

# One Central Illinois TV station shows how local media should cover coronavirus story

Covid-19 morphed from a concern to a global problem to a local one, spreading from handful of states to more than 30 in a week.

As the virus and the story [spreads](#), getting the news to people is a difficult job, one made worse by the day as the story becomes more political, which can be tricky for local news outlets.

“Every story is political now,” said television news anchor Sean Streaty. But Streaty, who has worked at WAND-TV, the NBC-affiliate in Decatur in Central Illinois, for 25 years. He approaches each day with a focus on making sure that viewers in central Illinois have a handle on what they need to know about Covid-19.



(Photo by Taylor Cameron)

“Every day we’re in direct contact with public health and local agencies,” Streaty said. “We get the information we need from a direct source and keep the politics out of it.

“And if we run a network story that deals with the political ramifications, we separate it from our local piece.

Here’s what the local news is saying, here’s what the politicians are saying.’”

Streaty approaches each day knowing he has to make the story make sense for his audience. No need to confuse anyone. In this age of disinformation, where more news comes out from more sources and people so easily confuse what’s true and what’s false, what’s straight news and what’s opinion and what matters and what doesn’t, finding a consistent source for your information is important.

Nationally, and internationally, coverage of Covid-19 becomes more urgent every day. And questions about how media cover the

virus and possible pandemic abound. So far, national media have covered the story from about three separate frames:

What's happening, who is affected and how will it affect the reader.

This approach is most common now and you can see it at all major news sources. The New York Times, Washington Post and Chicago Tribune are covering the story as it happens. Breaking news reports the newest numbers from the CDC, the latest death toll and the stories about what readers need to know about the Coronavirus, or Covid-19. When it's a crisis, the press usually does a stellar job of telling the audience what they need to know.

Are we prepared?

Pro-Publica posted a story that questioned the government's preparedness to handle a pandemic ([story](#)). The story explains the government's issues with getting test kits for Covid-19 and discusses our preparedness. The New York Times ran a similar piece about mechanical respirators ([story](#)). Another story, from the Washington Post, examined the missteps in placing people at a government facility in Alabama ([story](#)).

These stories might be negative in tone but they show a weakness that the nation must shore up as it prepares for what could be a major medical emergency. These stories are not political, despite being critical of our medical state and the government's handling of the crisis. They're the news profession doing what it does, looking for problems and exposing them to the public.

The political story is also making the rounds.

These stories take direct aim at Vice President Mike Pence and his history of dealing with medical issues in Indiana ([story](#)) or a story about how President Trump called the virus crisis a hoax ([story](#)). They continue as the President claims he knows

more than the doctors ([story](#)).

These stories fill the news cycle with more and more stories popping up every hour. The national story dominates the cycle, and reporters cover it at a breakneck pace. The investigative pieces take more time as reporters look for the gaps in the stories and fill them in.

Locally, the story must tell the viewers exactly what they need to know.

“One of the first things we’ve had to do is make sure that people know what we’re talking about,” Streaty said. “Originally, the virus was called a Coronavirus and now it’s officially called Covid-19. We’ve had a meeting and decided to call it Covid-19, originally called Coronavirus. We want to make sure we avoid confusion when it comes to the naming of the story.”

And the people at Wand-TV want to make sure that disinformation is kept to a minimum. That’s why they’ll separate the numbers story (death toll, how many are affected, local impact if any) from the political, or national story.

“Yeah, it’s pretty obvious they’re different stories,” Streaty said. “But we still want to make sure that it’s separated.”

And then they have to keep an eye on the comments on Facebook or other social media.

“That’s where you have that stuff,” Streaty said. “When we post a story it can bring out a beehive of comments on both sides of the spectrum. People can be pretty nasty and even call us out. Sometimes, we have to respond to that with facts.”

The local story eventually becomes the most pressing, letting the audience know what is happening near them and what is going to happen most.

As the Covid-19 virus spreads across the country, local and national media will be as severely tested as the medical profession on the front lines.

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