

# Now outsourced: Local journalism

The editor of a California news website looked to India for a reporter to cover Pasadena city government and politics.

**By Justin Pritchard**, Associated Press

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PASADENA, CALIF. - The job posting was a head-scratcher: "We seek a newspaper journalist based in India to report on the city government and political scene of Pasadena, California, USA."

A reporter half a world away covering local street-light contracts and sewer repairs? A reporter who has never gotten closer to Pasadena than the telecast of the Rose Bowl parade?

Outsourcing first claimed manufacturing jobs, then hit services such as technical support, airline reservations and tax preparation. Now comes the next frontier: local journalism.

James Macpherson, editor and publisher of the two-year-old website [pasadenanow.com](http://pasadenanow.com), acknowledged it sounds strange to have journalists in India cover news in the wealthy city just outside Los Angeles.

But he said it can be done from afar now that weekly Pasadena City Council meetings can be watched over the Internet. And he said the idea makes business sense because of India's lower labor costs.

"I think it could be a significant way to increase the quality of journalism on the local level without the expense that is a major problem for local publications," said the 51-year-old Pasadena native. "Whether you're at a desk in Pasadena or a desk in Mumbai, you're still just a phone call or e-mail away from the interview."

The first articles, some of which will carry bylines, are slated to appear today.

The plan has its doubters.

"Nobody in their right mind would trust the reporting of people who not only don't know the institutions but aren't even there to witness the events and nuances," said Bryce Nelson, a University of Southern California journalism professor and Pasadena resident. "This is a truly sad picture of what American journalism could become."

It is a shaky business proposition as well, said Uday Karmarkar, a UCLA professor of technology and strategy who outsources copy editing and graphics work to Indian businesses.

If the goal is sophisticated reporting, he said, Macpherson could end up spending more time editing than the labor savings are worth.

Macpherson appears to be the first to outsource community journalism -- work that by definition has been done by reporters who walk the streets they cover.

He posted the help-wanted ad Monday on the Indian edition of [craigslist.org](http://craigslist.org). Within days, he said, he had hired two Indian reporters, one a graduate of the journalism school at the University of California, Berkeley.

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