

Seattlepi.com celebrates 1 year of Web-only news

March 18 2010, By GEORGE TIBBITS , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Seattlepi.com, the online successor to the print version of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, celebrates its first birthday Thursday with music, free cupcakes and cheap beer.

For a Web-only publication that launched in the depths of the Great [Recession](#), just sticking around 12 months may be reason enough to party.

Seattlepi.com formally launched March 18, 2009, a day after the nearly 146-year-old P-I published its last edition on newsprint, leaving The Seattle Times as the city's only newspaper printed daily. The P-I's owner, New York-based Hearst Corp., had been losing money on the newspaper for years and hopes the online version will change that.

"The site is doing really well," said Seattlepi.com's executive producer, Michelle Nicolosi. She said about 4 million people are visiting the [Web site](#) each month, about the same as were visiting the Post-Intelligencer's site before the print version ceased publication.

"It's gratifying that people are still finding value in what we do," she said.

While [readership](#) may be stable, whether there's enough money to be made on the Internet is still an open question.

"Overall they are a journalistic success and a financial work in progress,"

said industry analyst Ken Doctor of Outsell Inc. in Burlingame, Calif.

For Hearst, Seattlepi.com is "a good learning lab," Doctor said. "They're learning how to be an effective online-only newspaper."

The P-I was the first major metropolitan daily in the country to go Web-only. Few have followed suit, Doctor and other analysts said, because print versions still provide the vast majority of newspapers' income and it's far from clear how online sites can be profitable, especially in a bad [economy](#).

When it made the switch, the P-I let go most of its 181 employees. About two dozen now report the news and run the Web site.

With the smaller crew, Nicolosi said, the Web site has focused on "core news," such as important local issues, politics, sports and major stories, while rounding out coverage with stories from wire services and through the relationships it has forged with other news outlets and local bloggers.

"I'll leave it to other people to decide how we're doing, but I think we're doing it very well," said Chris Grygiel, a P-I editor turned Web site jack-of-all-trades.

Grygiel reports on politics and City Hall, but the small staff often has to handle stories and tasks outside their beats. Grygiel has been seen at news conferences typing on a laptop while simultaneously recording audio on a tape recorder and snapping photos on a digital camera. On top of that is the pressure to post the [news](#) online as quickly as possible and to frequently update the story afterward.

"There are very few prizes for third or fourth place on the Web," Grygiel said.

Still, "we're having fun," he said. "It's different but it's challenging."

The staff and the public will celebrate Thursday. Besides snacks and \$1 beer, two groups will provide music for the celebration at the Crocodile Cafe in Seattle's Belltown district. Proceeds from the \$5 cover charge will go to a nonprofit writing center for children.

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