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The Search for True North: New Directions in a New Territory

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To Prepare for the Future, Skip the Present

'… today's obsession with saving newspapers has meant that, for the most part, media companies have failed to plan adequately for tomorrow's digital future.'

BY EDWARD ROUSSEL

'Burn baby, burn." These are the unforgettable words of a top-ranking Yellowstone National Park ecologist as fire ripped through the park's forests in the summer of 1988. Few people cared that Don Despain's words were taken out of context. The remark was used to pour scorn on the supposed devil-may-care approach of the National Park Service, which favored allowing natural fires to burn off accumulations of undergrowth in order to facilitate forest renewal.

A triple whammy of slumping advertising revenues, soaring newsprint costs, and competition from the Internet has left newspaper executives struggling to contain their own inferno. Tactics that helped newspapers survive for decades—budget cuts, promotions, the shuttering of peripheral publications—have failed to restore confidence among investors. In the first 10 months of 2008 alone, the shares of The New York Times Company dropped by more than 40 percent, while Gannett Company, Inc. shed two-thirds of its value.

The best approach for battle-weary media executives may be to let the fire run its course—however counterintuitive that might seem. That's partly because there is little the newspaper industry can do to stop the advancing flames. But it's also because today's obsession with saving newspapers has meant that, for the most part, media companies have failed to plan adequately for tomorrow's digital future. The economic downturn has added to the urgent need for a change of direction.

"This is a time for rigor, you need to know what you want to come out with at the other end of the tunnel,"

said Jack Welch, who was known as "Neutron Jack" when he was CEO of General Electric because of tough steps he took to reshape ossified corporations. "This is not a time to skimp on resources but to focus them on your best businesses: stop the weakest, invest in the strongest."

Newspapers still tend to define themselves by their paper rather than their news. By doing so they make a critical error at a time when readers and advertisers alike are going cold on paper and turning their attention increasingly to Web media. Newspaper executives have been slow to come to terms with the reality that the fat profit margins of previous decades are gone forever. Audiences, in decline since the 1960's, have been on an accelerating downward trajectory—from a slow glide to a nosedive—since the Internet's invasion.

Newspaper executives have often justified their lack of attention to digital media by pointing to the lower advertising yields. "When will the Web match the revenues generated by newspapers?" Maybe never. But it's the wrong question. The whole point about the Web is that it costs a fraction of the amount of a newspaper to reach your audience,

meaning that the break-even point for a newsroom stripped of the need to produce a newspaper is some 65 percent lower.

The probable elimination of a raft of second-tier newspapers during this economic downturn will provide a fertile environment for a new generation of digital media businesses to flourish. Here are 10 ways that will help newspapers make the transition to digital media companies:

1. Narrow the focus. When newspapers operated regional monopolies, readers depended on them to cover a wide range of subjects. Newspapers still routinely use their own reporters to cover a gamut of stories, ranging from politics to sport and business. That's nonsensical in the Internet era, when readers may choose content from a variety of sources. Instead, media companies need to invest more money in their premium content—editorial that is unavailable elsewhere but that is highly valued by readers. Go deep, not wide.

2. Plug into a network. Media companies should finance the additional spending on premium content by eliminating editorial costs in areas

where they are unable to compete with the best on the Web. If you are weak in sports coverage, link to the best Web site for your local sports. Well-curated hyperlinks to other Web sites are a valuable service for readers, and they cost nothing. Media companies will increasingly see themselves as part of a chain of content, as opposed to a final destination. Journalists will act as filters, writing with authority but also guiding readers to sources that add depth to coverage. The future of journalism is selling expertise, not content.

3. Rolling news with views. Newspaper deadlines suit publishers, not readers. News is a continuum. It never starts or ends, and coverage should reflect that reality. That doesn't mean a newsroom needs to be open for business 24/7. If 90 percent of readers don't log on between midnight and five in the morning, there is little point in being staffed overnight. But it is critical to be alert at the time when your traffic surges—typically between 8 and 10 in the morning and again around lunchtime. Remember: It's not simply about serving breaking news—the AP and Reuters can handle that. The role of a newspaper

company on the Web is to add value: look at a story from a number of angles, engage your audience, add multimedia.

4. Engage with your readers. The explosion of blogging and social media Web sites has created a culture in which consumers of news expect to be included in the news publishing process. Closed operations that shun reader engagement will increasingly be seen to offer a second-rate experience. Create functionality that encourages readers to share eyewitness accounts of breaking news, rate services such as restaurants and hotels, and get into discussions and debates.

5. Bottom up, not top down. The reporters on the ground are closest to your readers. They are therefore best placed to conceive, create and nurture community Web sites. Look at which reporters or editors get the largest mailbags and free them up to manage blogs on subjects that your readers are passionate about. That's likely to be narrow areas such as gardening or a mom's network, rather than broad subjects, such as politics or sports.

6. Embrace multimedia. Train edi-

tors to see video, photo galleries, graphics and maps as equal story-telling forms to text. A story about Tina Fey's takeoff of Sarah Palin is incomplete without video high-lights from "Saturday Night Live." A story about a soldier's life on the frontline in Afghanistan is best told with video, a map, and pictures as well as text.

7. Nimble, low-cost structures. About 75 percent of newspaper costs have nothing to do with the cre-ation of edito-rial content. In a digital era there may not be any need for print-ing presses or vans to trans-port a physical product. But the switch to

digital should also be an opportuni-ty to challenge the need to hold on to other in-house costs. Newspaper companies are bad at technology, so a digitally minded chief technology officer will be able to get cheaper and more effective services by out-sourcing. Newspaper sales teams

don't do particularly well at sell-ing ads on the Internet; too often they sell ads that are irrelevant to a reader's interests in an era when Google has made relevance key. If your sales team can't beat Google, then outsource to Google.

8. Invest in the Web. Don't try to suck too much revenue from your fledgling network. Your Web site needs investment before it can fly. Large networks, such as rail, phone and utilities, took decades to yield substan-tial returns. A Web revenue-growth model cannot sim-ply be a mir-ror image of the decline in your newspa-per sales.

9. Shake up leadership. One of the biggest obstacles to planning for a digital future is the senior editor or manager who is wedded to the ana-logue past. If the people who run your newsroom aren't passionate about your digital future, it's cer-tain not to materialize.

10. Experiment. We are operating in the most creative phase of the media industry's history. A time when broadcast, text and social media are colliding. Don't be afraid of failure. Try new projects, see what works, and build on success.

None of this will come easily. It breaks a newspaper culture forged over a 400-year period. For decades now, newspaper newsrooms have centered on "going to press," which has meant pointing all efforts towards a single deadline that culminates in the publishing of a definitive version of a story. Journalists who've spent a lifetime working around this kind of deadline often cannot make the switch to the continuous reporting demanded by Web audiences.

Nor are reporters and editors particularly good at interacting with readers. As long as newspapers have existed, editors have determined the news agenda and then rammed it down readers' throats. Sure, readers are welcome to send a "letter to the editor." It may even get published. But typically most editors have little interest in an ongoing dialogue. Linking to competitors' news services certainly doesn't come naturally to newspaper edi-

tors either, whereas it's seen as a sign of sophistication on the Web. Then there's the lack of familiarity with multimedia and the art of stitching together text, video, photos, maps and graphics.

Still, the dominant newspapers have a huge advantage over start-up news operations: They are trusted brands at a time when the proliferation of news sources has made trust a premium for readers and advertisers alike. That's a good springboard for success. But time is running out. ■

Edward Roussel is the digital editor of the Telegraph Media Group (TMG). He manages the Telegraph.co.uk Web site and oversees the development of TMG's expansion into other digital media, including the recent launch of Telegraph TV, a news-on-the-Web service in partnership with ITN. He was instrumental in restructuring the Telegraph's newsroom, with a view to placing digital media at the core of the 153-year-old newspaper group.

Journalism as a Conversation

'Today digital publishing is practiced by the masses, and it's inseparable from the practice of journalism.'

By Katie King

Last night, just before I turned out the light to sleep, I grabbed my mobile from the night table. With a wireless Internet connection, I used the device to flip easily through headlines on the BBC and The New York Times. Nothing new there. I turned instead to my Twitter feed. Twitter is a microblog, a free Internet service for conversations and short-form publishing. Posts are limited to 140 characters. You can post from your mobile device or your desktop/laptop, updating whoever is reading your post real-time day and night, wherever you are. Who reads? People who choose to follow you. In turn, you choose to follow other people's posts. You can reply publicly or privately to posts. It's a short form, immediate and ongoing digital conversation.

About the time I was going to bed in London, Kirk LaPoint, managing editor of The Vancouver Sun, was attending a luncheon speech by former President Bill Clinton in British Columbia about the economy and the U.S. elec-tion, among other things. LaPoint was twittering (a new verb, like Google and blog have now become verbs) the speech. I'd started following his tweets since I met him briefly at the Online News Association conference in Washington in September. I only met him once, but by following his posts I learned more about what Clinton was thinking (or at least saying) from his nine 140-character posts than I have from any traditional news stories on the speech.

Twitter is fast becoming my pre-ferred filter and guide to news and information as the people I choose to follow help me sift and sort the flood of data washing over me every day. They do this by finding, commenting on, and linking to news and informa-tion.

New Technology: Figuring Out What It Does

Why is this important? Because it is an example of how technology allows

"the people formerly known as the audience," as New York University journalism professor Jay Rosen calls them, to interact with and become part of the news process.[1] And it is a glimpse at how this technology, which we used to just call blogs, is in the process of changing our world, and journalism, in ways we can't begin to imagine.

It is the nature of disruptive technology that we almost always get it wrong when we try to guess the real use and impact of a new invention. In his book, "The Victorian Internet," author Tom Standage describes how, after inventing the telegraph, its creators struggled for years before the world figured out how it might actually be used. In 1844, with a U.S. government-funded telegraph line functioning between Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, its inventor, Samuel F.B. Morse, was still trying to convince a skeptical world of his invention's usefulness. "Yet after a while [Morse] realized that everybody still thought of the telegraph as a novelty, as nothing more than an amusing subject for a newspaper article, rather than the revolutionary new form of communication that he envisaged," Standage writes.

Morse had originally tried to convince Congress to fund and use the telegraph for government communications, but the invention really took off when it started to be used for business and commercial communications. By the early 1850's, sending and receiving telegrams had become "part of everyday life for many people around the world."

Now, a century and a half later—and almost 15 years into the digital media revolution—there seem to be a few important things to note.

We don't know what the impact will be of this flood of free, ubiquitous, easy-to-use new digital communication, content creation, and publishing tools that relate to journalism. "What tools?" we might ask. Well, the list changes so quickly that it will require updating in the time between when I write this article and when it is published. But here are a few examples:

- Blogging services, such as Google's Blogger and Window's Live Spaces and sharing, linking and tracking tools such as Technorati

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[1] Jay Rosen's piece, "The People Formerly Known as the Audience," appeared on PressThink, his blog, in June 2006. It can be read at: http://journalism. nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html.

- Microblogs, such as Twitter
- Video blogs, such as YouTube, Kyte.tv and 12seconds.tv, phreadz.com
- Mobile blogs, such as qik, moblog
- Social media sites including Facebook, Bebo, MySpace, LinkedIn, Plaxo, Flickr, Picasa
- Tagging and sharing sites such as del.icio.us, Digg, last.fm.
- Blog and Web site ads and promotion services, such as Google AdSense

There are, of course, many more being used by hundreds of millions of people around the world. And all of these tools I've mentioned allow anyone who can afford something as simple as a camera-enabled, Web-connected mobile device to create text, pictures, video and audio, post this content to a Web address, promote and potentially monetize it.

Journalism: 'A Process, Not a Product'

Which brings me to my second point about blogging and journalism today.

The debate is over. Hand-inked bibles, horse-drawn carriages, pagers: A few still exist, but they have mostly been overtaken by newer technology. The same is true for the monopoly of the publisher. Journalists no longer control the message. Today digital publishing is practiced by the masses, and it's inseparable from the practice of journalism. Newsgathering and distribution has changed forever, and the audience is part of the process.

Journalists, editors and media executives everywhere are struggling to come to terms with this fact and do what Gutenberg couldn't have done with his printing machine—understand and predict where this innovation will take the economy, media, politics and society.

Journalists use blogs and journalists compete with blogs.

Media blogger and journalism professor and blogger Jeff Jarvis (buzzmachine.com) writes and speaks frequently about a new role that journalists should embrace in a world in which The New York Times competes less with The Washington Post for readers' attention than it does with blogs and social media. Jarvis, who teaches at the City University of New York, argues that journalism today is a "process not a product."[2] Journalists must sift, sort and curate the news, he

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[2] Read Jeff Jarvis's blog posting on this subject at www.buzzmachine.com/2008/04/14/the-press-becomes-the-press-sphere/.

contends. "Do what you do best. Link to the rest."

The question Jarvis poses is this: Do we need more information or do we need, as a society, journalists dedicated to finding the gold nuggets amidst this raging river of content? The reality is that there are bloggers with passion and expertise on topics that exceeds anything that even the best reporter coming in on assignment could match.

This is where traditional editors typically weigh in, saying "Yes, but bloggers aren't trained journalists, they aren't committed to fairness or objectivity the way journalists are." In response, bloggers will point out that many readers don't believe the mainstream media today are fair or objective, either. Instead, many leading bloggers argue that the Web forces transparency on any digital writer. If you fib, if you fake it, if you get it wrong, someone will notice and call you out. Analysts like Jarvis argue that this is peer review on a global scale. There's even a name for it: "crowdsourcing." [See Jeff Howe's article on page 57.]

Crowdsourcing does not replace what traditional journalists do in interviewing, fact checking, verifying and making available important information to the public. But traditional journalists are no longer the only ones who can do this. Our work must incorporate and connect to the information being produced by specialists all around us.

An unpleasant and unproductive feature of the early years of mass digital publishing was that journalists and early bloggers spent a lot of time debating each other with red faces and pointed fingers about which side was more worthy, more reliable, more honest, and better served the readership and society. Thankfully, rhetoric has cooled as the digital media industry matures, and most mainstream journalists and editors embrace bloggers as part of the news process as well as blogging tools to engage in conversations with their readers, get tips and story ideas, and promote their own work. Many editors, including me, hesitate to consider a young journalist's resumé unless they have a blog or some sort of social media site that will demonstrate their ability to report, write, use multimedia, interact appropriately with readers and, most importantly, think. Except for a few stragglers, most of my friends, colleagues and business contacts have some sort of Web site or blog, are on Facebook, Flickr, LinkedIn or Twitter.

So—brace for it—what this means is that we are all bloggers now. We are

all participating in the media revolution.

I was asked recently to participate on a panel of London editors discussing the future of news. The question was posed: Are we living in the Golden Age of news or in its Dark Ages? It's neither, of course, though all the online editors on the panel said Golden Age since it is certainly not the Dark Ages. To my mind, this revolution can be seen more as the next phase of the Enlightenment, which puts publishing and communication in the hands of the many, instead of the few who have traditionally controlled the media.

There is a human cost to any revolution. The printing press put out of work a lot of monks skilled in the art of lettering exquisite hand-made bibles. A unique skill was lost, or marginalized, but in exchange we gained nothing less than the flowering of knowledge and education of the masses, creating the fertile ground in which democracy has since flourished.

In the United States, the newspaper industry is being ravaged by cost-cuts and layoffs. A brain trust of experienced, highly trained reporters and editors are losing their jobs. Pulitzer Prizes and reader popularity do not protect these talented professionals from pink slips today. But even as newspapers are downsizing, dynamic new online publications arise. One of the more intriguing new digital publications is Tina Brown's The Daily Beast. Gloriously named after Evelyn Waugh's fictional British tabloid in "Scoop," Brown's "Beast" is an excellent example of journalism in the age of Web 2.0. It provides original interviews and reporting, staff blogs for context and analysis, and it focuses a lot of attention on filtering through important voices in the blogosphere and highlighting good blogs to help readers make sense of a vast array of data.

Is the U.S. newspaper industry going to die? No, but it clearly is undergoing massive, wrenching change. Former Nieman Foundation Curator Bill Kovach often says that each generation creates its own new culture of journalism. We are clearly in full creation mode right now. I can't predict how that will play out, but I am enthusiastic and optimistic about the changes ahead for journalism and for the ability of citizens to get the information they need to participate in a democracy. ∎

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Suggest a Topic—And Content Flows to It

'… content becomes a roaring campfire that gathers around it a thoughtful and engaged group of people.'

BY JOHN A. BYRNE

I learned about the death of the American newspaper early in my life. I was all of 16, a gawky office boy at The Morning Call in Paterson, New Jersey, when I was caught inside the obituary of an institution: The daily that I had carried on my back as a newspaper boy, the paper where my ambition to be a journalist was born, was being closed. I remember that day in December 1969 as if it were yesterday. Teary-eyed, I walked through the sea of wooden desks and metal filing cabinets and into the chilly night. It was an awakening to see the reporters openly crying and consoling each other.

Newspapers die hard—and the obituaries over the next few years are likely to make us think of massive casualties in a war. Strip out the classified business, and you'll find that magazines face many of the same problems as newspapers: ever rising paper (and for us even worse postage) costs, the swift migration of advertising from print to Web, the inability of online revenues to offset the decline of print ads, and often declining readership. Yet as bad as the newspaper business has fared to date, some observers say magazines are even further behind the transition.

A recent study by the Bivings Group shockingly discovered that a survey of 50 top magazines were behind newspapers in deploying Web 2.0 technology.[1] Whether it's blogs, video, RSS feeds, or reader comments on stories, magazines

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[1] The September 2007 study, "Analyzing the Websites of American Magazines," can be read at www.bivingsreport.com/2007/analyzing-the-websites-of-american-magazines/.

trail newspapers in their adoption. "Newspapers fared better than magazines in nearly every category in 2007," according to the study by Bivings, a consulting firm based in Washington, D.C.. "In general, we have found that magazines are slower at adopting Web 2.0 trends than newspapers."

As the editor in chief of BusinessWeek's online operations and the now much older kid who walked through a newspaper closing, I'm both perplexed and shocked by the magazine industry's laggard status. We have every advantage in largely serving existing communities of readers in specific niches, from cooking and wine to sports and entertainment. Of course, I'm fortunate to work at a place that gets it—with 28 staff-written blogs, nearly 5,000 videos, plenty of RSS feeds, and a lively comment section where tens of thousands of readers weigh in with their views every month. It's why our site now boasts double the readership of our weekly magazine: more than 10 million unique visitors monthly vs. a 4.7 million audience in print.

When we talk about other new ways to compete, most magazines don't seem to know where to start. Aggregation? Forget it. Few editors want to link to other stories that send people away from their own sites. Curation? Writers don't "curate" journalism or discussions. They report and file stories and move on. Verticals? Editors want content that appeals to the broadest swath of people and gets massive traffic. User generated content? Most editors still turn up their collective noses at stuff created by their audience. Computer algorithms that replace news judgment for the prominence you give a story? You've got to be kidding. And Twitter? What's that?

As BusinessWeek has morphed from a brand that produces a weekly magazine to one that is pretty much a 24/7 multiplatform organization, the truths of our business have changed as well. Here's what they are:

- Context is as important today as content. It may, in fact, be the new king on the throne. That's because the world is evolving into niche communities, organized around individual interests and passions. Keeping your audience deeply engaged in the journalism you do is necessary to induce loyalty to your brand.
- We live in a world in which there are far too many stories chasing far too few eyeballs. What readers need in this environment is often help in organizing, sorting and sifting through all the articles.
- Consumers prefer multiple sources of news and consult 16 to 18 media brands a week. That's according to a McKinsey & Company study.
- Creating more journalism isn't necessarily the way you win online. It's costly, and the gains in audience from putting up more stories are by and large incremental.
- The smart and elegant organization of content through links and editorial curation has as much, if not more, value than simply publishing more of your own articles on the Web.

Responding to What We Know

How to best take advantage of these trends? In early September, we launched one of the most ambitious efforts ever to both stretch the BusinessWeek brand and to reinvent ourselves. We call it the Business Exchange. It allows our readers to create and organize around their own topics of interest, from active investors to youth advertising. The moment a topic is created by any user at bx.businessweek.com, a Web page pops up with links to stories and blog posts on that subject from all over the Web. No preference is given to BusinessWeek editorials. A story by one of our journalists is treated no differently than one from Forbes, Fortune, or The Economist or, for that matter, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, or The Washington Post. A blog post by a BusinessWeek blogger, moreover, gets the same treatment as one from Henry Blodget at

Silicon Alley Insider or John Battelle at Federated Media.

The "front page" or "cover" of each of these topic sites is not determined by an editor but by the community of readers. Whenever a user adds, reads, saves, shares or comments on a story or blog post, that activity is noted by a software algorithm that then places the content on what is essentially the front page. That way, only stories and blogs deemed the most active or useful are shown to the reader, who benefits from the wisdom of the crowd.

All the members of each topic community are recognized—by photo, profile and their contributions to the network. Indeed, if you admire a member of your community, you can peer over his shoulder to see what stories he is reading, saving, adding or commenting on—if he chooses to keep that activity public.

Our reporters and editors do not report, write and edit for the Exchange. But they do help to curate the content, adding relevant stories, blog posts, white papers, academic reports, and other reference materials to each topic. If you cover the stock market and an important story breaks on the New York Stock Exchange, you're expected to immediately search the Web for the best coverage and add it to our topic on Wall Street. A journalist might pose a question or make a comment to help fuel a conversation on the latest news and analysis rather than pick up the phone and start calling his or her sources.

Of course, this is no replacement for original explanatory journalism that remains at the core of what we do at BusinessWeek. It follows the dictum by Jeff Jarvis, the CUNY journalism professor and blogger, who advises media to "Do what you do best. Link to the rest." In a world where time-constrained professionals are trying to keep up with an overabundance of information in their specific fields, the Exchange serves a highly valuable purpose. No less important, it connects like-minded people from every corner of the world in an online community that enriches the journalism at the center.

In this way, content becomes a roaring campfire that gathers around it a thoughtful and engaged group of people. It's still at the center of the party, sparking compelling insights, opinions and storytelling that make journalism more memorable and meaningful than ever. But

the conversation has become as important as the journalism. In other words, the context of journalism has become as important as the content. That's because the Web is not merely a new distribution platform for information. It entirely changed the game. In this new game, journalism ceases to be a product, like a table that is handed down to an audience. Instead, journalism becomes a process that fully engages its readers—in the beginning, by asking them for story ideas; in the middle, by asking for the community's help in reporting a story and, in the end, when the published story sparks the larger conversation among readers and journalists who greatly expand on the story.

It's ceding a level of control and much more influence to your audience and benefiting from giving up total control. The outcome, I believe, is deeper and more meaningful engagement with your readers who also become sources who can enrich and improve journalism. This engagement, in turn, leads to new ideas, such as the Business Exchange, where a news organization lets the community tell us what topics it wants us to gather content and expertise around.

Little more than six weeks after our pubic launch, the Exchange already had a broad and fascinating array of more than 600 topics and thousands of registered users. The imagination shown by our users in creating unusual topics exceeds our wildest expectations. There's "Conscious Capitalism," "Bailout," "Recession Job Search," "Genetic Testing," and "Sarbanes-Oxley Compliance."

In the 18 months during which we were developing and building the Exchange, we called it "the microvertical." And that's exactly what it has turned out to be—a series of microcommunities around very vertical topics. Consider the number and variety of "green" topics: "Green Building," "Green Cars," "Green Computing," "Green Investing," "Green Technology," and "Green Travel." And then there's "Renewable Energy," "Solar Energy," "Wind Energy," "Hybrid Cars," and "Biofuels."

Running Into the Future

Recently I experienced a flashback to that day when I walked out of the Morning Call newsroom nearly 40 years ago. I was in a classroom with some of the smartest people in digital media at the New Business Models for News Summit at CUNY's

Graduate School of Journalism. It was yet another conference dealing with the analog-to-digital transition of journalism, and our group was devoted to the scary subject of "newsroom efficiencies." Our case study? The Philadelphia Enquirer (a make-believe newspaper) had just folded, and we were charged with coming up with a replacement product. The group solution: Do away with print altogether and create an online site with 35 editorial employees to replace a daily newspaper with an edit staff of 200. All of the 20 "content creators" on our staff would have to take photographs, shoot, edit and produce video, do audio overdubs and on-camera video stand-ups, as well as report and write. Based on traffic and revenue projections, the group figured it could afford an editorial budget of $2.1 million. That translated into an average salary of just $60,000 a year for a "content creator," and at least one person in the room argued that salary was too much.

This new Enquirer replacement, incidentally, would heavily rely on citizen journalism and pay-per-click freelancers. There would be no global or national news, sports or entertainment, but rather a linking strategy to third-party content to cover those important subjects. The "content creators" would focus largely on local politics, education, sports and human-interest stories.

The Philadelphia solution is an outcome I never want to see—not anywhere. A strong and vibrant fourth estate is not only essential to a fully functioning democracy but to the efficiency of a society. But the only way we can change that outcome is to embrace and champion change and innovation in our profession. We need to recognize that this is one of the most creative of times in journalism and, along with that wave of change, one of the most terrifying transitions for many media brands. This period has the opportunity to be our Renaissance. We need to reinvent and transform journalism—and the business model that supports it—to secure a successful future.

For a traditional media company, the Exchange is a revolutionary departure, one of many we and other magazines need to make to succeed in a new and different world. I know one thing: I never again want to be a part of another media obituary. ∎

John A. Byrne is the executive editor of BusinessWeek and editor in chief of BusinessWeek.com.

Creating a New Platform to Support Reporting

'My sole and motivating mission is to figure out how reporting can thrive as we witness the death of the institutional model that traditionally supported it.'

BY DAVID COHN

In the midst of my work building Spot.Us, a nonprofit project to pioneer a platform for community-funded reporting, I often imagine what my career would have been like had I been born a few decades and years earlier.

At this point 40 years ago, I would be a 26-year-old midlevel reporter, finally graduated from my cub police beat. I'd still be an eager overachiever, probably trying to get that next scoop in the hope that it would earn me recognition from my editor and perhaps someday the prestige of an award. If clichés held true, I'd wear a fedora hat and call my friends "buddy" or "mack." At night I'd probably drink too much, but every morning I'd walk into an office with dozens of other reporters running around, shuffling papers, making phone calls, all in the service of filling tomorrow's news hole.

As luck (yes, luck) would have it, my career is blossoming in a time of uncertainty. I never had the stability of that office job, but I have had the opportunity to define my own career path. The opportunities that abound in the wild west of the Web, still an open space to be tamed, have allowed me to be my own boss. And I believe journalists 40 years from now—yes, there will be journalism then—will experience to an even greater degree circumstances similar to mine. I'm lucky to be part of this first pioneering batch of independent reporters as we figure out the tools and platforms that we need to develop to ensure journalism thrives in the future.

Striking gold in our digital age will happen for those who create platforms upon which acts of journalism can be performed. While YouTube and WordPress have blazed large trails creating such

platforms, there are plenty of unexplored side trails that could lead to much larger areas where journalists could make their mark.

Right now, journalists are fleeing newsrooms—either being pushed out through buyouts or choosing to strike out in new directions—and by doing so creating a diaspora, of sorts, as they search for a new home. The question is whether a viable platform can be found to offer at least a modicum of job security so journalists can get back on track doing what they believe in—keeping the public well informed.

For me, trying to meet this goal means working on Spot.Us (www. spot.us). In the late spring of 2008, I received a $340,000 grant from the Knight News Challenge to test the idea of what I call "community-funded reporting." To do this, I am working on building a platform that allows freelance journalists to pitch their reporting ideas directly to the public, and in doing so create tools that an individual journalist can use to shape his or her own career in reporting.

The idea for Spot.Us stems from my work in citizen journalism but can also be attributed to an "aha" moment I had while being a research assistant on the book, "Crowdsourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd Is Driving the Future of Business," written by Jeff Howe. [See Howe's article on page 57.] When I was working on background research for his chapter on crowdfunding, I learned about Web-based microphilanthropy sites, such as Kiva, DonorsChoose, and others, which have been incredibly successful in targeting contributions to specific projects in their respective fields.

In October, the 1.0 version of Spot.Us went live. In reaching that point, I spent many hours working with lawyers on the terms of service agreements; I also acted as a project manager between those involved in design and those in development. The payment gateway I constructed had to meet my hosting requirements and build an audience around the concept of community-funded reporting. Even though these tasks—along with the vast majority of the myriad of my other start-up duties—don't come close to resembling shoe-leather reporting, I never lose the sense of myself as a journalist. The reason: My sole and motivating mission is to figure out how reporting can thrive as we witness the death of the institutional model that traditionally supported it.

Essential to understand, however, is that Spot.Us is not a news organi-

How Spot.Us Works

Spot.Us accepts microdonations that are put toward a journalist's proposal for an investigation. Progress toward reaching the goal is charted on the Web site. This means that an individual's donation goes only to the targeted project that spurred the donation. Rules exist to govern the percentage of funding that can be donated by individuals as a way of protecting against advocates becoming the primary funders of any specific enterprise reporting project. The finished content is licensed under a Creative Commons license, and Spot.Us will try to get it published in as many places as possible. If any news organization wants exclusive rights to the story, it will need to refund a percentage of the original donations, so the original supporters will get their money back to invest in a new story. ■ —D.C.

zation. Nor am I an editor. Spot.Us is a platform and, along with others who have worked with me on this project, I am its creator. What it will be is a collaborative marketplace that favors public participation in the process of producing journalism.

Until its October launch, by using just a wiki and a blog, Spot.Us managed to fund three journalists' investigative reporting projects in the San Francisco Bay Area, the city where our initial effort is taking place. The most successful of these projects was a series of articles that fact-checked political advertising for the November San Francisco election. To support this reporting, 74 people contributed an average of $33, and the total came to $2,500—which was the target amount this reporter needed to do this work.

To build Spot.Us, we've used an iterative approach, taking what has worked well in each step along the way and adapting it to the next level based on feedback we receive and the exchanges we observe. In doing this, we look for the path of least resistance, test our ideas, then make the solution a stable element of our design. Our 1.0 version, for example, was informed by the wiki, which demonstrated moderate success. At first, the 1.0 site, while stable, will be bare, but in time new

features will be added to suit the marketplace. This approach relies on constant growth that exists as a response to user feedback. And it is this feedback that informs and fuels our iterative process, constantly seeking the path of least resistance and stabilizing new elements. Rinse and repeat, as long as we can. If Spot.Us is never "finished," then I'll know it's a complete success.

There are many obstacles in our way, and I don't ever try to sell Spot.Us as being a silver bullet. There is no such thing. But Spot.Us should give us a way to find out whether people are willing to put a direct monetary value on what journalism provides. In some respect, our pitch to potential donors is as simple as this: "Upset that your local news organization isn't covering an issue you're passionate about? Donate $25 to a reporter who will!"

By tracking what happens on Spot.Us, we might find apathy among the public in their willingness to shrug off any contribution, choosing to wait for "free" reporting, the kind supported by advertisements, donated by citizen journalists, or perhaps paid for by a nonprofit organization. If Spot.Us reveals this, I will feel that we, at least, will have learned what the marketplace will—and will not—support.

If this enterprise fails, then it might be possible to conclude that direct microphilanthropy is not among the feasible options for enabling journalists to keep doing their work. But it would be a great disservice to journalism to at least not try to find out whether the public is willing to support this approach.

While Spot.Us might not hold these answers, I am confident it will assist in our search for new ways to enable journalism to thrive. With the old strategy of relying on advertising and classifieds vanishing, I am relieved that most news organizations are exploring this new territory. As one avenue of exploration, I invite them to join with Spot.Us as we try to expand community-funded reporting beyond the San Francisco Bay Area into other regions of the country. ■

David Cohn is editor in chief at BrooWaha, a citizen journalism network, and has written for Wired, Seed, Columbia Journalism Review, and The New York Times. He served as editor of NewAssignment.Net, focused on citizen journalism and news organizations' exploration of the social Web, and worked on organizing the first Networked Journalism Summit to bring together the best practices of collaborative journalism.

A 21st Century Newswire— Curating the Web With Links

News organizations can remain vital daily destinations by supplementing original reporting with links to the best nonlocal content.

BY JOSH KORR

Journalists may feel unmoored these days, but it's not because they've lost their compass. True north will always be an independent press exercising its First Amendment right to inform and entertain fellow citizens, to investigate the powerful, and to provide a forum and voice for the community. The problem is that many newsrooms are using an outdated map, one that doesn't show the modern news ecosystem's infrastructure: the link.

The news media's future is online, and the Web's foundation is the link. The Web is literally a collection of linked pages—and, by extension, of linked people and knowledge. But news organizations have traditionally treated their Web sites as just another place to republish print stories, rather than as nodes in the larger Web media network. They didn't see the value they could create for readers by connecting them to other sources and curating the Web's flood of information.

This mindset is changing as the digital transition accelerates. Most news organizations have staff blogs that link to news and sources on other sites, and a smaller number are experimenting with dedicated pages of curated links to interesting and important content elsewhere on the Web. But there hasn't been an easy way for news organizations to find and publish links even if they wanted to. What's needed is a way for journalists to easily discover links to relevant content and for newsrooms to integrate links into their editorial workflow.

I've been working on a way of incorporating links into the everyday practice of journalism: It's a wire service based on links rather than licensed content, which would en-

able newsrooms to develop a new practice of "link journalism."

The Web provides instant access to nearly every credible print publication in the world, not to mention thousands of blogs and Web sites written by experts, academics and journalists. Yet most news organizations' nonlocal coverage draws heavily from a small number of wire services, chiefly The Associated Press.

Basic wire coverage still plays an essential role—the AP is usually the first to report on major stories, particularly in out-of-the-way places. But it has also contributed to the spread of what, in my work as a wire editor, I came to think of as the AP's house style: voiceless, incrementally updated, process-oriented, one sentence of "news" stretched to 12 paragraphs. Such stories aren't always engaging or interesting, nor are they effective in providing understanding. Without context, they can induce news overload. [See story by Jim Kennedy, director of strategic planning at AP, about the AP's new approach to news reporting on page 28.]

Meanwhile, for any given news story, the more interesting and informative takes often come from sources other than the traditional newswires.

On any given day, these days, the stuff that actually makes people smile is found not in newspapers or wire stories, but in viral videos and pop culture blogs. The longer newsrooms ignore the Web's amazing universe of content, the less relevant they become for readers. The longer wire services fail to help newsrooms find this content, the less useful they will be.

But no one entity—be it a wire service or a news organization—can possibly track what's appearing in all papers, large and small, blogs, magazines and Web sites. Nor could any one news organization acquire the rights to all of this material. The great thing about the Web is that you don't have to pay anyone to help you bring great stories to readers—just link to ones already there.

Finding all of the good stuff is the challenge, so that's the real mission of a Web-era wire service. It's not to provide full-text versions of a handful of sources' news, but to offer links to the best stuff culled from all sources.

Curating the Web

My online link-based newswire—called The Wire[1]—is created by us-

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[1] www.publish2.com/newsgroups/the-wire

ing a free Web application called Publish2. Every day I go through a packed RSS reader and save links on all manner of topics from all kinds of sources. Just as newspaper wire editors apply editorial judgment when they select stories off the wires, I apply judgment when selecting links for The Wire. My goal is to provide a thorough, engaging wire for news organizations that want to start moving beyond the AP or are forced to do so for budgetary reasons. Any news organization can publish a feed of links from The Wire on its site or set up a Publish2 account to curate its own links, drawing from The Wire as a starting point.

My experiment is fine for a start, but it's nothing compared to the potential of a wire service seeded by links from thousands of journalists using their editorial judgment to collaboratively filter and curate the Web.

How would such a collaboration work? It starts in four ways.

1. Journalists save links to interesting stories in the course of everyday reading and publish those links on their news organization's site or on a personal blog—effectively acting as link bloggers recommending good stuff to read.
2. Journalists save links—to related stories, documents, interviews—in the course of their reporting, privately first, and then publish the links along with their articles.
3. Journalists link stories specifically for a newswire—either the aggregate newswire or a smaller one based on a Publish2 newsgroup. (Newsgroups are a way for newsrooms to collaborate on creating news aggregation features based on links.)
4. News organizations and freelancers add their own work to the link newswire—not for the sake of flooding the network with self-promoted material, but because they believe their work might interest other journalists and readers.

Next, this collection of links begins to act as a recommendation service for other journalists. Editors could then start their searches by viewing the most-linked stories for that day and seeing the wisdom of newsrooms that has bubbled to the top. Because the link effort is distributed—whether across or within newsrooms—and saving

links is a simple and quick process, linking can fit smoothly into journalists' daily routines.

This kind of link wire service is useful mostly for nonlocal coverage, but it also offers lessons for newsrooms' local reporting.[2] For example, just as newsrooms should link to the best explainers of complex stories, such as the financial crisis, routine city council stories should link to explanations of terms like "zoning" that readers might not understand. Linking to source material strengthens local stories by making them more transparent. And newsrooms that link to local bloggers can help their communities find the best of the local blogosphere and get some links sent back in return.

Linking should not be seen as a replacement for original reporting. Indeed, without original reporting there would be nothing to link to. At the same time, links are the way that great reporting gets distributed and noticed on the Web. And

by combining this reporting with links to interesting nonlocal stories, news organizations can remain vital daily news destinations.

Just imagine this scenario: Re-engaged readers flock to news sites. A bigger audience develops for news organizations' original reporting as thousands of networked newsrooms link to one another. Greater transparency fosters a renewed sense of trust in journalism. And a new business model emerges, in which a link newswire creates a new marketplace for news that advertisers could tap into—transforming the newswire from a cost center into a profit center.

That's a future worth linking for. ∎

Josh Korr is editor of The Wire, an online link journalism project that has been developed through Publish2.

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[2] In our Summer 2008 issue, two articles were about link journalism at the Knoxville News Sentinel on Super Tuesday. Scott Karp, CEO of Publish2, wrote "Linking Newspaper Readers to the Best Political Coverage," and Jack Lail, managing editor/multimedia at the News Sentinel, wrote "Election Coverage Becomes a Time for 'Instant Innovation.'" They are at www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports. aspx?id=100006.

No Time Left for Reluctant Transformers

‘Digitally based consumption by a fragmented audience requires new and sophisticated distribution mechanics … smartly connect[ing] consumers to available, relevant content in virtually unlimited ways.’

BY JIM KENNEDY

Just a couple of years ago, despite the clear digital direction of news consumption, it was still pretty hard to engage in a serious discussion of business model change in most news media companies. Sure, the world was in transition, but there was still time to adapt, or so it seemed.

That time is now officially, and undeniably, up.

All of the trends that news providers have been analyzing since the dawn of the decade are now in full swing. Consumption of news is generally occurring first on digital platforms, and most of the audience is connecting intermittently through multiple points of entry rather than making regular appointments with traditional news packages such as newspapers, broadcasts or bookmarked news Web sites.

The new model

Facts

Updates

Back story

Future stories/ Spin-offs ™
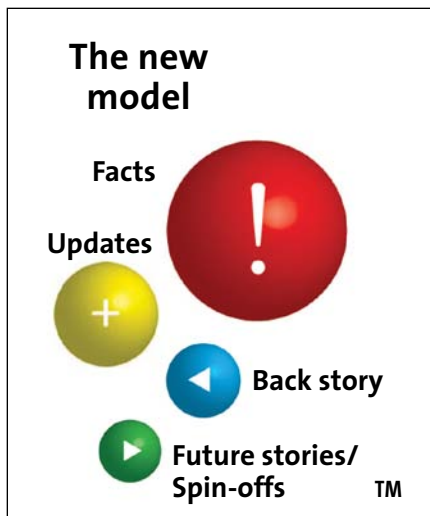
But many media companies remain in a state of reluctant transformation, stuck between the demands of the old and new worlds, mainly because the business model for news distribution has not evolved as fast

as consumption has shifted.

Companies are still relying on their edited packages to drive their businesses, and they really have no other choice. Even as revenues decline, the packages still manage to deliver more revenue, if not audience, than unproven alternatives that allow content components—stories, photos, video clips—to float freely through the channels of search, widgets and mobile applications.

The fledgling revenue models supporting the new distribution of digitized content are not yet strong enough to fund the newsgathering the old models nurtured and expanded through the 20th century. The dollars for subscription and advertising revenue are different in the new digital world of the 21st century—and lower by an order of magnitude.

The critical question facing the business is whether we can innovate our way through this rough transition in the business model. Can we carry innovation beyond content and technology to the less familiar territory of reimagining the business itself?

Every news company is grappling with a version of the same problem. For newspapers, it's a question of rightsizing to something smaller, or committing to a digital shift that portends big changes in news coverage, packaging and distribution across print and digital channels. For broadcasters, it's all about expanding into new channels without expanding the heavy costs of video newsgathering and production. Even native digital companies face the challenge of figuring out how to distribute content profitably beyond the boundaries of their destination Web sites.

For a news agency like the AP, which serves other media companies, the challenge is to imagine a new model that enables its clients to succeed across platforms without creating new conflicts among competing publishers, broadcasters and digital distributors. And it must be done at a lower cost to those clients because overall revenue for the news business is compressing.

Consuming the News

There are no easy answers to any of these questions, and a weak economy compounds the difficulty. But at AP we continue to focus on the fundamental change in news consumption patterns and what that means for both content creation and distribution. In the past year, with the help of a team of profes-

sional anthropologists, we studied the behavior of young-adult news consumers in six cities around the world and drew important conclusions about how to reconstruct our news model to fit the new cultural reality of cross-platform, opportunistic consumption of news.

Strip away the research jargon, and what that means is that young people around the world today are more likely to connect to the latest news through e-mail, search or text messaging than through old media channels.

Of course, that was something we very much expected to see. But through the intense interview process that distinguishes anthropology from simple surveying, we also heard something from the subjects we didn't expect to learn: They were mostly unsatisfied with their news experiences.

Despite the convenience of always-on access, the subjects said they were overdosing on short snippets of facts and updates and longed to explore the news in more breadth and depth. They wanted more of the back and future stories associated with the daily stream of headline-driven news. And that was the case across geography—cities in the United States, Britain and India— and across news category. No matter if the topic was war, natural disaster or entertainment, the consumers in our study wanted to know more, and they seemed willing to go get it, if only they knew where to find it.

Whether or not the journalism market is actually shorting breadth and depth in favor of breaking news is a question that could spark a spirited debate in any newsroom around the world, but the essential point should not be missed. That is, whether or not we're producing it, people aren't readily finding it in the opportunistic patterns of consumption they've adopted.

In today's news environment, technology unwraps the tidy packages that news providers produce. News gets split apart into atomic pieces for today's digital consumption—headlines, 25-word summaries, stand-alone photos, podcasts and video clips—all of which can be easily e-mailed, searched and shared outside of their original packaging.

Refitting the News

The model that emerged from our anthropology study helped to frame the task ahead by splitting the news into its fundamental "atomic" pieces of Facts, Updates, Back Story, and Future Story. That sets up a mission

to create and connect the essential parts of a next-generation news report, much as the old "inverted pyramid" established a framework for newspaper writing.

The inverted pyramid conditioned writers to organize the information in their stories from most important to least important. It drove the journalism and the business of the AP news cooperative for more than a century and a half, as the news was packaged day in and day out for space-efficient display in newspapers.

The model even worked for new media as they came along through the decades. AP created services based on newspaper stories to supply news for radio, television and eventually the Internet and mobile platforms. But newspaper stories, packaged as a snapshot in time, struggle to connect with an audience that is being conditioned to aggregate and manipulate unpackaged information on their own.

For AP, these trends delivered a clear directive to adjust the newspaper-story-first mentality. A shift to fastest-formats-first had already been made at the agency well before our consumer study. That shift has now accelerated with key new initiatives to enhance the differentia-tion of services to match platform and market needs.

Chief among those initiatives is a fundamental new process for news-gathering in the field called "1-2-3 filing." The name describes a new editorial workflow that requires the first words of a text story to be delivered in a structured alert (headline format) to be followed by a short, present-tense story delivering the vital details in step two. Then, in a final step, a story takes whatever form is appropriate for different platforms and audiences—a longer form story or analysis for print, for example. Other media types are coordinated along the way in similar fashion.

Another major initiative at AP responds to the need for more variety in the news. Major new content development projects have been launched in entertainment, sports and financial news to create more entry points for consumers with appetites for broader, deeper content in those categories.

Across the gamut of AP's reporting, we are pursuing stories with impact and writing in a lively and authoritative style that has both raised our profile and caused some traditionalists to wonder where the old wire service went. Despite the stir in some journalism circles,

there's no reason to mourn the loss of stodginess, real or perceived. AP's origins may trace back to transcribing the shipping news, but its future lies in engaging the audience with more than just the facts, as our new model suggests.

Content initiatives alone, however, can't get the job done. Digitally based consumption by a fragmented audience requires new and sophisticated distribution mechanics, meaning an infrastructure that can smartly connect consumers to available, relevant content in virtually unlimited ways. The key to making that happen is to make content more linkable and discoverable. For that, you need a system for tagging news content with codes for categories and names (famous people, places and things) that computers can easily read to deliver content at a user's command.

The AP has created such a system and is using it to power a comprehensive news service, called the Mobile News Network, for the Apple iPhone and other smartphones. In the future, we hope the AP "metadata" tags will help surface more relevant and timely news content through search engines.

Still to come, to complete the business model shift, are the revenue streams that will drive the new distribution of smart content. For the Mobile News Network, national and local advertising is being pursued to support display of headlines, stories, images and video clips on the phones. Constituent newspaper members of the AP are joining the network to build the scope and scale that new digital businesses will require to succeed.

As Google's advertising model has proven so definitively, a business built on clicks requires a network of massive numbers, not just a single Web site. While the old packaged media models may have enjoyed bigger returns on smaller bases, they dealt in scarcity, not ubiquity.

When information is available any time, any place, as it will be for generations of news consumers to come, models must be constructed to connect huge numbers of people with personalized bits of information. Those models will be driven by the aggregation of content, advertising and audience on a very large scale—perhaps not all in one place, but virtually all connected. ■

Jim Kennedy is the vice president and director of strategic planning for The Associated Press.

Mapping the Blogosphere: Offering a Guide to Journalism's Future

'… what we find is that legacy media holds the center, while online-only media are frayed at the edges.'

By John Kelly

Mapping the patterns of how people share information in the blogosphere makes visible and understandable what otherwise can seem unruly and complex. Using social network analysis and advanced statistical techniques, we can analyze the exchanges in cyberspace to create maps of community and attention among many thousands of bloggers. Mapping these online networks tells us a lot about how community is formed around kinds of information that bloggers seek and share with one another. And these findings provide clues that can give journalists a clearer sense of how what they do will be utilized in the age of digital media.

What our mapping analyses have shown us is how the emergent clusters of similarly interested bloggers shape the flow of information by focusing the attention of thematically related authors, and their readers, on particular sources of information. These social networks include new actors alongside old ones, knit together by hyperlinked multimedia into a common fabric of public discourse. Of great interest—and perhaps surprising news—to journalists is our finding that legacy media, journalistic institutions in particular, are star players in this environment.

While blogs are promiscuously available representations of what a person or organization would like the world to know, in practice the world at large is not likely to care about the content of any given blog. However, a community of specifically interested others will often arise around a blog in ways simi-

lar to real-life social configurations with which we are quite familiar. As the number of blogs increases exponentially, this "citizen generated" network is quickly becoming the Internet's most important connective tissue. In fact, the combination of text and hyperlinks (and, increasingly, hypermedia) makes the blogosphere arguably as much like a single extended text as it acts like an online newsstand.

To the extent that readers' patterns of browsing tend to follow the direction of links available in this hypertext network, the structure of the blogosphere suggests a kind of "flow map" of how the Internet channels attention to online resources. And this is what we are able to map—the extraordinary number of blogs authored by emergent collectives: public, persistent, universally interlinked, yet locally clustered and representative of myriad social actors at all levels of scale.

Peering Within the Patterns

What we find is not "media," in the familiar sense of packets of "content" consumed by "audiences," but a new form of communication. We write. We link. We know. In this networked public sphere, online clusters form around issues of shared concern, information is collected and collated, dots are connected, attitudes are discussed and revised, local expertise is recognized, and in general a network of "social knowing" is knit together, comprised of both people and the hyperlinked texts they co-create.

As David Weinberger observed in his 2007 book, "Everything is Miscellaneous: The Power of the New Digital Disorder," "as people communicate online, that conversation becomes part of a lively, significant, public digital knowledge—rather than chatting for one moment with a small group of friends or colleagues, every person potentially has access to a global audience. Taken together, that conversation also creates a mode of knowing we've never had before .... Now we can see for ourselves that knowledge isn't in our heads: It is between us."

The links represent the conscious choices of bloggers and fall into two main categories: static and dynamic. Static links are those that do not change very often and are typically found in the "blogroll," a set of links a blogger chooses to place in a sidebar. Blogroll links are created for

different reasons, but the network formed by them is relatively stable and represents a collective picture of every blogger's perceptions of the blogosphere and his or her own position within it. Dynamic links change frequently and typically represent links embedded in blog posts, a hard measure of a blogger's attention.

When the interests of many bloggers intersect, something we call "attentive clusters" typically form: groups of densely connected bloggers who share common interests and preferred sources of information. We analyze the behavior of these clusters to discover how the community drives traffic to particular online resources. By doing so, we can provide an important key to understanding the online information ecosystem. And here is some of what we've learned:

- The blogosphere channels the most attention to things besides blogs. Of the top 10,000 outlinks, only 40.5 percent are blogs, and these account for only 28.5 percent of dynamic links.
- The Web sites of legacy media firms are the strongest performers. The top 10 mainstream media sites, led by nytimes.com, washingtonpost.com, and BBC.com, account for 10.9 percent of all dynamic links.
- By contrast, the top 10 blogs account for only 3.2 percent of dynamic outlinks.
- Though the top 10 Web-native sites (blogs, Web 2.0, and online-only news and information sites combined) account for 10.8 percent of dynamic links, two-thirds of these (7.2 percent of total) are due to Wikipedia and YouTube alone.

Legacy media institutions are clearly champion players in the blogosphere. Given that online-only sites are the most skewed—in terms of political leanings, advocacy positions, and tone of information—of all forms of news and information Web sites, what we find is that legacy media holds the center, while online-only media are frayed at the edges.

Future Direction

Are blogs and Web-native media making old-style institutional journalism obsolete? Of course, this question has several dimensions. At the commercial level, institutional journalism is threatened by the In-

Political Video Barometer

As a visual demonstration of how ideas move through social networks, Morningside Analytics created a user-friendly online tool called the "Political Video Barometer." The barometer features an interactive graph showing recent YouTube videos popular with liberal and conservative bloggers. The horizontal axis shows the proportion of liberal vs. conservative bloggers linking to a video, and the vertical axis shows how many bloggers overall have linked to it. Click on a dot and the video plays—instantaneously. This map is available at www.shiftingthedebate.com/shifting/videobarometer.html. ■—J.K.

ternet, both in the form of "citizen media" taking its advertising-earning eyeballs and online classifieds taking its rent on informal markets. At the tonal level, the integrity and validity of "objective" journalism and responsible expert opinion is contrasted to the more slippery and uncertified forms of online content found in blogs, YouTube, and other user-generated content.

In discussions about their varying practices, journalists and bloggers argue over values of profes-

sionalism, independence, legal protection, and legitimacy as vessels of the public trust. But the picture is more complicated. Most links from blogs are not to other blogs but to a range of online sites among which mainstream media (MSM) outlets are the most prominent. And journalists are keenly attentive to blogs, often mining them for story leads and background research. Furthermore, the blogosphere is becoming as important as the front page of the paper for landing eyeballs on

a journalist's story. There is a cycle of attention between blogs and the MSM, in which the MSM uses the blogosphere as a type of grist for the mill, and the blogosphere channels attention back to the MSM.

What is becoming clear is how the blogosphere and MSM are complementary players in an emerging system of public communications.

Yochai Benkler, the author of "The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom," proposes a model in which the "networked public sphere," supplementing the older "hub and spoke" industrial model represented by the mass media, will alter the dynamics of key social communications processes. The mass media model, in which the ability to communicate publicly requires access to vast capital or state authority, has resulted in elite control over the power to frame issues and set the public agenda.

What ends up in the newspaper often starts with a government source or professional media advocate in the employ of one or another interested organization. In Benkler's view, a new, vastly distributed network of public discourse will supplement or supplant this elite-driven process. The networked public sphere will allow any point of view to be expressed (universal intake), and to the extent it is interesting to others, it will be carried upward (or engaged more widely) via a process of collective filtration. The extended network will contain its specialty subnets (analogous to interest publics) and its general-interest brokers (analogous to the attentive public) among others. This neural network-like system might potentially provide a much more stable and effective foundation for democratic social action than the established commercial media system it challenges.

What we already can observe is how the blogosphere acts as a multifocal lens of collective attention. Interest among bloggers creates network neighborhoods that channel attention to relevant online content. Discovery and analysis of these provides the promise of empirical exploration of new and critical ideas about the dynamics of the networked public sphere.

But what should not be overlooked is the central role that legacy news media entities still play throughout the blogosphere. And if journalists want to continue to fulfill the role they have aspired to in the past—to be general interest

intermediaries at the crossroads of public discourse—nothing in the actual behavior of bloggers suggests their role would diminish on account of lack of demand for this social function.

The news media's business model problems are, of course, another matter entirely, but at this stage it looks safe to say that blogs do not make commercial journalism obsolete, least of all in the eyes of bloggers (regardless of what some of them say about this). If anything, the central role of professional journalism in the expanded economy of political discourse makes it valuable in new ways. To the extent its near-monopoly on agenda setting and public representation is broken, its role as an honest broker of verified information becomes even more important.

Change Is Everywhere

The growing networked public sphere is not just changing the relationship among actors in the political landscape, but it is changing the kinds of actors found there and changing what "media" are actually doing. Some of this is easy to see. Ten years ago there were almost no bloggers; now, they are considered a formidable force in public affairs. And the legacy media are changing as well. Newspapers and other online publishers have added blogs to their offerings and transformed the way general articles are published to seem more and more bloglike (e.g. hyperlinks, reader comments, embedded video). Bloggers on legacy media Web sites have quickly gained prominence, and some media companies have found great success via blogging. For example, most people outside think of The Politico as a Web site, not a Capitol Hill newspaper.

As blogging and online media genres evolve, blog vs. MSM becomes purely a cultural, or perhaps commercial, distinction and not one of format. If in blogs we find more information about more issues and with more diversity of voices than ever heard in the MSM, why should we mourn the closing of newspapers and the dwindling of broadcast news audiences?

One argument is that the MSM form a locus of collective attention, where citizens are exposed to differing views on a common index of issues, and that the danger of losing this mainstream arena is that individuals will retract into irreconcilable redoubts of the like-minded,

and the central marketplace of ideas fade away. There is some evidence to support this fear. In our mapping, we clearly see the strong tendency of bloggers to link to other bloggers with similar interests and beliefs, particularly around politics. And other research buttresses what we can now see on our social networking maps:

- Most people's offline social networks are relatively homogenous with respect to political beliefs and attitudes.
- To the extent that people are exposed to opposing viewpoints, it is primarily through MSM.

It is, therefore, not unreasonable to fear that the centrifugal force exerted by hundreds of thousands of bloggers will sunder a public sphere long held together by journalistic institutions. But let us also bear in mind that the way we envision this problem reveals just how thoroughly the mass media model of society—featuring atomized consumers feeding at common troughs—grounds our imagination.

I'd argue that the question of how blogs are impacting the public sphere is not a straightforward matter of whether they undermine the MSM's ability to provide a platform for public agenda-setting and exposure to crosscutting political views. The full story is deeper and more nuanced. While the Internet, vivified by blogs, fractures the landscape of public discourse across a great many new actors, a core activity of bloggers is to focus attention back to the MSM, particularly to institutional journalism. The structured tissue of bloggers—each not a voice in the woods but a member of crosscutting communities—creates a new medium of social knowing, one that so far appears favorable to the presence of the kinds of high visibility, central platforms represented by legacy media institutions. ■

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The End of Journalism as Usual

'To maximize a news organization's social capital and marketability, its journalism today must be transparent, authentic and collaborative.'

BY MARK BRIGGS

There's the philosophical riddle about the tree falling in a forest when no one is around. Does it make a sound? Now try this twist: If a journalist has a story, but there is no market for the news, is it worth doing?

The business model for journalism is crumbling. So an informed discussion of journalism today must include an awareness of new business models and marketability.

Can marketing save journalism? It's a heretical question for some to consider, I'm sure, since journalists have long valued their practice as more "pure" than marketing and public relations. But these seemingly disparate forms of communication are melding together, and journalism can benefit from integrating new marketing strategies and tactics.

This type of marketing is not advertising, or slogans, or logos. As it has evolved in the digital age, it has become more transparent, authentic and collaborative, which I will argue are all traits that describe good journalism today, too. "The Cluetrain Manifesto" outlined this shift nearly 10 years ago with 95 theses on "the end of business as usual." The first line on its original cover read, "Markets are conversations."

A few years later, the concept that "news is a conversation" invaded mainstream journalism and is now universally embraced, at least in concept. So it stands to reason that if both markets and news are conversations, the practice of journalism today requires an awareness and capacity for the marketability of that journalism.

What follows is one thesis from Cluetrain. In reading it, see if you

can identify the mainstream news industry in it:

> Corporations do not speak in the same voice as these new networked conversations. To their intended online audiences, companies sound hollow, flat, literally unhuman.

Match that assessment with the most recent Pew research on the public's perception of journalism, in which credibility has hit an all-time low. See how journalism's disconnect with its community is helping play out the dire predictions from Cluetrain, including:

> The community of discourse is the market. Companies that do not belong to a community of discourse will die.

Think Social Capital

Ironically, this situation cannot be addressed by the marketing department at a news organization. Instead, it's about creating "social capital" by becoming the "trusted center" within a structure of relationships through digital communication. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu suggested social capital can be developed through purposeful actions and then transformed into conventional economic gains. This concept very closely aligns to the traditional business model for news of generating revenue based largely on a public service.

For several years now, journalists have taken positive steps into the digital age by adding blogs and multimedia to their craft while increasing interactivity and immediacy. Simultaneously, news organizations have shed jobs, and their stocks have taken a pounding on Wall Street.

So why isn't this strategy working? Because journalism's brand is broken.

News organizations struggle not only with public perception of journalism but also with brand value in their local community. As I travel and talk with news professionals looking for ways to add Web 2.0 elements—comments, forums and user-generated content—to their online operations, I'm no longer surprised to hear an editor or reporter say, "Readers won't do that on a news site."

But this type of response is an admission of failure, especially when we find start-up companies like Flickr and Craigslist gaining more

brand cache in a local community than a business that has been serving a community for decades. Even worse is when a local, independent blog generates relevant and constructive discussion based to a large extent on the news reported by the local news organization and the original news Web site's conversation is either dormant or misguided and destructive.

Building targeted communities of discourse with a layer of journalism on top can help. The Bakersfield Californian, for example, has been a leader in creating and cultivating such communities with projects like Bakotopia. And the beat blogging movement started by Jay Rosen's NewAssignment.net is about doing this kind of journalism by convening a community of discourse in the form of an online social network.

To maximize a news organization's social capital and marketability, its journalism today must be transparent, authentic and collaborative. This is why blogs and Twitter work for news organizations. Neither will replace traditional journalism, and that shouldn't be the objective. These new digital tools bring journalists closer to readers and readers closer to journalism by removing barriers to a more networked conversation.

They help journalists avoid sounding "hollow, flat, literally unhuman" as Cluetrain warned against. And they build influence for the journalists, which Philip Meyer argued in "The Vanishing Newspaper" leads to economic success.

Judgment and Strategy

Recently I was part of a strategic content planning session for a traditional newsroom. I suggested that one priority should be content that is "marketable." Some translated this to mean running celebrity gossip on Page One. Not so, I tried to explain. Marketable content means that the target audience is desirable to advertisers, either because of its size or quality. TechCrunch, for example, succeeded in doing this, and in fewer than two years has become the leading source for technology business news, eclipsing such coverage by The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, and local Bay Area newspapers.

News operations are struggling to find the right balance between quality and quantity. Local news sites are organized based on the

print sectioning—local, sports, business, lifestyle—that was invented because of press configurations. Advertisers can't put their finger on the demographic they might reach with this kind of mass-appeal formatting. It's not nearly targeted enough for today's digital world. So smart news operations launch niche sites, targeting moms, dads, pets, shopping, home and garden, and more traditional categories such as arts and entertainment. If not topical sites, then they go hyperlocal.

These are definable markets, ones that a sales representative can use to easily explain to a prospective advertiser exactly who will be reached by positioning an ad in a particular section.

What about the news organization's cornerstones of reporting responsibilities—breaking news and watchdog journalism? These are a news operation's loss leaders, and they don't form a specific market. But they can draw a transient audience because of their popularity online. Once visitors arrive, they are introduced to the rest of the site's content, which then might attract a more loyal following. This reporting also improves social capital by keeping a reader informed and pro-

tecting his or her interests.

News operations need markets, and markets are conversations. Shoveling content into separate categories isn't enough. It's time to end business—and journalism—as usual.

A Holistic Approach

Can journalism be pursued with a blind eye toward the market realities of the business models that have supported journalism? Not if journalism is to have a future.

This is why college journalism programs should be teaching the basics of business and marketing as part of journalism training, as Jeff Jarvis is doing at the City University of New York and Dan Gillmor at Arizona State. The reality is this: With fewer traditional jobs in journalism available today—and probably fewer tomorrow—there is a greater need for the study and practice of entrepreneurial journalism for students and for out-of-work journalists who still want to serve a community.

This holistic approach—blending business strategy with journalism—is already guiding independent, hyperlocal start-up news efforts around the United States.

Self-sustaining operations will proliferate as traditional news organizations continue to shrink and digital tools evolve and lower the barrier to entry even further.

Digital entrepreneur Elizabeth Osder visited the University of Southern California last fall and spoke frankly to journalism students about this new environment, according to a summary posted by Online Journalism Review.[1] She presented the following recipe for entrepreneurial journalism:

> Start with the impact you want to have. Figure out what audience you need to assemble to have that impact and what kind of content is needed to do that. Then price it out: How much money do you need to do it?

After one student complained that this felt too much like business school, Osder defended the new approach as bringing to them a necessary discipline. "It forces you to be relevant and useful versus arrogant and entitled," Osder replied.

For me, this isn't just a concept; it's my new reality. I resigned my position at The News Tribune in Tacoma, Washington in October to pursue entrepreneurial journalism with a start-up company founded to serve local news publishers with technology and strategy. We will succeed if we can help publishers connect to the networked conversation in their markets. The technology is irrelevant, but critical to sustaining journalism are these new traits: an entrepreneurial mindset, measureable success tied to establishing social capital, and a recognition that authentic, transparent and collaborative work is the foundation for viability and sustainability in the marketplace. ∎

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[1] To read about Osder's presentation, go to www.ojr.org/ojr/people/Geneva/200810/1542/.

The Wikification of Knowledge

A neuroscientist explores the shared challenges of medicine and journalism when it comes to gathering information and reaching conclusions in the era of social media.

By Kenneth S. Kosik

How do we know what we think we know? To narrow this longstanding epistemological question, let me ask this about the world I generally inhabit—medicine, where I work as a neuroscientist. For questions about medical conditions, two sources of knowledge exist. There is expert knowledge—the kind acquired by those who read the primary scientific papers, examine findings from controlled studies, and who, by virtue of their training and their advanced degrees, carry the weight of authority. The second is what today would be called "wiki" knowledge, the kind that arises from collective experience. Today, the knowledge of the designated expert is increasingly challenged by the collective experience of ever-expanding cybercommunities. In the battle of the blogosphere vs. the expert, the expert seems to be losing ground. This contemporary dialectic represents a challenge for many disciplines, including the journalist, who must decide how to balance expert views with those of the cybercommunity.

Knowledge: Expert Vs. Wiki

When medical findings are announced, whether a new therapy, a new preventive measure, or a new research finding, neither the journalist nor the physician should assume that an expert opinion is definitive. The expert may be "as good as it gets," but the limitations of the expert approach need to be clear. For example, let's take treatment decisions with a newly approved medication for Alzheimer's

disease. To get approved by the FDA, the pharmaceutical company had to prove safety and efficacy. But how frequently does the drug fail to work, and do other health-related factors such as lifestyle or coexisting disease or genetic risk affect the likelihood the drug will work? These are difficult questions for the expert. In the case of the most commonly used drug in Alzheimer's disease—donepezil—the physician has no idea about enhanced or diminished benefit in association with other health factors and usually does not mention to the family that many users show no benefit at all.

Perhaps the power of the wiki could provide more depth when one is making a decision about a drug treatment. Certainly, the choice of a medication becomes even more acute for some of the stratospherically priced drugs used in cancer treatment today. So how can we create a wiki-based knowledge environment for medical information? In times past, collective knowledge derived from folk medicine, old wives tales, and anecdotal reports. The number of contributors to collective knowledge in any one community was small and, therefore, the conclusions clinically suspect.

The modern-day version of folk medicine is no longer confined to a small circle of happenstance encounters within the limits of our physical geography. With the disappearance of these boundaries, our links to medical conditions like our own can reach across the globe. Large numbers of people—well beyond the numbers found in most medical studies—can build disease-oriented social networks with layers of added information and with an ease of follow-up to create a living, dynamic wiki. From the network one can cluster individuals in any way desired—by geographic location, by occupation, by response to a medication—and begin to extract patterns and correlations. We can organize and reorganize data and perform statistics based on any parameter we chose and create hypotheses that can then be verified prospectively.

Within the potential of social networks lies untapped wiki knowledge poised to challenge the experts by opening wide the collective knowledge gate. In November, Google announced its new Web tool—Google Flu Trends—which uses people's search clues (entering phrases such as "flu symptoms") to create graphs and maps to predict and show regional outbreaks of the flu.

Can social networks rival what is learned from expert approaches such as controlled studies and disease registries? Sound conclusions in the medical field are based upon statistical significance. The statistical power of a population, i.e. the ability to distinguish between an experimental and control group, when posed a research question often depends on having a sufficiently large study group. The best way to increase the number of participating individuals is tapping into the Internet. However, saddled with a freewheeling Wild West style, the Internet cannot easily provide pure well-controlled study populations. But the vast potential for touching enormous numbers of people could negate the noise of the Web. Experts use "meta-analysis" to increase the size of their experimental sample. Wiki knowledge derived from a social network offers a fluid, open source, ongoing meta-analysis—a virtual collection of experiences that can be constantly updated as users enter more individual data.

Benefits and Challenges of Collective Information

Social networks empower the "expert," be it a doctor or a journalist, because access to this community-generated knowledge is shared by all. For example, illness and a significant story intersected at Love Canal, where 21,000 tons of chemical waste lay buried beneath the community unbeknownst to the residents. Back in 1978, a time long before social media existed, Lois Gibbs, a local mother and president of the Love Canal Homeowners' Association, first associated exposure to the leaking chemical waste with the epilepsy, asthma and urinary tract infections that were recurring in her children. Although flagrant and clear cut, Love Canal is not unique. Now, the ability of Web-based medical networks to cluster data geographically has the potential to reveal other dangerous living conditions. Similarly, occupational risks for disease are well recognized, and organizing medical data in this way will likely serve as an early warning system for on-the-job risks—and for investigative stories that can be done about them.

Figuring out what constitutes a healthy lifestyle is something that consumes the time of both doctors and journalists, whose job it is to report reliably on the barrage of evidence emerging from many different studies—much of it con-

tradictory or, at least, confusing. New information surfaces almost daily about dietary measures or fitness programs that will increase or decrease our risk for cancer, heart attacks, Alzheimer's disease, and more, and some of it is potentially contaminated by the bias of financial involvement.

How can one possibly capture all these simultaneous variables when computing risk? Did a study that found something new about coffee drinkers control for the number of hours those people spent in the gym? When a new drug is tested, the control group may not be identical to the experimental group in caloric intake, number of portions of vegetables eaten, or their amount of daily exercise. At best, the study is controlled for age and gender. But if those taking the drug are eating poorly and under stress and those on placebo are dining on salads and jogging on the beach, the wrong conclusion could be reached. And if one adds in genetic variation found in human populations—certain types of genes can increase or diminish the risk for disease—the variables mount further. Controlled studies are just not powered to capture multiple variables, and medical conditions are brimming with variables. The only way

to increase the statistical power of a conclusion is to increase the sample size, exactly what social networks are designed to do.

Because wiki knowledge in the social network arena is obtained in an unconventional manner, it might not provide conclusive evidence. Therefore, a preferable way of thinking about wiki knowledge is as a guidepost for the design of hypotheses (for scientists to test) or generating story ideas (for journalists to report). For each of us, the pitfalls are evident, and a few of them are highlighted below:

- **Selection bias is a problem.** Those on a social network tend to be younger and not economically disadvantaged. When groups of people are excluded due to entry barriers, the information generated from the community will be biased, and other knowledge will be lost or skewed. In time, the increasing penetration of the Internet to all segments of the society will resolve this issue as has happened for telephones and TV.
- **The privacy question.** No network is totally secure—and medical information is not immune to the problem. This summer, staff at a hospital near Los An-

geles was discovered snooping through records of Hollywood celebrities. And this case is not unique. Beyond the security of servers, networks allow levels of access; therefore, on a site where people share medical information, they can limit the information that others can see. Some individuals may want to remain completely anonymous. Others may be willing to share all their information within a small subnetwork of people they know well and keep anonymous their data to the larger network.

- **Entry of false data is a potentially serious issue—for doctors and journalists alike.** For example, take reporting on the performance of surgeons, an area in which data are sorely needed. Suppose a disgruntled patient wants to smear a surgeon and fabricates multiple entries with bad outcomes. Tools are needed for verification. Suppose a person is part of social network related to weight control or hypertension and enters false data. If just a few people are guilty of false entries the overall conclusions will not vary much. But large numbers of people may have a tendency to lie or distort

their personnel information even if their identity is concealed.

Neither doctors nor journalists will have been the first to venture into the realm of figuring out how to utilize wiki knowledge. In "Wikinomics," by Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams, many positive examples are presented that bring collective Web-based knowledge to the business model. Yet there are critics of this approach, too. Andrew Keen, author of "The Cult of the Amateur," argues that Web-based knowledge is superficial and lacks deep and considered judgment. Indeed, Web content can be boisterous, unfiltered and amateur. Yet if conventional knowledge is only what experts know, then should everything else be considered "amateur" knowledge? While Web users may be a raucous bunch, they can be as easily airbrushed into a statistic through a social network as they can be in an expert study.

An External Hard Drive for the Brain

As a neuroscientist who spends time thinking about how people's brains process information, this technology—and the information overflow it

brings—are without a doubt changing the way human beings make decisions. Neuroscientists have increasingly come to understand memory as a function not intended to recreate the past, but to guide us into the future. Viewed in this way, memory does not have to be perfectly accurate; instead it has to serve us for outcome simulation and correct decision-making based on the memory of an experience that resembled our current circumstances.

Stores of information downloaded from hand-held devices will help close the gap between successful and unsuccessful outcomes when making decisions because we can draw upon a deep base of information and experience. We can instantly tap into a living source of collective experience about our condition while sitting with the physician. As pointed out by Daniel L. Schacter and Donna Rose Addis in a recent essay in Nature (2007), "information about the past is useful only to the extent that it allows us to anticipate what may happen in the future." Our ability to anticipate the future may be enhanced by a richer store of information that includes a Web-based compilation of data.

It is perhaps an irony of our time that with all of these avenues to discover knowledge at our command, we can find ourselves starved for information in a sea churning with nothing but information. The particular knowledge craved, for example, by those given a life-threatening diagnosis, often lies outside the expertise of physicians—even specialists. While flickers of hope appear on the Web through encounters with others and a shared experience, judging the reliability of this experience—and its fit with our own—can be difficult. But to have the opportunity to find information and test its reliability means that no longer is one person—an expert—expected to know everything and render infallible judgment. That view is the no-longer tenable burden of the expert physician; nor can it any longer be the guiding belief of the trained journalist. ∎

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Media Re:public: My Year in the Church of the Web

In studying new and old media, the author feels 'as though I've undergone two religious crises; one feels like a loss of faith, the other like a conversion.'

BY PERSEPHONE MIEL

In November 2007, I was invited to spend a year at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet & Society, leading a research project in partnership with the MacArthur Foundation. Its aim, according to Colin Maclay, the center's acting executive director, would be to take a "skeptical but constructive look at the state of the blogosphere." Many well-known folks in the world of blogs had applied for this job, but the Berkman Center decided they needed someone who had not "drunk the blogging Kool-Aid." This is why they took a chance on me—someone who'd worked with traditional news media in less developed countries, where online media were still mostly considered irrelevant, who'd never written a blog nor regularly read them.

Our project was named "Media Re:public." This turned out to be an apt name given our key finding that more journalism in the public interest is essential, whether created by professionals or amateurs, commercial entities or nonprofits, online, on the air or on paper. But in the yearlong process of reaching this conclusion—looking at "new" and "old" media and how they're blending (and not blending)—I feel as though I've undergone two religious crises; one feels like a loss of faith, the other like a conversion.

Preaching a False Message

Before moving to Boston and taking on this project, I'd spent a dozen years with the international media development nonprofit Internews Network (internews.org) working in the former Soviet Union and other countries to promote independent media. The idea that

commercial media with advertising coming from many sources equals financial independence, which is the best foundation for robust independent journalism, was central to much of our work. This message seemed especially appropriate in places like Russia, where I lived for many years, when everyone seemed to agree that converting state-run media to true public media was an impossible task, and commercial news media would be the country's savior.

As I look at what is happening now to this news model in the United States, I believe I was a missionary of a false gospel. Relying on advertising to support independent editorial structures that serve the public interest has always been a remarkably fragile construct resulting from a combination of history, regulation, professional aspirations, and family businesses. It's been eroding for a long time due to deregulation and the shift of many media businesses from privately held companies to shareholder corporations. Couple this with the shift of media consumption to the Internet, where advertising aimed at people looking for the score from last night's game no longer necessarily supports the same enterprise

doing reporting on city hall, and it delivers the fatal blow.

In interview after interview I did with those working at newspapers and in TV and radio news, people described a continuing shift in priorities towards anything that helps their bottom line. Usually, this means cheap or free content that brings in large audiences or is advertiser-friendly, including a huge increase in various kinds of sponsored content. The church-state newsroom wall is looking more and more like a low hurdle, crossed without breaking stride.

Even publicly funded broadcasters offered little comfort. When I started this project, I imagined that public radio and TV stations would be the natural homes for the kind of mixing of amateur-professional online media that I'd hoped might address the impending failures of traditional commercial media, especially locally. Though I haven't given up hope, the more I looked inside the system, the less likely this seemed, despite the many smart and motivated people who work within these news organizations. There are wonderful initiatives, both nationally and at local stations, but I worry these efforts will not get the financial and po-

litical support they need to develop and prove themselves. Some terrific efforts by local stations—part of a steady stream of small-scale innovations—include New Hampshire Public Radio (nhpr.org), the Public Insight Network[1] and :Vocalo (vocalo.org), a bold and beautiful experiment by Chicago Public Radio, which I regularly listen to at my desk.

Converting to Participatory Media

It was not my misgivings about the future of newspapers and serious journalism generally but my conversion to a participatory media evangelist that shocked my friends. From their point of view, I am now drunk on the Kool-Aid. When I began this project, we were all curmudgeons,[2] acknowledging that the Internet was important but believing this whole "citizen journalism" thing was wildly exaggerated. Citizen media guru Dan Gillmor, now one of my favorite Berkman colleagues, had come to speak at Internews, and his message was very convincing. But we took away ideas about how to enhance professional journalism, not replace it. When Berkman explained that my research was meant to answer the question of why online citizen media had not yet created a revolution—in shifting power from the center, where mainstream media resides, to the edges—I laughed out loud. I still have a hard time believing that anyone really thought unpaid, untrained people would take on significant portions of the work of professional news media.

Though my belief in the need for professional journalism remains intact, I have come to believe that "participatory media," the name we gave online citizen media, can, and indeed must, create a more democratic sphere for information and a more engaged public. By naming it "participatory media" we moved past defining it as only, or even mostly, being about blogs and acknowledged that not everyone

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[1] http://minnesota.publicradio.org/publicinsightjournalism

[2] This is the technical term for traditional media people who maintain that bloggers are irrelevant and/or dangerous. If you are one, as I suspect many Nieman folks are, I urge you to escape. We need you.

Media Re:public: Conclusions After a Year of Exploration

Media Re:public's final report went to press in November. It is available on the Berkman Center's Web site at www.cyber.law.harvard.edu. Its conclusions include the following:

- The disruption of the scarcity-based business model for traditional media outlets is leading them to reduce and shift the scope of their original reporting.
- Web-native media entities are not addressing all of the reporting gaps left by legacy media, and current structures and mechanisms do not provide sufficient incentives for them to do so.
- In the changing media environment, news consumers risk relying on news sources that are neither credible nor comprehensive.
- Despite impressive successes, participation in the online media space is not universal; there are populations and ideas that remain underrepresented.
- There are specific kinds of critically important journalism that have not found reliable sustainability models in the online media environment.
- Efforts to understand and address the issues above are limited by a lack of rigorous empirical evidence, instead relying largely on incomplete information, anecdotes and intuition. ■ —P.M.

involved is a citizen or a journalist, never mind a citizen journalist. Participatory media is whenever the people formerly known as the audience help shape the media environment, whether by commenting or recommending, sorting or reporting.

One observation to emerge from our research is the increasing amount of participatory media happening within traditional news organizations. The disturbing thing, however, about what is taking place there is that the content is often just as susceptible to the problems of

credibility and lowest common denominator quality that professional journalists once condemned as inherent to amateur online media.

As part of my research, I attended many conferences, almost all a mix of old and new media, with some tilting towards journalism and others in the direction of technology and participatory media. The contrast between the two tribes—and they are distinct despite increasing trends towards intermarriage—remains stark. At NewsTools2008, folks from traditional and online media, technology companies, startups and universities spent three extraordinary days in the self-organized sessions of what is known as an "un-conference": ideas bubbled as we learned about each other's projects. On the third day, most of that group went home, but some of us stayed to take part in a daylong event with a group of local traditional journalists who, I have to admit, depressed me utterly. As a group, they seemed to have only one question to ask: What's going to happen to my job?

Meanwhile, despite the image of bloggers and other new media folk as a sort of closed society, I experienced just the opposite. Just about all those I talked with in the new media world were excited to share information and explain their thinking and approach. I learned to give up a skill I'd developed during years spent with specialized professionals in the U.S. media of pretending to know what they were talking about long enough to guess. With my new colleagues, I could say, "Excuse me, but what exactly is Twitter?" or substitute Flickr, RSS, geo-tagging, SEO, or any of dozens of other terms that entered my vocabulary during this past year. Never did I feel that anyone had any less respect for me for not knowing. This refreshing attitude was one of many things I wish traditional media folks would pick up.

The Work Ahead

Despite being a convert to participatory media, I do not believe it will produce quality journalism by some kind of volunteer crowd-powered magic. "Build it and they will use it to make the media we need" has not proven to be true in the areas that matter. What I see being done online by both Web-native media and traditional media is the easy stuff—the low-hanging fruit, including coverage of politics, consumer news, gossip and technology. Much

hard work remains to do to realize its potential; pretending that we've figured out everything about how participatory media works is very dangerous. We need a far more sophisticated interpretation of the citizen media scripture before my conversion will be complete.

As I write this, sitting in my hotel in Tbilisi, Georgia, my Berkman colleagues and I are finalizing our main report and several other documents we're publishing under the aegis of this project. The one-year MacArthur grant has ended, and I'm looking at ways to act on the conclusions I reached.

Here's my sense of where we are now in this discussion—and where we need to head:

- More media projects should focus on the needs of specific publics, especially underserved populations.
- They should build on what's available and bring organizations together rather than trying to create something entirely new.
- Technology is only one tiny part of the picture; the hard work will involve people.

I will continue to think and blog sporadically about these important media issues at www.mediarepublic.org. Between consulting jobs, which will likely focus on bringing my new media perspective to the international media development world, I will volunteer my time to develop a local media project with teenagers in my neighborhood, Boston's South End. This project is tentatively called NeighborChord. Because many people in the neighborhood are not online, it will combine digital and traditional media, and these youngsters will be trained in traditional reporting as well as the multimedia and technology necessary to produce it. Like many experiments, it may fail. But a year of looking at the state of the news media has led me to believe it is critical to try. ■

Persephone Miel directed the Media Re:public project at the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University. Prior to joining Berkman, she spent more than 12 years with Internews Network, an international NGO supporting independent media around the world.

The Wisdom of the Crowd Resides in How the Crowd Is Used

'...the animating idea—our readers know more than we do—is evolving into something that, if used wisely, will be far more efficient and useful than our first, early attempts at this new form of journalism.'

By Jeff Howe

Our presidential election was indeed historic, but not just for the reasons emblazoned in headlines throughout the world. It was also the most closely monitored election in U.S. history, as everyone from CNN to The Huffington Post to Harvard University asked people to document their voting experience and provide instant reports on problems at the polls. Thousands responded, sending in text messages, photographs, videos and even voice mails. The resulting data were aggregated and displayed—in real time—on maps, in charts, and over RSS feeds.

All of this activity signaled a small but significant advance in the use of crowdsourcing as a new tool in digital journalism. While crowdsourcing, or citizen journalism, has been widely embraced by all manner of news operations over the past several years, its track record has been decidedly spotty. In theory, crowdsourcing offers outlets like newspapers and newscasts and Web sites an opportunity to improve their reporting, bind their audiences closer to their brands, and reduce newsroom overhead. In reality, relying on readers to produce news content has proved to be a nettlesome—and costly—practice.

I coined the word "crowdsourcing" in a Wired magazine article published in June 2006, though at that time I didn't focus on its use in journalism. It was—and is—defined

as the act of taking a job once performed by employees and outsourcing it to a large, undefined group of people via an open call, generally over the Internet. Back then I explored the ways TV networks, photo agencies, and corporate R&D departments were harnessing the efforts of amateurs. I had wanted to include journalism in the piece, but there was a dearth of examples.[1]

That quickly changed. Not long after Wired published this article the term began to seep into the pop cultural lexicon, and news organizations started to experiment with reader-generated content. Around this time, some of the more memorable moments in journalism had been brought to us not by a handful of intrepid reporters, but by a legion of amateur photographers, bloggers and videographers. When a massive tsunami swept across the resort beaches of Thailand and Indonesia, those "amateurs" who were witness to it sent words and images by any means they could. When homegrown terrorists set off a series of bombs on buses and subways in London, those at the scene used their cell phone cameras to trans-mit horrifying images. Hurricane Katrina reinforced this trend: As water rose and then receded, journalists—to say nothing of the victims' families—relied on information and images supplied by those whose journalistic accreditation started and ended with the accident of their geographical location.

With these events, the news media's primary contribution was to provide the dependable Web forum on which people gathered to distribute information. By late 2006, the stage seemed set for the entrance of "citizen journalism," in which inspired and thoughtful amateurs would provide a palliative for the perceived abuses of the so-called mainstream media. These were heady times, and a spirit of optimism—what can't the crowd do?—seemed to pervade newsrooms as well as the culture at large.

At Wired, we were no less susceptible to the zeitgeist. In January 2007, we teamed up with Jay Rosen's NewAssignment.Net to launch Assignment Zero. We anticipated gathering hundreds of Web-connected volunteers to discuss, report and eventually write 80 feature articles

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[1] Howe's article, "The Rise of Crowdsourcing," can be read at www. wired.com/wired/archive/14.06/crowds.html.

about a specified topic. At about the same time, Gannett was re-engineering its newsrooms with the ambition of putting readers at the center of its new business strategy. I had a close-up view of both efforts. At Assignment Zero, I was trying to help apply the crowdsourcing principles, while in 2006 I broke the news of Gannett's retooling—the most significant change since it launched USA Today in 1982—after spending several months reporting on the sea change at the company for Wired Magazine[2] and for my book, "Crowdsourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd Is Driving the Future of Business."

It would be easy to say that the original optimism was simply naiveté, but that wouldn't be exactly correct. As it turns out, there's a lot that the crowd can't do or, at least, isn't interested in doing. Recently I spent time talking to sources at Gannett as well as some of my Assignment Zero alumni[3] to revisit what went right, what didn't, and to pull from them valuable lessons for others to put to good use. What I've learned

has reinforced my belief that crowdsourcing has limited applicability to journalism—it's a spice, not a main ingredient in our fourth estate. I've also come to fear that news organizations will rely more and more on reader-generated content at the expense of traditional journalism. But what's also clear is that the animating idea—our readers know more than we do—is evolving into something that, if used wisely, will be far more efficient and useful than our first, early attempts at this new form of journalism. At any rate, crowdsourcing isn't going away, so it behooves all of us to make sure it improves journalism but does not replace it.

Assignment Zero's Formula

Assignment Zero was intended to demonstrate, as I wrote in a Wired.com piece on the occasion of the project's launch in March 2007, that "… a team of professionals, working with scores of citizen journalists, is capable of completing an investigative project of far greater scope than a team

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[2] Howe's July 2007 story in Wired, entitled "To Save Themselves, US Newspapers Put Readers to Work," can be read at www.wired.com/ techbiz/media/magazine/15-08/ff_gannett?currentPage=all.

[3] David Cohn, an Assignment Zero alumnus, has an article about Spot.Us on page 20.

of two or three professionals ever could." In this case, the first topic of investigation by the crowd would be "… the crowd itself—its wisdom, creativity, power and potential." Dozens of "subject pages" were constructed, ranging from open source car design to architecture. Included was even a subject file called "the crowdsourced novel." Within each topic, there were up to 10 assignments, in which contributors could report, brainstorm or "write the feature." It was an ideal format for a newsroom. But then, we weren't soliciting journalists.

We came out of the gate strong. The New York Times published a column devoted to Assignment Zero, and the effort received lots of positive attention from the blogosphere. Within the first week, hundreds of volunteers had signed up. But just as quickly, these enthusiastic volunteers drifted away. Six weeks later, most of our topic pages were ghost towns.

What had we done wrong? Here's a few lessons learned:

1. Using the crowd to study crowdsourcing proved far too wonky and bewildering for most of our would-be citizen journalists.
2. We failed to anticipate that while building a community can be difficult, maintaining it is much harder. We didn't have a tier of organizers ready to answer questions and guide people in the right direction. With their earnest e-mails unanswered, quite naturally most volunteers drifted away.
3. We expected the crowd would fall all over themselves for the opportunity to produce all the artifacts of the journalistic practice—reporter's notes, inverted pyramid articles, and long-form features. It turned out that asking people to write a feature proved about as appealing as asking them to rewrite their college thesis. And so our contributors spoke with their feet.

Six weeks in, we turned things around. We scrapped most of the feature stories; instead people were asked to conduct Q&As. Critically, we shifted our tone. Instead of dictating assignments to people, we let the crowd select whom they wanted to interview or suggest new subjects entirely. In the end, about 80 interviews made it to the Web site as published pieces, and the majority were insightful and provocative. What their interviews made clear is these volunteer contributors tackled topics about which they were passionate and knowledgeable, giving their content a considerable advantage over

that of professional journalists, who often must conduct interviews on short notice, without time for preparation or passion for the subject.

Gannett's Newsroom Reinvention

Gannett, too, found itself experimenting with crowdsourcing in some of its newsrooms but did so for different reasons and in different ways than Assignment Zero. Conceived as a wholesale reinvention of the newsroom—rechristened the "information center"—Gannett's readers were now to reside at the heart of the two planks in its strategy.

After a successful initial foray into crowdsourced reporting—at The (Fort Myers) News-Press, in which a citizen-engaged investigation unearthed corruption in a sewage utility in a town in Florida—Gannett decided to export this model to its other newspapers.[4] Readers (a.k.a. community members) would also play a significant newsroom role in the renamed "community desk," which would

oversee everything from blogs to news articles written by readers.

In reporting on Gannett's strategy, I chose to focus on how the changes were being implemented at one paper, The Cincinnati Enquirer. One indication of how the newsroom was changing was the shift in job responsibilities. A longtime metro reporter, Linda Parker, had recently been reassigned as "online communities editor." Every Enquirer Web page prominently featured the words "Get Published" as a way of eliciting stories, comments and anything else Cincinnatians might feel compelled to submit. It all landed in Parker's queue; perhaps not surprisingly, these words and videos never have resembled anything commonly considered journalism.

Even figuring out how best to prompt contributors has revealed valuable lessons to those at the Enquirer—ones that other news organizations can learn from. "It used to read, 'Be a Citizen Journalist,'" Parker told me. "And no one ever clicked on it. Then we said, 'Tell Us Your Story,' and still nothing. For some reason,

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4 Betty Wells, special projects editor at The News-Press, wrote about the newspaper's use of crowdsourcing for the Spring 2008 issue of Nieman Reports in an article entitled, "Using Expertise From Outside the Newsroom," which can be read at www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100085.

'Get Published' were the magic words."

Now, nearly two years into the experiment, the Enquirer considers this feature to be an unequivocal success. I sat with Parker, a cheerful woman in her mid-50's, in April of last year as she pored over several dozen submissions she had received that day. There was one written by a local custom car builder trumpeting his upcoming appearance on a BET show, and another, expressing with the intensity of emotional passion befitting the circumstance, is a notice for a play being held to raise funds for a fifth-grader's bone marrow transplant. Parker almost never rejects anything she receives, though she scans each one for "the F-word," and then posts it to the site. "A few years ago these would have come across the transom as press releases and been ignored," she says.

This observation points to a central problem with Gannett's strategy—indeed, with both the hyperlocal and crowdsourcing movements in general. Readers are content to leave the gritty aspects of reporting to journalists; they prefer to focus on content and storytelling that Nicholas Lemann, dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, once characterized in The New Yorker as being the equivalent of the contents of a church newsletter.

As it turns out, Tom Callinan, the Enquirer's editor, observed a while into the project "even 'Get Published' was too newspaperlike in its sound. People don't want to get published. They want to 'share.'" And so this is what the Web site's button now encourages its readers to do. The results continue, as Callinan says, to tend toward "pretty fluffy stuff."

Lessons Learned

So what are we to take away from these experiments? Readers are very

interested in playing a role in the creation of their local media. They don't necessarily want to write the news; what they want is to engage in a conversation. This doesn't mean, however, that they don't have valuable contributions to make. This fall, Callinan told me, readers shared with others on the Enquirer Web site news about a stabbing at a local strip club and a photograph of a theater fire. "We were able to confirm the stabbing," he said. "We would have never known about it without the tip." It might not be grist for a Pulitzer, but it fills the copy hole.

Nor were these key lessons lost on those of us involved in Assignment Zero. In fact, Assignment Zero's community manager, Amanda Michel, employed the lessons of what didn't work adeptly at her next venture, directing The Huffington Post's effort, Off the Bus, with its citizen-generated coverage of the presidential campaign. Rather than duplicate what journalists were doing, Off the Bus leveraged its strength—namely, the size of its network of 12,000 "reporters." With citizen correspondents spread across the nation and ready to attend smaller rallies, fundraisers and get-out-the-vote events that the national press ignored, Off the Bus found its niche.

Off the Bus became arguably the first truly successful example of crowdsourced journalism with some of its citizen reporters breaking national stories. Perhaps its most significant story was about the moment when Barack Obama, at a nonpress event fundraiser in San Francisco, made his famous comment about how rural Americans "cling to guns or religion" as an expression of their frustration. However, this reporting by Mayhill Fowler, the citizen journalist who broke this story, actually drew attention away from Off the Bus's broader achievement. Toward the end of the campaign, Off the Bus was publishing some 50 stories a day, and Michel—with the help of her crowd—was able to write profiles of every superdelegate, perform investigations into dubious financial contributions to the campaigns, and publish compelling firsthand reports from the frontlines in the battleground states. The national press took note—and sent its kudos—but more importantly, readers noticed. Off the Bus drew 3.5 million unique visitors to its site in the month of September.

Michel achieved this because she took away valuable information from the failures of the experimen-

tation at Assignment Zero. Rather than dictate to her contributors, she forged a new kind of journalism based on playing to their strengths. The result: Some contributors wrote op-eds, while others provided reporting that journalists at the Web site then used in weaving together investigative features, including one that explored an increase in the prescribing of hypertension medicine to African-American women during the campaign. They also contributed "distributed reporting," in which the network of contributors performed tasks such as analyzing how local affiliates summed up the vice presidential debate. "We received reports from more than 100 media markets," Michel said. "We really got to see how the debate was perceived in different regions."

Is Off the Bus the future of journalism? Hardly, Michel contends, and I agree wholeheartedly. She regards Off the Bus as complimentary, not competitive, with the work done by traditional news organizations. "We didn't want to be the AP. We think the AP does a good job. The question was what information and perspective can citizens, not reporters on the trail, offer to the public?" Nor does she claim the Off

the Bus method would work with all stories. It's easy to build such a massive network of volunteer reporters when the story is so compelling. But what happens when the topic generates far less passion, even if it is no less important—say, for example, the nutritional content in public school lunches?

The take-away message for journalists should be this: Adapt to these changes and do so quickly. "The future of content is conversation," says Michael Maness, the Gannett executive who helped craft the company's recent newsroom overhaul. Worth noting is that one of Gannett's unqualified successes are the so-called "mom sites," launched in some 80 markets. Each is overseen and operated online by a single journalist with the assignment of facilitating conversation while also providing information. "We're moving away from mass media and moving to mass experience," says Maness. "How we do that? We don't know." ■

Jeff Howe writes for Wired magazine and is the author of "Crowdsourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd Is Driving the Future of Business," published by Crown Business in 2008.

When Journalists Blog: How It Changes What They Do

'I was surprised at just how much these journalists felt their work had been changed by the simple act of blogging.'

By Paul Bradshaw

From journalistic pariah to savior of the news industry, blogs have undergone an enormous transformation in recent years. As a journalist and a blogger, I was curious to see how this transformation from blogophobia to blogophilia was affecting journalism. Was the hype surrounding the potential of blogs to transform our craft being realized—or were journalists simply treating their blogs as another "channel" into which to plough content?

Earlier this year I distributed an online survey to blogging journalists to get a feel for the lie of the land. The response was incredible—coming from 200 journalists from 30 countries, representing newspapers and magazines, television and radio, online-only and freelancers. United States and United Kingdom respondents dominated, but every continent (except Antarctica) was represented.[1]

As I pored over the results, I was surprised at just how much these journalists felt their work had been changed by the simple act of blogging. I had expected some effect on their relationship with the "former audience," but what surprised me most was when more than half of the blogging journalists said this relationship had been "enormously" or "completely" transformed. At the same time, when I might have an-

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[1] More information about the findings of this online survey is available on the author's blog at http://onlinejournalismblog. com/2008/10/14/blogging-journalists-survey-results-pt1-context- and-methodology/.
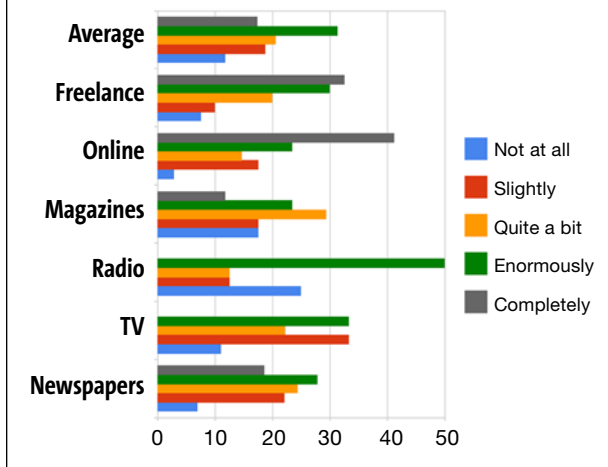
ticipated that some aspects of the journalistic process to be affected, I found, instead, consistency in responses I received. This included in areas ranging from how journalists generated story ideas and leads to newsgathering and news production and even what happens after publication or broadcast. In each instance, the majority of journalists told stories of change.

Has Blogging Affected Your Relationship with the Audience?

Legend:
- Not at all
- Slightly
- Quite a bit
- Enormously
- Completely

Categories: Average, Freelance, Online, Magazines, Radio, TV, Newspapers

So the headline is: Blogging is changing journalism — at least for those journalists who blog. But alongside this conclusion resides a collection of more interesting findings.

Cutting Out the Middlemen

In generating story ideas, blogging journalists don't need someone to tell them who the readers are and what they want: They already know, because the readers are on their blogs, telling them who they are and what they're curious about.

In this new blogging relationship, editors are the middlemen being cut out.

The role of official sources—such as public relations spokespeople and firms—were also being diminished, as sources for stories broadened. Story leads now come through the comments or through private communication initiated via the blog. And once they are pursuing a story, some journalists use the blog to "put the call out" for information and sources—and rely on the transparency of their reporting process to push official sources to reply. One respondent wrote:

On hot-button stories where our readers are asking a lot of questions, we post updates every time we make a phone call. For example, [a company] declared bankruptcy, and the new owner wouldn't take the previous owner's gift cards. Our readers were peeved and hounding us to do something. The corporate folks weren't saying anything, so we didn't have any new information to report. Because we didn't have any new info, we didn't write anything in the paper. But on our blog, we would post updates at least daily to tell people when we left a message and if we had heard back yet. We eventually scored an interview with the new CEO and posted it in its entirety on our site. Another reporter saw it and called us. We swapped info. Our readers also post links to other stories on the topic from other news orgs.

In some examples, this collaboration becomes a form of crowdsourcing. But for others the pressure to publish meant more reliance on rumors and less rigorous research, with the onus placed on blog readers to clarify and fact check.

Swifter, Deeper, Stronger

In production, blogging journalists felt they worked more quickly, breaking stories on their blogs before following up online and in print or broadcast. They also write shorter, more tightly edited pieces, not just for blogs but also for print and broadcast. Reporters said they write more informally than before, while using the blog as a space to publish material that didn't "fit" the formats of print and broadcast. And journalists link to other stories when time or space constraints mean they are unable to report in full—what Jeff Jarvis called on his blog, BuzzMachine, "Covering what you do best and linking to the rest."

After publication or broadcast, blogging journalists are less inclined to discard a story completely; stories had "more legs." Errors and updates get highlighted by readers and fixed. The permanence of the Web means stories are always "live." In the words of two journalist bloggers:

> The audience remains able to comment on the content and regularly provides information which updates it. The

reporter then has the opportunity to revisit the subject, creating a great "off diary" print story (loved by news editors everywhere).

Well, you never finish, do you? You write something that may or may not spark a conversation, and you've got to be ready for that conversation even if it happens months later.

This importance of distribution emerged as a significant change, as journalists spoke of forwarding links, posting updates on Twitter, and using RSS.

Interactivity and "conversation" were frequently mentioned. As one journalist blogger let me know:

I cover more than 30 countries. The reaction of people who live in a place tells me a lot about the issues I am writing about. My blog seems to generate arguments, which at least help me understand a story more.

An Uneven Picture

Despite these similar trends, the picture was not the same every-where. Freelance or online-only journalists were more likely to say that their work had been transformed "enormously" or "completely." In contrast, no journalist employed by the television or radio industries felt that blogging had "completely" changed any aspect of their work.

Similarly, sport journalists reported less change in their work than any other journalists. Media, technology, finance and arts and culture journalists were more likely than others to say that blogging had changed their processes "enormously" or "completely."

A third of the respondents only started to blog in the past year, so my suspicion is that there remains room for more change. Clearly, we are only at the beginning, as the news industry faces one of the most significant transformations in its history. ■

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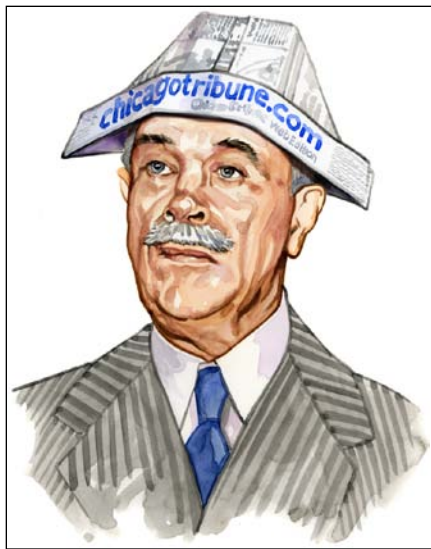
Digging Into Social Media to Build a Newspaper Audience

‘We weren’t even sure whether a mainstream news site could become part of the cybercommunities that evolve from social media sites.’

By Bill Adee

Meet “The Colonel.” He’s a pretty dapper guy. In his early 50’s, he has worked for the Chicago Tribune and lived in the city his whole life—well, except for that stint in the Army Reserves. That’s how he earned his nickname. He started out as a copy boy in the newsroom, worked his way up, and now he’s Web ambassador for chicagotribune.com.

Because he spends so much time at the Tribune, he lives in the South Loop, close to Soldier Field and his beloved Bears. The Colonel is adventurous, and he makes his way around the city to try all sorts of different foods. He loves eating steak at Gibson’s outdoor cafe and is not above heading over to Jim’s Original for a Polish.

While he’s a Web guy, the Colonel starts his day off with a cup of Stewart’s coffee and the papers. He’ll check out chicagotribune.com and suntimes.com for local news, then he’ll scan nytimes.com and latimes.com. After his daily news fix, he watches the latest viral videos on YouTube.

The Colonel is very interested in local politics, and he’s a take-things-one-issue-at-a-time moderate. His

news tastes are reflected in what he shares with his friends. He makes a point to interact with Tribune readers individually, but he'll do this, too, on Facebook, Twitter, Digg and other social media sites and blogs.

"I'm here to make the most of your time," he says. "My goal is never to send out a link that's lame."

The Colonel doesn't exist. Or does he?

Roughly 40 percent of the traffic arrives at chicagotribune.com when a user types our URL into a browser or goes to a bookmarked page.

The other 60 percent? That traffic comes via search engines, Web sites, and blogs. On a typical day in early 2008, Google was our No. 1 source of outside traffic, followed by Yahoo! (#2), CareerBuilder (#3), Fark (#10), The New York Times (#20), and Facebook (#47). In all, more than 4,000 sites sent users our way—with 350,000 different clicks.

At chicagotribune.com, a lot of our time is spent focused on our content, as it should be. But given those percentages, we needed to be asking whether another very important job we have is to make sure our content finds an audience and connects with people in other areas of the Web.

That question led to our "Project O." The "O" was for search-engine and social media optimization and for Owen—as in Owen Youngman, the Chicago Tribune vice president who championed and funded the group tasked with spreading our content to the rest of the Web.

Social Media's Viral Power

For me, Project O's genesis occurred in March 2007. Back then, I was the former sports editor at the Tribune who'd been working as associate editor for innovation for just a few months. Tribune national correspondent Howard Witt wrote a piece about Paris, Texas, a small town with a troubled history.[1] Published on March 12th—and available online that same day—Witt's story attracted 16,000 page views. The next day, the count dropped to 1,300. But on March 21st, nine days after it appeared on the newspaper's front page, this story about a tiny place far from Chicago generated 43,300 page views. By the end of March, this story was our site's most popular story, with more than 126,000 people coming to chicagotribune.com to read it.

What happened? Turns out that

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[1] www.chicagotribune.com/paris

more than 300 blogs had linked to the story, and it became popular on Digg, where stories are submitted by users and then promoted to the home page based on the rankings of users. Roughly 35,000 page views of the total came from people who went directly from Digg to our Web site to take a look at this story.

That was my first experience with Digg and the viral power of social media. And it made a lasting impression. It forced me to think about how the Tribune and other newspapers produce so many great stories—a lot of them with remarkable images—and yet, in the typhoon of information, I wondered how people can find ones they might not know exist but will be drawn to read once they do. And how might we be able to help make this happen. Clearly this question went beyond searching online, since I doubt many people set out in March to pop the words "Paris, Texas" into their search engine.

I knew then that there was an active role for us to play in doing a better job of bringing what Tribune reporters work hard to produce to the attention of new and appreciative audiences. And we had to take the material to these audiences, wherever they are finding and learn-ing from each other on the Internet. Then we had to somehow connect the material we had with people who might be interested in taking a look. To do this, our job would be to construct cyberconnections that, when acted on, would mirror the serendipitous reading experience familiar to so many as they thumb through pages of a newspaper. What made this a bit different, however, is that we needed to figure out how to do this systematically, rather than relying on luck and happenstance.

Colonel Tribune Goes Social

It was Saint Patrick's Day, 2008, and Daniel Honigman and I were sitting in my office. Honigman was the first of the four 20-somethings I hired for Project O. He quit a full-time job and signed on to this project for $500 a week, no bene-fits, and no guarantees beyond the 12 weeks that the Tribune had ap-proved to fund this project.

We had no handbook to follow, nor anyone inside the company to whom we could turn for advice. We weren't even sure whether a main-stream news site could become part of the cybercommunities that evolve from social media sites. But Honigman had impressed me sev-

eral months earlier with a story he'd written about the importance of influencers to corporations and his abiding interest in social media and search-engine optimization.

In addition to using Google Trends, which tracks and reflects what keywords people are searching for on a daily basis, we decided to start by focusing on a few social media sites—Facebook, Twitter, Fark, Reddit and Digg. I was concerned about having Daniel and the three others I hired—Amanda Maurer, Erin Osmon, and Christina Antonopoulos—use their own Facebook profiles to represent the Tribune. Daniel suggested we create an online avatar, and that's how "Colonel Tribune," a nod to the newspaper's legendary figure, Col. Robert McCormick, was born.

I know what you are thinking. How could you pick an old white guy with a military title to be the Tribune's ambassador in the world of new media? Believe it. The Colonel has taken on a life of his own though Twitter and other social media sites where he can be found. He routinely gets news tips from some readers, hears from others about corrections and typos in stories, and he is offered story ideas. One example: The Colonel was notified via Twitter about a bomb threat and building evacuation downtown. The tip was checked out by a reporter, and the story was posted on chicagotribune.com.

Through Twitter and Facebook, we've invited people to meet-ups at a local bar. They showed up in numbers that surprised us—and even paid homage to the Colonel by wearing his trademark hat.

The goal for Project O was one million page views a month. By June, at its peak, it was doing more than six times that number. And so our project continues with permanent funding.

Can a mainstream news site become part of the social media scene? Absolutely, yes. But be warned. To do this requires having the same kind of great team I had: Facebook-savvy youth, an innovative Web staff, and an extremely supportive newsroom. Even then, it will be essential to become immersed in the various communities and to reach out in ways that create interactive relationships. Like friendships, these are ones that come only with time, trust and hard work.

For us, we had a Colonel to help. ∎

Bill Adee is editor of digital media for the Chicago Tribune.

Web v. Journalism: Court Cases Challenge Long-Held Principles

'... courts and legislatures, reluctant to apply different rules to the "old" and "new" media, are rethinking the basic constitutional principles that have protected a free press for generations.'

By Jane Kirtley

In late September 2008, a California state appeals court struck down a gag order that forbade The Orange County Register to report by "all means and manner of communication, whether in person, electronic, through audio or video recording, or print medium" testimony by any witness appearing in a class action wage-and-hour suit brought by its newspaper carriers.

The trial judge—whose ruling was overturned—had concluded that the injunction was necessary to prevent future witnesses from being influenced by others' testimony. But this gag order violated just about every precedent establishing the strong presumption against prior restraints going all the way back to 1931's Near v. Minnesota and 1971's Pentagon Papers case, New York Times v. United States. As the appellate panel ruled, there was no way that the risk that witnesses in this civil case might be influenced by news reports was sufficient to justify this kind of censorship. Other, less restrictive alternatives—such as simply admonishing the witnesses not to read the paper—would accomplish the same goal.

Was this appeals court's ruling a great victory for freedom of the press? Well, yes and no. Yes, because the appeals court got it right. But no, because the trial judge thought his order was the right thing to do,

despite nearly 70 years of unbroken precedent to the contrary.

Unfortunately, that trial judge is not alone in seeming to be First Amendment-challenged. It's not that they hate the press, exactly. But they don't really understand the unique role the news media play in a democratic society. They reject the idea that "the press" should enjoy any special privileges. Nor do they seem to know what to do about those legions of unidentified and ungovernable bloggers and other online journalists out there who, in their eyes, do little except spread false rumors, violate copyright laws, and identify rape victims with impunity, all the time hiding behind the anonymity that the Web permits. As a consequence, courts and legislatures, reluctant to apply different rules to the "old" and "new" media, are rethinking the basic constitutional principles that have protected a free press for generations.

Web Restrictions

The Orange County Register case is similar to recent examples of judges issuing gag or "take down" orders against Web site operators who have had the temerity to report details about Paris Hilton's personal life or the names and statistics of Major League Baseball players without authorization from the league. The difference is that some of these orders have actually been upheld. Although in the past it was accepted law in the United States that the remedy for invasion of privacy was to sue for damages, not enjoin the speech, for many judges the immediacy and ubiquity of publishing on the Internet changes the balance, justifying more draconian measures.

Copyright law presents a slightly different challenge. The owners of intellectual property have always had the legal right to demand that violators "cease and desist" publishing and distributing infringing works. But the advent of the Internet means that copying others' work without permission is easier than ever before. Congress enacted the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) in 1998 to address this situation without also stifling protected speech. As an incentive to encourage Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to continue to offer untrammeled access to the Web, the DMCA's "safe harbor" provision protects them from liability when their subscribers upload infringing material, as long as they "act expeditiously" to remove the material once notified that it has been posted.

The problem is that a prudent ISP will be inclined to take down the content and leave the subscriber and the copyright owner to sort out their respective rights later. To facilitate that process, the DMCA permits copyright holders to use "administrative subpoenas" to compel the ISP to disclose the identity of the subscriber. Although the subpoenas are supposed to be strictly limited to curtailing infringing activity, they can also be used to circumvent well-established First Amendment principles protecting the right to engage in anonymous speech.

A similar threat arises in the context of defamatory publications. Many bloggers and other posters engage in vituperative commentary online without identifying themselves. In a provision similar to the DMCA safe harbor, section 230 of the Communications Decency Act grants ISPs immunity from liability for libelous speech posted by their subscribers. But again, the ISP can be compelled to reveal the individual's identity if a judge concludes that a plaintiff has a valid claim. Those who might be affected by this ruling include newspapers and other media, which could be forced to unmask readers who post anony-mous comments on their Web sites, leaving them vulnerable to retaliation or retribution.

Confidential Sources

The question of whether journalists should have the right to protect their confidential sources is being affected by the Internet, too. The existence and extent of any reporter's privilege has been an unsettled and volatile issue in the courts ever since the Supreme Court's narrow decision in Branzburg v. Hayes in 1972 determined that the First Amendment did not create one. Despite that opinion, however, most states and federal circuits recognized some kind of protection, at least in certain circumstances. But after a series of rulings to the contrary in several influential federal appeals courts, most notably in the recent Judith Miller case, media groups lobbied Congress to pass a federal shield law. Although attracting bipartisan support, the bill remains stalled in the Senate.

A major point of contention with this legislation is the question of how to determine who would be covered by the law. Attempts to adopt a broad functional definition to include anyone who

is "doing journalism," regardless of medium or platform, was rejected by those who feared the law would be used to protect individuals "linked to terrorists or other criminals," or who are merely "casual bloggers," presumably unbound by traditional ethical standards and accountable to no one.

Whether existing shield laws in the states will cover bloggers and other non-mainstream journalists remains an open question and very much depends on the particular statutory

A screen shot from a YouTube video of the arrest of "Democracy Now!" radio host Amy Goodman at the protest during the Republican National Convention.

language and the courts' interpretation of it. Although a California court ruled that the state shield law protected the identities of operators of a blog that revealed Apple Computer's trade secrets on the ground that their publications constituted "news," the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals refused to recognize that blogger and self-described anarchist Josh Wolf was a journalist under the same law, because he was not "connected with or employed by" a news organization.

Law enforcement officials at the Republican National Convention in September 2008 collectively threw up their hands and declined to make a distinction, detaining or arresting dozens of journalists, both "mainstream" and "citizen," swept up while attempting to cover and report on the demonstrations and protests in Saint Paul. Of course, the Internet made possible "real-time" and worldwide distribution of reports of the protests.[1]

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[1] YouTube video about Amy Goodman's arrest is at www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBjcqwQgF7Q&NR=1.

Digital technology has facilitated newsgathering in many ways. But its impact has not been entirely positive. For example, in theory, the digitization of government records, coupled with the ability of anyone with a computer and a modem to gain easy access to them, should have been celebrated as a welcome opportunity for meaningful citizen oversight. But judges and legislators, driven by fear that such access would facilitate illegal conduct ranging from identity theft to employment discrimination, have used the threat of it to justify curtailing access to these electronic files.

It doesn't stop there. Judges also cite their discomfort at the idea that someone logging on from a distant location, having no "legitimate interest" in the local community, will amuse himself by trawling through court or real estate records and publishing them online. They worry that citizen journalists with cell phone cameras will invade courtrooms and post trial footage online, a practice they consider both disruptive and undignified. Although they might support the concept of access to government records and proceedings in the abstract, once it becomes cheap and easy the gatekeepers began to question its wisdom. Information, it seems, is just too valuable—or too dangerous—to entrust to a blogger.

None of these considerations should drive legal policy. Rights of access, or freedom of expression, are not, and should not be, conditioned on some government official's idea of what constitutes "responsible" journalism. Judges and legislators should continue to follow the principles that have protected the press, and the public's right to know, for more than 200 years. But at the same time, those who publish in the new media and are always quick to invoke the First Amendment are challenging so many things held sacred.

The question confronting all of us—given the tenor of our times and the judicial decision-making we are seeing—is whether the First Amendment will survive this challenge. ∎

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Ethical Values and Quality Control in the Digital Era

'Situations that editors confront in this digital-era maelstrom reflect the vexing ethical challenges and the diminished quality control standards at a time when they are most needed.'

By Bob Steele

'Some of us feel like page-view whores, and it's got to stop."

With those words, a newspaper editor who e-mailed me in the summer of 2007 said what many of his colleagues have come to believe. It was an expression—an admission, really—of what many editors acknowledge has happened in the full-throttle race on the digital speedway fueled by a feverish fight for financial survival.

In my nearly two decades on the faculty of The Poynter Institute, I have fielded thousands of ethical queries from editors, reporters, producers, photojournalists and a good handful of news corporation executives. I'm generally heartened by the sincerity of the journalists in wanting to do the right thing ethically, and I cheer the remarkable report-

ing that is still produced in the face of considerable obstacles. Nevertheless, I'm very worried about the significant erosion of ethical standards across our profession and the resulting corrosion of the quality of the journalism. The blogs, Tweets, social networking, citizen-submitted content, and multimedia storytelling that are the tools and techniques of the digital era offer great promise. They also, when misused, present considerable peril.

Ethical Dilemmas on the Web

Situations that editors confront in this digital-era maelstrom reflect the vexing ethical challenges and the diminished quality control standards at a time when they are most needed. Several examples I've been involved with exemplify the impor-

tance of renewing a commitment to time-honored ethical values that will build and protect the integrity of the journalism as it morphs into new forms of reporting, storytelling and delivery.

The editor who penned the "whores" self-description had asked me for input on what he termed "a not-very-good story this morning re: hate crimes." That news story included information from a community blog, information that ostensibly described what the alleged victim of the hate crime had done to prompt an attack. The editor wanted to know my view about whether putting the news story on the site of a traditional newspaper—with this additional information in it—gives the blog content false credibility.

I read the story and absorbed many of the reader comments attached to the Web site's version of that story. My response to the editor addressed both the blogs-as-news-content issue and the vile tone and tenor of certain reader posts to the story. Here's what I wrote in an e-mail to the editor:

I fear that many papers/reporters/editors are so caught up in the "search for eyeballs and page views" that the default position is often "let's put that blog stuff" in our story because "it's out there and folks are talking about it." We'll then "balance" the piece with concerns expressed by others connected to the story who have a different view than the bloggers.

Too often we give unjustified credibility to bloggers who are, at best, practicing amateur journalism or simplistic punditry. And news organizations provide that false credibility by equating the bloggers' observations and views with the rigor of news reporting. My point is similar to what Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel emphasize in "The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect," when they contrast assertion with verification. The latter is a purposeful process that seeks and reports the truth as best as possible. The former merely declares something based on little or no reliable fact-finding and thin, if any, confirmation.

I also told the editor it's bad when time-honored journalistic values of accuracy and fairness are eroded in the quest to draw eyeballs to the Web-generated stories. And it's

a bad thing when there are serious negative consequences to those who are caught up in news stories, whether it's a dead man who can't defend himself to the blogger's pejorative descriptions of him or a victim's family members who are re-victimized by the hate, scorn, mocking and ridicule that are part of the comments posted to a news story.

Some readers' comments posted to the hate crime story—presumably ones that violated the paper's posting standards—had been excised. But other posts remaining I believed clearly pushed beyond the paper's standards against offensive name-calling and racist and bigoted commentary.

The editor, who I believe cares deeply about both the quality of the journalism and the ethics of the profession, responded with the mea culpa I cited above. While I know this editor does not want to be a "page-view whore," I also recognize that he and his peers are under immense pressure to save the franchise. That means big-time risk taking and, in this era of staff cutbacks, it also means decreased editorial oversight and diminished checks and balances. Quality control suffers and quality deteriorates.

This ethical pressure cooker is reflected, too, in the thoughts of a managing editor at a metro paper who called me in October 2008. This editor wanted input on how to handle the increasing use of social networking by the paper's news staffers. Indeed, that paper's editors had advocated more blogging and Twittering, including on the personal sites of the newspaper's journalists. The goal: to spur reader interest and potentially more online user connection. The alarm bells started ringing when the managing editor noticed that one staffer's Tweets included what the editor termed "snarky" comments about a political candidate, comments laced with both opinion and obscenities.

Just as that editor recognized that loose oversight had created an ethics problem that necessitated reaffirming some core values, the editor of The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer knew there was a serious problem when her paper's Web site prematurely reported the death of an Ohio congresswoman. "The speed of information is causing us to make mistakes," Susan Goldberg told a Kent State University forum on online ethics in September 2008.

Goldberg said that error would never have been made in the print version of the story because the facts

would have been confirmed. "I don't want us to be wrong. I don't want our newspaper to be wrong," she said. "Mistakes can be damaging to our credibility. We're on a big stage, and we have a loud voice." She also declared that an "experiment is not working" when their political blogger became actively involved in the campaign of a local congressman.

Other editors have called me to seek guidance when they discovered that staff journalists were touting politicians or political causes on their personal Facebook pages. In most cases, the editors had not proactively addressed these conflict of interest issues until after a problem surfaced. Then it was more challenging to respond and in some cases to negotiate new ethics policy language with the guild representing the paper's journalists.

Tools and Tribulations

Some of the ethics crashes on the digital media highway have generated national attention. The accuracy and fairness concerns can be multiplied by the increasing use of so-called citizen journalists to provide reports that are then disseminated—often without verification—by traditional news organizations.

Take the example of an October 2008 story that speaks loudly to the dangers of fast and furious reporting complicated by the minimal sourcing of the information.

For a period of time, CNN had a report on its iReport site (a user-submitted site where the content comes from the community) that claimed Apple CEO Steve Jobs had suffered a major heart attack. The story was not true, but Apple's stock took a quick dive with company shares off by more than 10 percent before the CNN iReport story on Jobs was debunked and removed from the site.

While many editors tout their ability to quickly take down factually wrong information or other egregious content, the damage done can be significant.

Sometimes it's the tools journalists are using or just poor techniques with the tools that are ethically problematic. The Rocky Mountain News in Denver was roundly criticized for insensitivity in the funeral coverage of a three-year-old boy. A Rocky reporter used Twitter, a microblogging tool, to live-blog details from the graveside to the paper's Web site.

In the wake of significant backlash, Rocky Mountain News Editor John Temple wrote to readers that he accepted responsibility for

any failing in the Twitter technique used in that situation, though he felt there was justifiable news value in the event that warranted this kind of unique coverage. "We must learn to use the new tools at our disposal," Temple wrote in his newspaper and on its Web site. "Yes, there are going to be times we make mistakes, just as we do in our newspaper. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try something. It means we need to learn to do it well. That is our mission."

Strong Standards

Which takes us full circle back to the importance of quality control as editors and other journalists search for that "true north" point on the moral compass. In recent years, many editors across the land learned hard lessons about the necessity of vigorous oversight on staff work. High-profile plagiarism and fabrication cases at papers the likes of The New York Times, USA Today, The Boston Globe, The Seattle Times, and The Sacramento Bee set off alarms. And in many of those cases the sinners were not the wet-behind-the-ears, youthful journalists but long-in-the-tooth veterans who succumbed to sin.

Editors recognized they needed better systems of quality control to deter liars and sinners. They needed clear, strong standards for attribution and a checks and balances process that prosecuted the work of all reporters and columnists, even those who had earned trust over the years. Those oversight lessons can and should be applied in the digital arena where writers can be tempted to cut corners on attribution as they rapidly source stories across the Internet.

Journalists—from reporters to multimedia producers to editors— are under great pressure to do more with less. The intense financial forces, the thinner staffs, and the risk-taking culture create a mixture where heightened quality control measures are all the more essential. Now is the time to reaffirm essential core values that underpin journalism ethics and journalistic excellence. Accuracy, fairness and honesty are as important now as they have ever been.

We must not let journalism turn horrific. Nor can we allow ourselves to become page-view whores. ∎

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