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Accelerate Local announces Digital Transformation Lab for publishers of color

The Atlanta Voice, The Dallas Weekly, New York Amsterdam News, Houston Defender, The Washington Informer to be pilot partners; first stand-alone project for LMA accelerator

(September 25, 2019) — Accelerate Local, designed to reinvent business models for news, today announced its first stand-alone project: a six-month digital transformation lab for African-American newspapers.



The Atlanta Voice, The Dallas Weekly, New York Amsterdam News, Houston Defender and The Washington Informer will serve as pilot partners in this unique lab.

According to a recent Local Media Association survey, African-American newspaper owners, like many other media outlets, are concerned about the future of their publications and struggle with digital transformation — only 9.5% of their revenue comes from digital. The five pilot partners have been in business an average of 75-plus years and have strong ties to their communities.

“The black press, like the rest of the local media industry, needs help when it comes to digital transformation strategies,” said Nancy Lane, president, Local Media Association. “We are delighted to launch the first industry effort focused on a strong digital future for publishers of color. We invite other funders, R&D partners and philanthropists to join our efforts and help this important segment of the local media industry.”

Accelerate Local, owned by LMA, will invest six figures in this lab that will feature three phases over six months:

- Assessment and analysis of short-and-long term opportunities – conducted by Accelerate Local’s managing director, Peter Newton (former chief operating officer for GateHouse Media and former executive at Monster.com and *The Boston Globe*).
- Testing phase – each publisher will choose 2-3 projects, designed to drive digital revenue and/or audience in collaboration with Newton, based on a customized report that he will deliver to each participant.
- Debriefing, industry playbook and a 12- to 18-month roadmap plan for each publisher.

Extensive resources from Accelerate Local will include regular coaching calls and onsite visits with Newton, sales training and joint sales calls from LMA’s Director of Member Development, Jack Zavoral, and regular cohort meetings with the five publishers (both in-person and via video calls). An industry playbook will be made available to all publishers of color at the end of the program.

“I am extremely excited about the opportunity to participate in the Digital Transformation Lab,” said Janis Ware, publisher and owner, *The Atlanta Voice*. “As usual, LMA finds itself on the cutting edge of our industry and as it continues its pursuit of innovation in our media space, I’m thrilled to be along for the ride.”

Penda Howell, vice president of sales, advertising and partnerships for the *New York Amsterdam News*, said, “We look forward to further enhancing our digital platforms to create ‘Best in Class’ stages for our marketing partners and fellow publishers to follow.”

“As an independent local newspaper publisher, I am confident that participating in the LMA Digital Transformation Lab is a tremendous opportunity that couldn’t have come at a better time,” said Denise Rolark-Barnes, publisher, *The Washington Informer*. “I look forward to sharing this experience with my colleagues in the Black Press as we explore ways to better serve our readers and strengthen our digital future.”

The lab also includes pro bono work from some of LMA’s most engaged R&D partners, including Second Street. The Accelerate Local team seeks additional R&D partners to participate in this project. Contact the team at acceleratelocal@localmedia.org if interested.

“We have learned a lot from the three labs that are currently under way focusing on digital subscriptions, branded content and data strategies,” said Jed Williams, chief strategy officer, Accelerate Local and LMA. “We couldn’t be more excited to launch digital transformation for publishers of color as our first stand-alone Accelerate Local project. We are

passionate about the role of the black press in North America and look forward to working with these five progressive publishers to reinvent business models for news.”

About Accelerate Local

Cracking the code to build a viable future for journalism will take far more than any one person or company can provide. Created by Local Media Association and backed by its deep partner network, Accelerate Local – “Reinventing Business Models for News” – fuses the experience of local media with the ingenuity and strength of leading tech providers and entrepreneurs to reinvent business models that support a healthy local news ecosystem.

About Local Media Association

Local Media Association (<https://www.localmedia.org/>) is a thriving and innovative organization that serves more than 3,000 newspapers, TV stations, digital news sites, radio stations, directories and research & development partners. LMA is the only industry trade organization that brings all local media together for the purpose of sharing, networking, collaborating and learning. The association’s focus is on future business models and maximizing opportunities on the digital side of the business. This is accomplished via cutting-edge programs including its business model accelerator, Accelerate Local, as well as conferences, webinars, research, training, innovation missions, chief digital clubs and more.

LMA’s D&I initiatives

In Fall 2018, Local Media Association [announced a strategic commitment](#) to diversity and inclusion initiatives including: a Chief Diversity Club; programs to encourage participation from under-represented communities in LMA events and learning programs; and internal performance indicators to drive diversity in LMA’s boards and speakers at its events. LMA also offers free memberships, sales certification courses and conference registrations to publishers who serve underrepresented audiences.

About the lab partners

The Atlanta Voice: For more than 50 years, *The Atlanta Voice* has ably provided a voice for the voiceless without fear or favor and is proud to continue its legacy as a voice for those who still need a platform to plead their causes. It is the largest audited African American

community newspaper in Georgia with over 600 distribution locations throughout the Atlanta metropolitan area, with digital distribution on www.theatlantavoice.com, email, social and mobile apps.

Dallas Weekly: Continuously published without missing a single issue for more than 60 years, the *Dallas Weekly* has emerged as the leading most trusted voice of the African American community in north Texas. The *Dallas Weekly* (<https://www.dallasweekly.com/>) has been recognized and awarded for its impactful journalistic excellence not only locally, but also statewide, regionally and nationally, more than any other Black owned media enterprise of its kind in the area.

New York Amsterdam News: The *New York Amsterdam News* is one of the country's oldest (105 years), continuously published African American newspapers, and the leading voice of the black community in the New York region. As a weekly (Thursday) legacy newspaper, the *Amsterdam News* enjoys a loyal following of more than 98,000 readers weekly with our print product. Its current digital offering, amsterdamnews.com, currently enjoys 100,000 unique visitors per week, and more than 444,000 page views per month, and growing.

Houston Defender: Celebrating almost 90 years in business, the *Houston Defender* Network – Houston's Leading Black Information Source – serves an audience of over 150,000 on multiple platforms of print, digital (<https://www.defendernetwork.com/>) and social media.

The Washington Informer: The Washington Informer Newspaper Co., Inc., is a multimedia news organization emphasizing news about the African American community in the metropolitan Washington D.C. area. Now in its 55th year, it reaches over 50,000 readers through its weekly print edition, and an audience of more than 87,000 www.washingtoninformer.com readers, including its weekly email newsletter and social media platforms.

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