Editors can hear his voice throughout the office. There’s a Midwest tinge to it, but, most notably, it booms, which can be intimidating to the fact-checking interns in the cubicles across the hall. The figure attached to the voice seems illusive at times. When rounding the corner, it’s hard not to take a glimpse into his wide-windowed office to see if his sharp eyes are focused on the computer screen. Sometimes, for days at a time, his office stays dark — empty.

But Daniel Brogan’s imprint at 5280 magazine is always evident. In 1993, with a degree in journalism from Indiana University and 10 years of professional experience, he founded the Denver city book. From the beginning, the magazine was deemed doomed. Brogan remembers hearing the buzz around town. Businesses were making bets to see how soon Denver’s newest city magazine would fold — just like the ones that came before it. Certainly, with such a track record, it wouldn’t take long. Brogan proved them wrong, though, and service journalism helped keep the new magazine afloat.

And I’m one of those fact-checking interns who, at times, find Brogan’s voice intimidating. For the past four months, I’ve served as 5280’s editorial dining intern, and I’ve fact-checked stories, written blog posts and print stories while also creating the ever-so-exciting calendar events and dining guide blurbs. In addition to carrying out those day-
to-day tasks, I also studied 5280’s approach to service journalism as a part of my master’s project at Missouri’s School of Journalism.

When I first started developing this idea of studying service journalism in city magazines, I couldn’t even pinpoint its definition. Sure, it serves the reader, but I sought out a concrete explanation. However, even after nearly a year of studying its practices, it remains, at times, almost as illusive as Brogan. In interviewing the editors at 5280 that practice service journalism daily, I found that they, like me, use singular, abstract words such as useful and actionable. My next step was to study the magazine’s content. I conducted a loose textual analysis of each featured service journalism package from 2015. I then resorted to crashing editorial planning meetings.

At the end of my search, this is what I have discovered. This is a year’s worth of research and examinations at a nationally award-winning publication. (According to its shelves of awards, 5280 has garnered five recognitions in the past five years for its reader service.) Not only does it have the awards to prove it, but 5280 also surpasses other city magazines in newsstand sales. In 2015, the city magazine industry as a whole experienced a drop of newsstand sales of 15.5 percent, but 5280’s dropped only 5.64 percent. The sell-through rates for 5280’s are also impressive. The average sell-through rate at other city magazines hit 26.4 percent while 5280 was 42.1 percent. Bragging rights aside, here’s my dive into the realm of service journalism and its importance in city magazines.

The Evolution

For more than 100 years, city magazines have had a foothold in some of America’s greatest cities. Many began as gossip magazines. (Think: Colonel William
Mann’s *Town Topics* in New York City founded in 1879, which shutdown in 1905 due to a blackmailing scandal.) Although arguably one of the most notable city magazines hit the printing press in 1935 (*The New Yorker*), *Philadelphia* magazine is one of the oldest. The Trade Leagues of Philadelphia founded the publication in 1908 as a quarterly illustrated book. Founding editor Alan Halpern and chairman D. Herbert Lipson helped evolve the *Philadelphia* into a more modern city book. Other city magazines began to grow and come into themselves in the ’60s.

At that time, many magazines tried imitating these illustrious city books but failed in doing so — until a character by the name of Clay Felker came on the scene in 1968. He challenged that cartooned, monocle-clad mascot in the top hat from the *New Yorker* with *New York* magazine. Tom Wolfe, one of Felker’s staff writers, recalls Felker throwing down the challenge: “… we start out the week the same way they do, with blank paper and ink. Is there any reason we can’t be as good as *The New Yorker*? … They’re so damned dull.” Thus *New York* magazine began its trek to the top. And other city magazines followed.

And what perfect timing Felker had. America’s social scene was experiencing something of a shift. The baby boomers rapidly bumped up the nation’s population, and tension within cities bloomed. Inner cities began facing a sense of depletion, and the ’burbs filled up with mostly affluent white families. Tourists also made more of an appearance. The conditions seemed fair for a growth in city magazines.

In 1968, the same year *New York* magazine hit the scene, *Newsweek* magazine reported: “Every red-blooded American city craves a symphony orchestra, a civic center, a major league baseball team and other monuments of civilization. But these days a city
can take a shortcut to status with a city magazine.” Those city magazines offered
information on symphony orchestras, civic centers and baseball teams — all via service
journalism.

**Defining The Practice**

The term service journalism is sweeping. Sometimes it’s called consumer
journalism or reader service or even civic journalism. There have been various definitions
offered through the years. James Autry, former president of Meredith Corporation, once
described it as action journalism. Autry defined it as, “… journalism that goes beyond the
delivery of pure information, to include the expectation that the reader will do something
as a result of the reading.”

Byron T. Scott, a Missouri School of Journalism professor, notes this hard-to-
define sector of journalism in his 1988 speculative essay. His goal was to build a program
at the Missouri School of Journalism that pinpointed service journalism. The chair of the
department, Don Ranly, asked him to define it. Through pages and pages of typewritten
contemplation, Scott concludes, “Service journalism is needed information, delivered in
the right medium at the right time in an understandable form, and intended for immediate
use by the audience.” He admits he’s not satisfied with his own definition. A year later,
Scott’s protégé Gael Cooper studied the term and concluded that it’s “a term coined to
describe the process of providing needed information to segments of the reading public.”

Lucky for the industry, Don Ranly, a Missouri School of Journalism professor,
got more creative and concrete with the idea; he coined the term refrigerator journalism
in the ’80s. This is how Geoff Van Dyke, editorial director of 5280 and a 2000 Missouri
School of Journalism graduate, still thinks of the term. “That’s always stuck with me,” Van Dyke says. “For someone to be reading a magazine and to take the energy to tear or cut a story or a page out and put it up on their fridge, there has to be something of value there.” He complains that his wife still does it; there’s something called the Internet now. Refrigerator or not, Van Dyke and other editors all agree: Service journalism is the backbone to 5280.

Remember when Brogan started the doomed-from-the-start magazine? These service packages fueled the pages. They didn’t require too much time or money. The first cover story published in July 1993 in 5280 was Top Docs, a very traditional service package that the magazine still runs today. Brogan remembers collecting a list of licensed doctors, stuffing envelopes and sending ballots out. Then, when they came back, he sat in front of the TV and tallied up the votes for the best doctors in town. “If you were willing to put in the shoe leather, you could do those type of packages,” he says. Remember, this was before the Internet, Yelp and Facebook. 5280 capitalized on these issues. People were picking them up, passing them around. With its food in Denver’s door, the staff could then afford to produce longer, perhaps investigative, narratives that required months of substantial reporting.

Serviceable Perks

Today, 5280 proves to be more of a diversified magazine, mingling those narratives with, still, those service journalism packages. And these packages still fuel the magazine by maintaining newsstand sales and drawing in advertisers. It’s a similar scene at other city magazines, too. “Service journalism is the bread and butter of any city magazine,” Koehler says. “People underestimate it; people like to think narrative is more
important. A lot of people forget that they didn’t pick up the magazine for the long-form story. They picked up the magazine for the top 12 restaurants.” She continues: “It’s so sexy to be like, ‘Oh I followed this person for 10 years.’ Yeah, but nobody read it because the magazine had a crap cover for its crappy service story.”

Audrey Congleton, 5280’s audience development manager, oversees those newsstand strategies. Recently, the editorial and art side of 5280 has started to include her in cover decisions, which she deems important. She grabs an archived issue of the magazine and throws her forearm halfway up the cover. “This is what you see as a consumer,” she says, referring to the pocket on newsstands that most magazines perch in. The big 5280 logo pops, and, ideally, the image or piece of a cover line will pop, too.

In 2015, each of the 12 issues published (not counting 5280’s ancillaries) featured service journalism on the cover from best bars to mountain escapes to a coffee guide. However, that’s about the end of any sort of formulaic cover creation. The best-selling issue in 2015 was January’s Colorado bucket list, which, Congleton says, goes against all of her beliefs. There isn’t a smiling face; there isn’t a photo of pretty scenery. It’s funky colors, and the cover line rests below the pocket.

However, the reader’s key takeaway remains service. And with service pieces, especially those traditional ones, advertisers flock. Top Docs is always a thick issue because it’s easy for the ad department to sell to medical businesses and doctor’s offices. It makes sense, they think, to advertise a like-minded service. Advertisers can’t yet understand that those nontraditional pieces draw in more eyeballs, like June 2013’s fourteeners issue, one of 5280’s best-selling issues to date. (There’ll be more on that
later.) With the money that comes from newsstand sales and advertisers — and also those loyal subscribers who’ve kept happy — 5280, in turn, has more money to reinvest in its long-form narratives and nontraditional service packages.

**Planning Service — The Nontraditional Way**

Back within the brick walls of 5280’s downtown Denver office, Koehler plans the May 2016 issue. It’s a numbing yet sunny February day, but she enthusiastically talks about the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve down in the southern part of the state. She spent four days camping there last August — nearly six months ago — and now it’s time to compile her notes, collected brochures and iPhone reminder photos. She pulls out her phone to show me a picture of the alien-like desert. She explains that there are two places to camp: the park and the preserve: She also races through some other important information for readers. Visitors can’t get a permit after nightfall; that might ruin someone’s trip. Visitors have to let air out of their tires to drive on the sand, but what happens when they go to leave? No tire compressor. That might ruin a trip. And there aren’t bathrooms in the park, so plan accordingly; that also might ruin a trip. (Koehler found this out once she was there. She was itching for a shower, so, like a reader/first-time visitor might do, she sought out the closest bathroom, which was in town and required a $10 permit.) There are also these cool bugs in the park found nowhere else in the world, but do readers really need to know about those? Koehler continues to think aloud.

This is her way of sorting out information. She scratches notes as she talks and refers to a numbered list of topics and story forms she’s already started making in a
notebook. She explains that, with a service piece like this, the writer must prioritize the information. It’s a 14-page package, so she starts planning the space accordingly. She scribbles some math: 14 pages total, the first two are the opener, 450-words per page, so 450 multiplied by 12 … That’s what she gets. She has less than 5,500 words to explain to the first-time visitor how to spend 48 hours in these dunes.

What Koehler is working on is considered nontraditional service journalism. This is the sweet spot of service journalism in city magazines. Traditional pieces include Top Doctors, Top Lawyers, Top Dentists, Best Neighborhoods and Best Restaurants. And although those might seem easy to piece together, Koehler says brainstorming and keeping these packages fresh year after year — 20 years down the line — is tough. It’s the nontraditional packages that are fun to produce and bring more value to the magazine. To describe nontraditional service journalism in one word, it would be localized. Unique and audience-specific or tailored would also work. According to Amanda Faison, 5280’s food editor, Brogan has lived by the mantra that if you pick up a page of a city magazine from the gutter, you should have a sense of that magazine; that it’s 5280. Faison’s been around for nearly 20 years — since the magazine’s start when a team of four worked out of a bedroom in Brogan’s apartment and a “big” issue was 80 pages. Today, a big issue hovers around 240 pages. A package about a national park with sand dunes is all Colorado, all Denver and so very 5280.

These are the packages that push readers to pick up an issue. Remember, with platforms such as Yelp and Facebook, traditional service packages have become less valuable, though Faison argues that those Yelp reviews are just watered down; everyone can be considered a critical reviewer these days. But only 5280 editors and other city
magazine staff members can be the true experts — and such a voice in the writing is required, mixed with some personality and sharpness. So sure, Yelp is stealing some of these service packages’ limelight, but nontraditional packages are so locally tailored and aggregated that readers can’t go anywhere else for such comprehensive information about, say, the guide to fracking in Colorado or how to conquer a fourteener. (Defined, those are mountains that peak at an elevation of 14,000 feet or more. And yes, Coloradans are really into Mother Nature and extreme sports.)

**A Service Article About Service Journalism**

Like climbing a fourteener for any normal person, service journalism isn’t easy to master, especially when it comes to those nontraditional pieces. As discussed, it’s difficult to define, which naturally makes it difficult to execute. Ranly always said service journalism should be three things (in addition to refrigerator-worthy): useful, usable and used. For Van Dyke, it’s less about the definition and a set of rules and more about the idea and the execution. “Definitions, while worthwhile, I don’t think about them at all,” he says. “I don’t think about ‘Is this going to be useful?’ By definition it has to be useful or it won’t go in the magazine.” So service journalism, according to Ranly and Van Dyke, has to be useful. But, beyond that, not many people have attempted to develop any other concrete “rules.” Ranly offered up some rules of thumb, but that was 1992, nearly 25 years ago and pre-5280.

After spending 14 weeks inside the walls of the 5280 office and analyzing, interviewing, observing and even helping to create service journalism packages, I’ve developed a list broken down by serviceable categories on how to master service journalism at a city publication: Brainstorming and planning, reporting and information
gathering, writing and executing the package. This, in essence, is a service journalism piece on, well, service journalism.

**Brainstorming and planning.**

**Know your audience.**

“I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but people have no problem hopping into their Subaru and driving three hours up to the mountains to go hike or camp,” Van Dyke says. “It’s built into the culture.” After spending a couple of weeks in Denver, it’s easy to notice this trend. On the weekend, familiar faces seem to disappear into the mountains via clogged highways. Like any good magazine, 5280 has taken note of this trend. Because outdoor covers seemed to do better in 2015 than other topics, the editorial team decided to amp that up this year and add a few extras to the mix. And because driving three hours is not a big deal, why not feature statewide natural attractions? The staff doesn’t mind escaping the city and writing outside its limits.

**Think seasonally.**

Even though Coloradans prove to be adventurous, fly-fishing in the dead of winter, though it’s still in-season according to regulations, isn’t the most appealing. With many service packages, seasons play a role. In April 2015, the cover feature, “50 Front Range Adventures,” marked the start of warmer weather. In June, the fly-fishing guide was published — right in time for the summer season and when people are willing to wade into creeks. But seasonality isn’t end-all-be-all. Other packages such as the Colorado bucket list could have arguably run at any time.

**Mind the cover.**
In March, I sat in on a meeting between Koehler and writer Jessica LaRusso. LaRusso was in the midst of a summer service package about parks in Denver. Although her outline held promise, words had yet to be strung together. Yet the two were already considering the package’s cover line. “Ten parks. Will that look OK on the cover?” LaRusso asked. Koehler wanted to beef up the number. (Numbers are important for service. See more below.) “Well, 8-10 parks will act as a backbone, but with all the sidebars …” With those elements, the number of parks could jump just based on mentions and potentially pull in more readers.

This conversation took place before the story had been completed. This shows the importance service journalism plays on covers via the cover line and corresponding art. In 2015, each of the 12 covers published featured service journalism pieces — from 50 Front Range Adventures to Top Docs to Winter in Denver. The cover lines set the reader’s expectations. You’ll get a list of surprising things to do close to Denver, find 315 of the best physicians in town or discover 75 things to do in the brutally cold winter months. This year’s cover line-up is on track to mimic the service-centric covers of last year’s with a beer lover’s guide and a newcomer’s guide. In the realm of city magazine covers, service sells.

Adjust accordingly.

In the same vein as the cover, consider framing. Each July since 1998 (the idea of “best this” and “best that” was done before then, but the 1998 June/July issue featured the first cover of Top of The Town), 5280 has published it’s Top of The Town issue. This is a traditional piece of service that highlights the best in town — from bakeries to ski repair shops. Van Dyke describes the Top of The Town issue like a rollercoaster; you never
know how well it’s going to do. Last year, the staff decided to switch up the wording on
the cover. Instead of simply boasting “Top of The Town,” the cover line read: “153
Reasons to Love Denver.” From 2014 to 2015, sell-through rates increased by nearly 20
percent. Of course, 5820 can’t be sure the cover line is what did it, but certainly it had to
play a role.

**Reporting and information gathering.**

*Do the reporting, and own it.*

This might seem obvious because, well, this is a journalist’s job. But reporting is
key in service journalism packages at the city magazine level. Sure, international travel
magazines report on resorts halfway across the world via the Internet, but because city
magazines are local, just go. As previously noted, Koehler traveled to the sand dunes and
did her fair share of firsthand reporting. “We are almost without fail going everywhere,
tasting everything, drinking as much as we can without missing work, so we’re doing
these things, and we want to convey that, and I think they [the reader] appreciates that,”
Van Dyke says. This, in turn, expresses authority and credibility. People won’t read
service articles if they can’t actually *use* the information.

**Avoid conflicts of interest.**

As a journalist, this seems obvious, but not all publications abide by this rule of
thumb. Faison, who has been around for 20 years and is known as one of Denver’s top
food experts *still* tries to dine out incognito. It doesn’t always work, but she hates being
recognized. Callie Sumlin, the new assistant food editor, can slide in and out of
restaurants and bars not as noticed. “When we’re doing our restaurant lists, we pay for
our own meals,” Brogan says. “We do everything we can so the restaurants don’t know
we’re there when we are, so we don’t get any special treatment.” This is important, and the reader values this unbiased approach to reporting.

**Find a backbone.**

Of course the reporter needs a backbone, but so do these service packages. Usually, that comes in the form of a numbered list or categories. Take, for instance, February 2015’s Best Bars package. It’s broken down by usable categories: beer bars, date bars, foodie bars, bars for locavores and booze+. September 2015’s Smalltown Getaways features seven small towns; that’s its backbone. In April 2016’s nontraditional feature, “The Dark Side of Fitness,” Koehler and the editorial staff decided to offer reasons that give fitness is “dark.” Each blurb begins with a reason: “because.” “Because even the strong-willed bow to Facebook,” “Because fitness is f&%#ing expensive,” “Because Colorado’s fickle terrain can mount a sneak attack.” Whether it’s a number, a reason or a category, backbones give the package structure.

**Offer multiple entry points.**

The time to consider the presentation isn’t while sitting down to write; it’s during the reporting. Faison always keeps this in mind. “The reality is very few people are going to sit down and beginning to end read a story,” she says. So, help them out. Vary the visual. Offer a chart here, an infographic there and a short narrative over there. Then, readers can pick and choose what appeals to them. Koehler says it simply: “Sometimes a block of text is not that sexy.”

Faison enjoys breaking things down to showcase various elements. This, she says, gives the readers something outside of a chunk of text. In her September 2015 Food
Lover’s Guide, a whole spread is dedicated to “The Colorado Pantry.” A photograph of a pantry with various locally made items offers a catalogue-like approach that allows readers to pick a numbered item and read up on a certain product. On the next page, an illustrated $12 jar is diagramed out with little blurbs that explain why this jam is $12: The fruit, the can, the work hours and so on. Below that is a small essay about apple cider. Thus, the reader can pick and choose.

*Include directives.*

As the food editor, Faison always thinks of specific directions that she might be able to use to push her readers to action. “If we don’t give you that ‘sit here, go at 6 p.m. and order this,’ then that information becomes lost; it comes muddied,” she says. Readers want the lowdown, and that’s the reporter’s job. Always work to push the reader to action.

*Writing and execution.*

*Address your audience.*

Koehler issues a challenge: Write a piece of service journalism *without* using second person; it’s tricky and awkward. “It’s conversational,” Koehler says of using second person. “It’s how I would speak to you. We’re sitting here, and you say, ‘Oh I have a friend coming into town. What should we do for the day?’ I say, ‘Here’s what you should do.’”

*Use numbers.*

As previously mentioned, numbers are appealing on the cover. Van Dyke says this is the case because there’s a tangible sense of, “Wow, that’s a lot” of whatever it is — doctors, restaurants, destinations, tips, etc. “It telegraphs to the reader that there’s
something that will be useful,” he says. 5280 also has a knack for using by-the-numbers blurbs. These are quick snippets of statistics. In part, it plays with the idea of 5280 — its numerical title. It also gives readers a break and allows them to take in a quick hit.

Steer straight with the headline.

Sure, everyone loves a good pun, but whom is it really serving? With service journalism, let go of the cleverness, and cut to the chase. “Who are you benefitting by being cute with this pun?” Van Dyke asks. “You’re edifying yourself and your colleagues, and that’s about it.” To really serve the reader, give it to them straight. Tell them what they’ll take away from the package.

Find a voice.

Because the text is in second person, it’s likely the voice will be more conversational; this is important for service packages. It’s also important to consider the subject. In writing the “Dark Side of Fitness,” Koehler says she aimed to use a voice that was almost like, “Are people really doing this?” laced with a sense of incredulity. Other packages require a different voice: “You’ll think, ‘I should try to write this in a way that’s more high brow.’ Or, ‘This calls for a conversational, sitting-around-a-campfire feeling.’” It’s also important to understand the voice of the magazine and how to manifest that “royal we” personality.

Give readers a break.

5280 likes to include first-person narratives to break up its service packages and that information-overload feeling for readers. Van Dyke and Koehler keep in mind that reading a magazine should be a lean-back experience, one in which readers can kick back and relax. The reader shouldn’t leaning over it like a textbook or handbook. Part of this
comes with varying the presentation and length of the content. Another part is including first-person accounts that might offer some fun insight through a character or plot.

**Vary, vary, vary.**

Don’t write 10 stories at 400 words a piece. Help out the art director (in this case, Dave McKenna) and vary the story lengths. There are these elements calls a grid and hierarchy. McKenna uses a grid to help guide his designs. These are preset, though might be subject to change with redesigns. There’s always going to be a dominant element on the page — that’s usually the backbone. Outside of that, there are the sidebars, boxes, charts, Q&As, etc. Rather than standard, uniform elements, it’s important to vary lengths, style and even point of views. This idea combines the elements of a prominent backbone and offering multiple entry points.

**Mind the advertisers.**

This point should probably be highlighted in a bold yellow or presented in a big box. “There is no fraternizing with ad sales,” Koehler says and describes it as a church-and-state relationship. “It doesn’t mean we don’t write about our advertisers, but if you ask me who advertises with our magazine, I do not have a clue, and it doesn’t matter.”

This ideology stems, in part, from Brogan’s journalism background. He admits he frequently gets angry phone calls from advertisers, especially with the annual Top of The Town issue. It goes something like: “We’ve been advertising with you for 15 years, and we aren’t voted the top jeweler?” But because service journalism hinges on credibility, the editorial and ads departments should not intersect in any way. However, the advertising department can sell ads by selling the issue; as noted, the annual Top Docs issue draws in a lot of medical-based companies and practices.
On The Page

In accordance to these guidelines, a survey of last year’s service packages reveals a few standouts. There’s May’s “Backyard Bounty” by LaRusso. This guide to urban homesteading in the city offers the reader pieces in information in digestible categories such as vegetables and herbs, fish, hops, fruit and bees. These categories serve as a backbone while the fun sidebars provide multiple entry points that bust myths, offer a checklist for gardening (perfect refrigerator material) and break down beehives by the numbers.

Another notable package was Koehler’s “Beginner’s Guide To Fly-Fishing” issued in June. Of course, she went fly-fishing. There are many elements to this seasonal information, but the package begins with a simple glossary of terms. Each page has a dominant element such as a list of steps to follow to assemble your “system” and a chart of the best fishing holes for beginners. Mixed in is a first-person account from Koehler herself where she laces a humorous voice into the narrative: “It was a fitting introduction to what may well be the single most exasperating, curse-inducing leisure activity on the planet. (Yes, even more so than golf.)” The rest of the pieces utilize that “you” in addressing the reader: “If you don’t know a Woolly Bugger from a Copper John—but you’re interested in learning …” or “… it’s on these rivers you’ll find anglers doing their damnedest to ‘match the hatch’ …”

December’s “Coffee!” issue by Chris Outcalt and Callie Sumlin also provided the reader with digestible, fun pieces of information — a favorite being the blind taste test by connoisseurs of McDonald’s, Dunkin’ Donuts, gas station and Folgers’s coffee. Also included was a first-person defense of the decaf drinker, barista confessions and how to
brew better coffee at home. Each of these packages aims to serve its reader and does so by addressing them with the second-person “you” in a conversational tone that’s easy to read and spiked with a fun voice.

**Off The Page**

But the concreteness ends as soon as the print pages end and where the infinite world of the Internet begins. Translating these service packages online proves to be a challenge — one that digital associate editor Jerilyn Forsythe says every magazine is struggling with. The root of the issue stems in the brainstorming phase when, oftentimes, online presentation isn’t yet considered; that’s the last step. In reality, the essence of service journalism simply can’t be transferred to the Web. “Our service packages in the print magazine tend to be highly designed,” Brogan says. “There are lots of pieces. It’s not necessarily linear. You can jump in at any point and move through the spreads. We haven’t figured out how to translate that to the Web yet.” Frosythe agrees: “It’s almost like the entire concept of a print service package is so starkly different than what digital audiences are looking for, so there is no perfect translation. I think that’s why lists have become so popular.” Although lists often serve as the backbone for service packages, there are all of those other components: boxes, sidebars, charts, graphics. Those, if translated, are mostly easily imported as JPEGs, which are not SEO-friendly.

To hit a middle ground, this year *5280* started creating online-only, food-related service pieces. Faison, who is heading up this initiative with the digital team, likes that this is bringing more traffic to the site, perhaps gaining more routine readers in the process, but the amount of reporting going into these for an online package makes her sad. She says these pieces could easily warrant sidebars, boxes, infographics or charts but
that the Internet limits this. The first service package featured 20 of Denver’s best food markets, a work-in-progress for more than three months. Teaming up, four staff members visited more than 60 food markets in Denver. The result was 14,700 views in its first month online and 18 comments. The first time it was posted on Facebook, it received 116 likes, 75 shares and 6 comments; this is above average. The initiative is proving to be successful. Next in line: tacos and then ice cream.

In the end, the good news is that every editor agreed without my prompting: Print isn’t dying anytime soon. And service journalism is still thriving — both online and in print.

**Concluding Thoughts With Tacos In Hand**

It’s mid-week at 5280, and I find myself sitting at the bar of the Four Seasons. It’s a stark contrast from Taqueria Emanuel, a small, sweaty taco joint where I sat yesterday for lunch. I, along with four other editors, am working to compile a list of the best tacos in town. It’s part of building the online presence via food service initiative that 5280 launched this year. And as I’ve learned, writing service journalism pieces requires you to gain new experiences — not just do online research and making calls to PR managers. Because of this, I’ve been to 10-plus taco joints in the last three weeks. My stomach is reeling, anticipating my final taco, a sirloin and bacon taco. I hope this will be my last for a while.

But this is service. We’re curating content, or tacos, to serve our readership with the best. Each blurb will be a quick hit, about 70 words and will include the eatery’s location, phone number and website. Move to the next. There will be categories: Breakfast, veggies, pork, beef and wild card (oysters and bison). Through these greasy
little tacos, I’ve taken in firsthand the work that editors and writers issue into these services pieces. They might not always be easy, especially those nontraditional ones, but they’re valuable assets to city and regional magazines.