

Bill Tompkins named to take Black Press helm

Written by George Barnette, Special to the NNPA from the Afro-American Newspaper
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Publishing veteran Bill Tompkins will get a crack at moving Black newspapers forward as he's been named president and CEO of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, the umbrella organization for America's Black newspapers.

Tompkins has 19 years of experience with the {Washington Post} serving as vice president of marketing and director of national advertising among other roles. After leaving the {Post}, he moved on to Kodak to become chief marketing officer of its entertainment imaging business unit. Tompkins, whose first day on the job was July 2, said that both experiences, as unique as they were, prepared him for this endeavor. "You get to use your left brain and your right brain," Tompkins said after a July 16 news conference. "You're creative and on the spot, but you're analytical and serious at the same time and that's always been my history."

The 69-year-old NNPA, also known as the Black Press of America, is an organization of more than 200 Black newspapers in the United States and Virgin Islands. According to an NNPA statement, it is the only national organization strictly for Black newspapers.

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According to Tompkins, the NNPA is in a battle with today's realities for the survival of periodicals as publishing economics, relevancy and shifting media platforms pose serious hurdles to successfully putting out a newspaper. Tompkins said that as he assumes the NNPA post, he'll have to face different realities than the ones he faced at the Post when he left in 2000. However, he said he's ready to face those challenges to make sure that the NNPA and its member publications not only survive, but thrive, as well.

"Part of what we're going to do is raise the level of awareness, impact and use of Black media," said Tompkins. "It is important to raise the awareness level of the power that they bring to corporate America, social issues and all the things Black media can do and traditionally has. We're going to take it up a notch."

Tomkins also said the timing of his appointment is critical. He said he believes this election is an important time for Black papers to not only provide information that matters, but to also encourage its readership to vote.

"If people know what's going on and how serious the issues are and what the consequences are to them if they sit on the sidelines then people will have the opportunity to really have their participation make a difference," he said. "A lot of people assume that the Black vote is a slam dunk for Barack Obama. That is not necessarily the case and even if it is there's a difference between the number of people that do vote and those who can."

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