

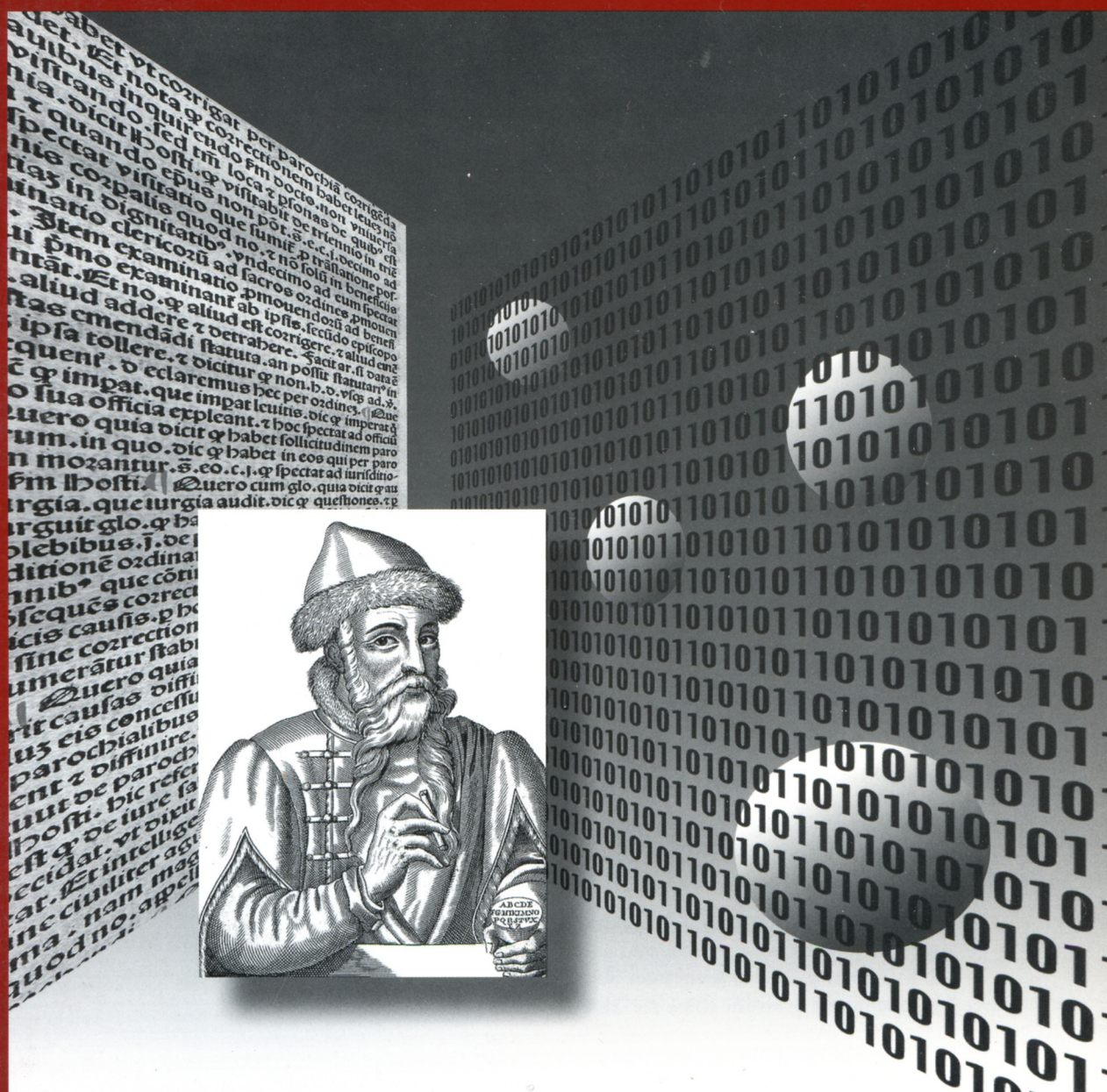
# NIEMAN REPORTS

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## Technology Is Changing Journalism Just as It Always Has



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# Journalism in the Era of the Web

It's feisty and combative, but is it compatible with journalism's highest standards?

By Bob Giles

**M**ainstream news organizations are struggling to apply old-fashioned news standards to the Web, but are discovering it is not easy to translate the virtues of accuracy, balance and clarity to a medium where the advantages of speed and timeliness prevail.

Web technology has strengthened the traditional watchdog functions of journalism by giving reporters efficient ways to probe more deeply for information. The capacity to search documents, compile background and historical context, and identify authoritative sources has expanded the reporter's toolbox. It also has introduced a fundamentally different culture built on interactivity, fewer rules, and fewer limits.

Speed and timeliness once were the strength of newspapers. The wire services built their reputations on being first with the big stories, which people typically found in their local papers. The immediacy of television took that edge from the printed press. Now the Web has established its own advantages of speed and timeliness; and in doing so it has enabled newspapers to come full circle by posting breaking news and extending their brands through such innovations as online afternoon editions.

At the intersection of traditional journalism and the Web, attempts to apply the standards of the traditional newsroom encounter such other values as freedom, irreverence, advocacy and attitude. Web journalists argue that the Olympian tones of the traditional press don't work online. They liken their new medium to the true spirit of the First Amendment and observe that it harkens back to a time when newspapers were feisty and combative. Ann Compton of ABCNews.com describes the essential difference between her online staff and the network's television journalists: "We write more brightly. We throw in more slang. There is a richness to the dot-com coverage that you really can't do on television." Similar comparisons can be made between the Web and daily newspapers.

Is such "richness" compatible with the highest standards of journalism? Can the freewheeling, provocative, irreverent nature of the Web adapt to a culture whose traditions have been shaped by a more sober, structured medium?

The process of establishing standards online is moving along, influenced by three developments. First is the reality that the dominant news Web sites will be run by the old media—the traditional news organizations such as daily newspapers, newsmagazines and network and major cable television outlets. What makes this a reality is the influence of the marketplace, which has been especially harsh to

upstart dot-coms. Those with insufficient capital or marginal journalistic reputations or weak marketing strategies are being weeded out. Among the survivors are the mainstream news organizations that have the resources to build powerful Web sites and to insure that these platforms reflect the rigorous standards by which their print publications are written and edited.

Second are efforts by online journalists to craft standards for the Web. The Online News Association is beginning a project to develop strong guidelines, including recommendations for how they can be applied and monitored. A grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation will enable the Online News Association to hire a project director and meet a deadline of October 2001 for the guidelines it recommends.

Rich Jaroslovsky, president of the Online News Association and managing editor of The Wall Street Journal Interactive, says there is "a lot steam behind the project." Too many online news decisions are being made "by the seat of the pants," Jaroslovsky says, "rather than having a reason for the decision. We hope to develop a document that doesn't direct but persuades," not just journalists but also those who are working in other online cultures and making distinctions between news and commerce.

The third, and perhaps the most far-reaching influence on journalistic standards, is the interactivity that results when journalists put their e-mail addresses on the Web. E-mail can bring instant feedback to a story just posted as well as to one that is read in the newspaper over coffee in the morning. Some reporters are constructing barriers to such engagement with readers, preferring instead to not have e-mail or to be shielded by a filter that lets through only the messages they think they want to have.

E-mail enables reporters and editors to hear from people who may know something about the story and who can share an authoritative perspective, provide additional sources or raise the possibility that the story may be unbalanced or unfair. The potential for such interactivity is that it can contribute to raising the level of journalistic performance.

Jon Katz, a Web commentator who writes for Slashdot.com, says, "The surprising thing to me is the degree to which I am held accountable by readers for what I am doing. Whatever you are writing, your column makes its way to the most knowledgeable people on the subject.... What you learn is your column is not the last word, it's the first word." ■

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# The Internet, Technology and Journalism

## Peering Into the Digital Future

Our journey into the digital future begins with an essay by **Tom Regan**, associate editor of The Christian Science Monitor's Web site. His advice: Remember that technology is changing journalism, "as it always has;" wireless is the next publishing realm, and the Web—as a news distribution method—is (almost) already dead. **Elizabeth Weise**, who has reported on the Internet since 1993, contends the technology beat is changing. "Those of us who weren't business reporters don't want to become them, and increasingly that's where this train is headed," she writes. **Nancy Hicks Maynard**, whose book "Mega Media" explores the digitization of news, observes that "much about the ways we define, gather and produce news will have to change, too." **Adam Liptak**, senior counsel at The New York Times, describes how technological changes might imperil "the secrets, status and swagger of the American institutional press." **Dan Rather**, managing editor of CBS Evening News, urges journalists to "stand guard" against the lessening of news standards and the "balkanization of our society" when news of civic import is not commonly shared. **Lee Rainie**, director of the Pew Internet & American Life Project, weighs the pluses and minuses of news on the Web and finds "the Internet has been good for news. . . ." **Arthur E. Rowse**, author of "Drive-By Journalism," worries about how powerful media companies already dominate news on the Web. From the **Annenberg Public Policy Center** comes an article predicting greater integration of TV and Web coverage the next time Americans go to vote. **Kenny Irby**, visual journalism group leader at The Poynter Institute, reflects on the impact technology has on photojournalism and argues for preserving the still photograph. **Patti Breckenridge**, assistant managing editor at The Tampa Tribune, describes what it will take to be a journalist in the 21st century. (A hint: different qualities and skills than what most journalists possess today.) And four journalists offer opinions and evidence about e-mail interactivity with readers.

## Financing News in the Internet Era

Figuring out how to make quality online journalism a financially viable proposition is consuming vast amounts of brainpower. The answer, so far: have very deep pockets. **Mark Sauter**, cofounder of APBnews.com, writes about what happened to his site, where stories won numerous journalism awards but reporters lost their jobs because of bankruptcy. **Jack Fuller**, president of Tribune Company, outlines a strategy in which media converge and create financial support for "the expensive business of newsgathering." **David Weir**, a vice president at Excite@Home, believes journalists should not shy away from involvement in creating the financial models for new media news companies. **Danny Schechter**, executive editor of mediachannel.org, describes the tension he experiences in being a journalist and having "to get down (and dirty) in the money troughs," as he looks for a way for independent media voices to surface on the Web. **Jay Small**, a former journalist who manages digital services for Thomson multimedia, offers journalists advice from the world of consumer electronics: "Let the methods of delivering the news flow from the business model, not the other way around." **Gerald Jordan**, professor of journalism at the University of Arkansas, ruminates on whether broadcast rights fees might be jeopardized by new technologies.

## Building New Homes for News

At The Providence Journal, online editor **Andrea Panciera** writes that all sorts of barriers between the online and print staffs must be broken down so that “the editorial voice that we’ve been searching for” can exist on the Web. **Jonathan Klein**, who founded The FeedRoom (a news network on the Web), debunks arguments about the threat posed to democracy when consumers decide what stories to watch, rather than journalists. **Katie King**, a vice president at Reuters Media, explains that Reuters banks on the reliability of its reporting and markets it online, 24/7, in 11 languages and 18 countries. **Jackie Barron**, a local TV news reporter in Tampa, Florida, covered a murder trial and reported daily for three different media—TV, newspaper and the Web. She writes about multimedia reporting from the frontlines of media convergence. **John Tarleton**, an independent reporter, describes how protesters develop their own news sites on the Web, and **John Gage**, chief researcher for Sun Microsystems, suggests how the Internet provides a great opportunity for students to become education reporters.

## Helping Reporters’ Fingers Do Some Walking

By using new technological devices to disassemble millions of computerized records, Chicago Tribune project reporter **Mike Berens** unearthed patterns of fatal nursing errors and transformed statistics into investigative stories. **Brant Houston**, executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. (IRE), explains how he trains journalists to use new computer tools to enhance their reporting. **Patricia Coleman**, research director at IRE, **Jim Morrill**, a reporter at The Charlotte Observer, and **Bill Graves**, who writes for The Oregonian, share their reporting experiences with listservs and document searches. **Jerome Aumente**, professor emeritus at Rutgers, urges journalism educators to help find imaginative solutions to the new workplace demands of this digital era.

## Developing a Global Interactive Dialogue

There are few places in the world where technological changes are not resulting in new approaches to how journalists do their jobs and consumers get their news. **Rakesh Kalshian**, an Indian journalist, describes the gold rush atmosphere created by Internet publications. But gold, he writes, has been hard to find. From Africa, **Tanya Accone**, executive producer of M-Web Africa, reports that obstacles abound, such as a lack of access to technology and of a wired infrastructure, but so do potential payoffs as the Web helps journalists circumvent autocratic government restrictions. **András Vágvolgyi**, a magazine writer in Hungary, visits Serbia and discovers that the new technology “is not just a tool but is freedom itself.” **Songpol Kaopatuntip**, an editor at The Bangkok Post, writes about adapting to the arrival of computers and the Internet in the newsroom. Journalist **Philip J. Cunningham**, who reports from many Asian countries, takes us along as he writes his stories at Internet cafés. **Andreas Harsono**, managing editor of a monthly magazine in Jakarta, explores how Internet publications helped to topple a corrupt president but also how today’s widespread poverty curtails technology’s potential reach. And **Françoise Lazare**, a reporter at Le Monde, tells how, for the first time, her newspaper used its interactive Web site to break a big story: Evidence accusing President Jacques Chirac of corruption could be seen on videotape. ■

# Technology Is Changing Journalism

Just as it always has.

By Tom Regan

One of the clearest memories of my youth is a conversation I had with my father in the summer of 1970. My dad had left his work in politics and the media to concentrate on the new phenomena of cable TV. (He would eventually go on to become the most successful cable consultant in Canada.) We were talking about why he wanted to switch careers when he said a most amazing thing. “Someday,” he told me, “you’ll be able to read your newspaper on the television.”

I looked at him like he had two heads. Read my newspaper on the TV? Oh sure, dad. And that’s what you’re going to base your new career on? I told him I thought he was crazy, that nobody would ever do something so weird.

My dad passed away 15 years ago, but often, as I read my newspaper, *The Christian Science Monitor*, on my WebTV, I’ve thought of my dad and wondered what he would think of the Internet and the new forms of journalism of the 21st century. Actually I know—he would love new media and all its possibilities. And I’d be lying if I didn’t say that this apple has fallen pretty close to the tree.

I’ve crossed my Rubicon as far as new media and journalism are concerned. Recently I thought about returning to print reporting after working in new media during the past eight years. But I realized that my definition of what it means to be a reporter had dramatically changed. In the past, my newspaper work meant finding a good story, doing interviews and research, and filing my stories or columns on time. Those elements remain at the core, but new elements have been added. Now I want to generate audio and video along with text. I want my e-mail address on everything that I write.



*Photo courtesy of The Library of Congress.*

I want to participate in chats and forums. I want to use the new tools of modern storytelling available on a medium like the Web because they will add richness and depth to any piece on which I work. And I want to be able to get my pieces to readers as fast as possible, on whatever platform they want to receive it.

As we enter the 21st century, publishing digitally no longer just means putting up “shovel-ware” (or legacy content, as some call it) on a Web site. We face a future in which technology will change journalism, as it always has. Just as telephones gave reporters the ability to remain on the scene of a story longer or TV allowed us to tell news stories using moving pictures, these new media are already changing the way we do our jobs as journalists—whether we welcome those changes or

not. While the basic tenets of journalism will remain the same (honesty, fairness, accuracy), almost everything else will change: how our work reaches our audiences/readers; the tools we use to do our jobs; the nature of the relationship we have with the people who access our work, and who are competitors are.

Welcome to the future of journalism. Please make sure your seatbelts are fastened, your chairs are in the upright position....

## Getting the News Out: How We Will Publish Content in The Future

There is a very important fact that all journalists must bear in mind—our future does not lie on the Web. In fact,

if you believe some people, we should just forget about the Web altogether because its time as a distribution method is almost past.

That's probably a little too pessimistic. The truth is, however, media outlets that focus only on the Web will be concentrating on too little, too late. That's because the Web will be just one of many ways that we will get the news to those who want it. Other methods will include e-books, wireless cell phones, personal digital assistance (PDA) devices such as Palm Pilots, and probably several other methods we are not even aware of yet. Desire by the public for these methods of delivery, and the cost savings they will bring to the media who use them to publish, will drive these changes during the next decade.

The key to many of these changes will be improved screen resolution. Even though recent statistics from groups such as the Pew Research Center and The Poynter Institute show that more and more people are choosing to read their news online, few would say that it's an experience they prefer to reading a newspaper or watching a TV. (Audio is an exception to this argument, as digital audio, via the Web or wireless, is already comparable to other media.) But at the recent Seybold Publishing Conference held in San Francisco, people who work in this area were saying that within two to three years, small devices like PDA's or e-book readers will have screen resolution comparable to ink on paper. Only it will be better, they say, because it will be back lit (so you can still read in the dark), with better contrast. Larger screen technology is about five years away.

When these better screens become available, it will have an enormous

impact on the delivery of new media content. The old saw of "You can't read it on a bus or take it into the can" will mean nothing, because hand-sized reading devices will enable you to read/watch/hear media content any place you like. And as these reading devices drop in price, you'll see many publishers start offering deals where customers will buy/rent a reading device from them. You'll still be able to access other content (probably via subscription) but the devices' default setting will all be set to the primary publisher. (AOL and Microsoft are already marketing tablet-sized devices that include wireless Internet access.)

And speaking of wireless, it will become the primary platform on which to publish digital content. Currently Sprint PCS, for instance, offers wireless access to the Internet, but it's mostly text and made for very small screens. Sprint, however, has started marketing

access in the palm of your hand—which includes rich graphic and video capabilities. You will literally be able to watch any TV station in the world if it has an Internet output (as most radio stations do today).

None of this is science fiction—it's all currently available or in a testing mode and will be available within the next few years.

## Give Us the Tools and We'll Finish the Job

A couple of weeks ago, during one of those beautiful fall New England days that seem to sneak past winter's guard dogs just before he decides to clobber us, I sat in Copley Square and wrote a column on my laptop. I didn't dictate it into my voice recognition software (which is how I normally "write" my first drafts—this piece, for instance,

was about half typed, half spoken), because the background noise was a little loud. When I finished, I took my wireless phone out of my pocket, connected it to my laptop, got a good 56 kbps connection, and e-mailed the story back to the Monitor. Then I used my Instant Messaging software to chat with the editor of the piece about how he planned to edit it. (My mother-in-law, who lives in Turkey, saw I was online and "chatted" with me as well.)

Also this fall I attended a conference called "Being Human in the Digital Age," in Camden, Maine. I used my digital voice recorder to "tape" an interview with James Adams, the head of an Internet security firm called iDEFENSE. That night, I downloaded the digital audio to my laptop and sent a copy of the entire interview back to the Monitor so our audio people



Nokia, a Finnish telecommunications firm, conceptualized terminals for its 3G (third generation) network. 3G is planned for test marketing in Japan in 2001 and in Europe in 2002. © Nokia, 2000.

wireless phones with much bigger screen areas and plans to have broadband access available on phones within two to three years. Imagine broadband



could do some editing. I also sent back a few digital photos I had taken. I would have had sent video but I had forgotten to bring that camera.

Technology is quickly eliminating the usual reasons reporters find to avoid creating extra material for their new media partners. For instance, the digital audio recorder is only slightly larger than a cigarette lighter. The video camera is palm-sized. Laptops are shrinking and soon will be half the size and weight they were only two years ago. In other words, the barrier to creating more content has more to do with attitude than with inconvenience. This is particularly true for print reporters, who love to complain about how overworked they are. (I was a print reporter for a long time—I remember the drill.) And while they are overworked, the reality is that most of the extra content mentioned above took almost no extra time to create or prepare.

And as much as some reporters may hate to hear this, creating this extra material will soon become a part of every reporter's job description. That doesn't mean the act of storytelling, which comprises the heart of good journalism, will change. But the tools we will use will definitely change.

Let me offer an example of a technology that most reporters will be eager to use. Currently, voice recognition software only allows the person who "trains" the software (to recognize their voice) to create a text file from an audio recording. But Lernout and Hauspie of Burlington, Massachusetts, one of the leading voice recognition companies, say they are about two years away from having a system where you can tape anyone you like, and it will transcribe all voices, no voice training needed. No more madly scribbling notes during interviews. Just tape it, download it, and transcribe it with the proper software.

### **Let Freedom Ring: the Impact Technology is Having On Journalism Around the World**

As journalists in North America argue about whether or not we want to re-

ceive e-mail, the Internet and technology are changing the face of journalism around much of the world. (I am indebted to Adam Powell of The Freedom Forum for examples mentioned below.)

E-mail in particular is transforming newsgathering. For instance, 10 years ago The Johannesburg Star in South Africa covered the neighboring countries of Africa using the wires like The Associated Press or Agence France-Presse. But in recent years, as editors and reporters around Africa started getting e-mail, the Star has been able to generate its own coverage of sub-Saharan Africa. As one editor recently told Powell, African journalists are now constructing their own journalism, and they are no longer dependent on an American or European view of what is happening on their own continent. And now, these same news outlets are beginning to share digital video and audio feeds.

Another great example of how technology is changing modern journalism is transpiring among Arab publications in the Middle East and Northern Africa. A group of editors set up a password-protected Web site in London where Arab editors can file an uncensored version of stories they run in their publications. The idea is that other editors around the Arab world can read these stories, and although they can't run them, it allows them to know what's really happening in other Arab countries so they can shape their own coverage to reflect the truth. Perhaps an even more interesting comment came from one Arab editor who told Powell that the Internet is finally allowing his paper to cover America in depth. When Powell asked what that meant—after all, the Arab countries all get CNN and such—he replied that he had been able to create a network of Arab correspondents in the United States who cover events in the United States from an Arab perspective.

Within a few years, it will be impossible for authorities in totalitarian or communist countries to prevent their citizens from having firsthand knowledge of the news. Meanwhile, countries long accustomed to an American view of the world are finding ways to

create news as viewed through their own filters.

### **Turning a Buck—a Thousand Revenue Streams of Light**

Journalists who hate the Internet and all it stands for are fond of saying that while new media might have all the sizzle, old media has all the steak. And it is true that most new media companies are either losing money or just breaking even.

The problem of revenue for new media was that for a long time we were trying to pour old wine into new bottles. The models we had for revenue generation all came from older media. But it's becoming increasingly clear to those of us who work in new media that there is no one single river of revenue (like display ads or classifieds in newspapers), but many small streams that come together to create a larger river.

Banner ads will generate some revenue, but it will never be the magic bullet envisioned in the beginning of new media. Newer revenue streams include selling access to archives, new syndication deals in which Web sites sell their content to companies like Screaming Media and iSyndicate—who then sell it to other Web sites or for use on a company's intranet—and the creation of personalized editions. (All of these methods generate revenue for us at the Monitor.) And once micro-transactions are available in about a year or so, permitting media companies to sell content for pennies, rather than dollars, fee-based models will be much more acceptable to readers/users.

But here's something we've also discovered at the Monitor. The Monitor's Web site, [csmonitor.com](http://csmonitor.com), has become one of the main ways for people to subscribe to our print edition. In fact, we sell almost as many subscriptions online as we do via direct mail or other advertising methods. And the retention rate of people who sign up via the Web site is twice as high as for those who sign up through other methods. I believe this is because people use one medium to complement the other. In other words, they like having a choice. In the future, new media outlets that

work hand in hand with old media counterparts will be the ones that prosper. That's because the secret to making money with new media is for media companies to see themselves as content providers, and not just newspapers, radio stations, etc.

And here's the other bottom line about revenue. It's a hell of a lot cheaper to get the news to people via digital methods than analog ones. Ultimately this fact alone will convince many media outlets to switch to new media models.

### And in Closing...

A few years ago I attended a conference held by the Nieman Foundation on journalism and technology. The two-day conference turned into an Eeyore-like wail of how new media were going

to ruin journalism. During one particular gloomy panel about the future of journalism, a man standing beside me leaned over and said, "It's like listening to a group of 15th century monks talk about the printing press."


I will never forget his words because he spoke the truth. People hate change and journalists hate it more than most people. We are a skeptical group by nature and view all change through a jaundiced eye. After all, that is what we are paid to do for most of our professional lives. So it's easy to understand why some journalists are fearful and suspicious of these changes.

Without sounding too much like a fatalist, it's important that we realize that most of the changes described above are inevitable. But the reality is that the elements that make good journalism, and good journalists, will never change. Ignoring the future doesn't

mean we can escape it. But paying attention to it means we can shape it. There are many battles still to be fought on the digital battlefield—like privacy, access to information, and access for all to these new media. Good journalists will be needed to report on these topics, as well as all the other issues that people are talking about.

In the end, it's all about our readers/viewers/audience and getting them reliable information in a timely manner. If we focus more on their needs, and less on our complaints, then moving into the new media era will be a piece of cake. ■

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## The Beginning (and End) of an Internet Beat

The Net story is no longer about cultural shifts. It's about money.

By Elizabeth Weise

In the speeded-up world of technology, I can only compare covering the Internet technology beat during the past eight years to something like covering Hawaii between when it fell into the orbit of the United States and now. For both assignments, the story began as one best handled by something akin to a foreign correspondent, but evolved into one requiring the approach and mindset of something closer to a business and real-estate reporter.

I began my career as *the* Internet reporter on the overnight desk at the Associated Press bureau in San Francisco in 1993. I had done a few computer stories at the Seattle AP and before that some stories on an up-and-coming company called Microsoft as a reporter for the Seattle National Public Radio affiliate. All this because my high school happened to

teach BASIC, making me the de facto computer expert on staff.

The San Francisco overnight was a protective shift. It involved doing the weather report, some radio pieces and a few rewrites, but mostly one was there in case the Big One hit. In the grand AP tradition of dues paying, it was where green reporters were sent to cure for awhile.

Alone in the bureau from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., I was bored and lonely and quickly began fiddling with the 'tube I'd been assigned. After a few days' work I finally figured how to back out of AP Edit and get the modem to dial out to my newly acquired Internet account on what I, at the time, did not realize was an already famous online community, the WELL.

Coming to work at night was suddenly fun, an ongoing party I was eager to return to. The WELL was composed

of thousands of fascinating people discussing everything under the sun, as well as an e-mail link to a brand new world. Each night after the briefs package was sent, I explored, and quickly realized what I was learning about was a story worth writing about. Thankfully, my bureau chief Dan Day took my word that this Internet thing wasn't just some new CB radio-like craze, but a true cultural shift that we should be covering. My first story was about the Women's Information Resources Exchange, a newly begun women's Internet network which much later morphed into Woman.com.

I was discovering (and covering) a new culture, and I frequently likened the beat to being a foreign correspondent. But I was stuck on the overnight desk, doing interviews by phone in the mornings and precluded by union rules from venturing out on my own time to

actually meet the people I talked with. And by AP rules, I couldn't write bylined stories since I hadn't physically been to the (mostly Silicon Valley) towns these people worked in.

To get around this, Dan and I hatched the idea of a weekly column to be called "On the Net." But the AP's then-executive editor Bill Ahearn turned him down cold, saying it was hardly national news. Ever an editor to stand up for his writers, Dan ignored New York and decided to run this new column on the state wire.

During its first year, the AP's own computers couldn't even handle the @ sign in e-mail addresses, meaning that at the bottom of each column we had to write, "Elizabeth Weise can be reached at weise (insert 'at sign' here) well.com." Half the time the papers that ran the column forgot to substitute those words for the actual @ sign, and I'd get angry messages from tech-savvy readers wondering what kind of dolts we were. The AP wouldn't have e-mail for its staffers for another two years, so I had to use my private account for my reporting and my address, and none of this was even reimbursable.

When the Web hit, at the AP we had terrible trouble writing about it. It turned out that the // in http:// (which at that point was still required to actu-

ten bulletin board of the Net, and Internet Relay Chat, the grandfather of all chat and instant messaging programs, which is now mostly inhabited by hackers and hacker wannabe's.

One momentous and hysterical day was when America Online finally opened a gateway to the Internet. Thousands upon thousands of "clueless newbies" stumbled out the door into alt.best.of.internet, the first Usenet newsgroup on the list. Unfortunately, much like Columbus when he hit San Salvador in the Bahamas and thought he'd found China, they thought this one newsgroup was the entire Internet and spent several days bumbling around complaining about how small and boring it was. Net "denizens," as we tended to call them, sat on the sidelines, chuckling and baiting them.

After close to a year of this, with "On the Net" running in a goodly number of papers on the West Coast, New York finally decided the Internet was a real thing after all and that they should actually be covering it. I was offered the august position of national writer, based in San Francisco, with a newly created title that New York was convinced sounded perfectly cutting edge—AP Cyberspace Writer.

To this day I believe it stands as the oddest title ever bestowed on an AP writer. It ran just below my byline,

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**I was discovering (and covering) a new culture, and I frequently likened the beat to being a foreign correspondent.**

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ally reach Web sites) was read by some computers in the system as a "Stop Text" message, meaning the story cut off as soon as those characters were sent. It took the technicians several weeks to figure out what was happening and much faxing of articles to papers unlucky enough to be on those lines.

That first year of columns was like writing from some distant civilization, one now virtually extinct. The Internet in 1995 basically consisted of the digital cacophony that was Usenet, the once thriving but now almost forgot-

though few papers actually used it, choosing the AP bug instead. Business cards were a different matter, demanding all sorts of explanations as I handed them out at conferences, but no matter what I said the person reading the card almost always burst into laughter at the sight of the title. After I left, the AP quietly changed the beat's title to AP Internet Writer.

The next two years were marked by a growing national fascination with the Internet and the online world and the gradual coming along of the news industry to the change. And in the way of

a reporter who was taking part in the culture she was covering, I fought a constant battle with those back home who kept telling me (rightly so, I realize now) that the bulk of America would have no idea what we were writing about. In the beginning the copy desk required that each use of the word "Internet" be followed on first reference by the phrase "a world-wide network of computer networks." Then there were the numerous fights over the use of World Wide Web (as it was dubbed by its inventor) rather than the grammatically proper World-wide Web.

And e-mail took forever to beat out electronic mail on first, or sometimes all, references. (Wired magazine recently decreed the return of the hyphen to e-mail, after valiantly and ungrammatically demanding that it be email to all and sundry for years.) Then there was the ongoing struggle over reaction stories. In the face of any catastrophe—say the Northridge earthquake in Los Angeles or the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City—the general desk immediately called looking for an Internet-Reax story to accompany the required sidebar containing a compendium of man-on-the-street comments from around the nation. It took the better part of a year to finally convince them people online were just the same as those offline.

In 1997 USA Today made me an offer I couldn't refuse (not hard to do with someone on an AP salary), and I switched to covering the same beat for a newspaper. This new position was nirvana. One of the issues that always came up in the early years was where newspapers chose to run the stories we were writing about this new Internet culture. It seemed clear to the writers that they were news or perhaps style stories, being as they covered the hitherto undiscovered world of cyberspace. But because they were nominally about computers, they almost always ran in paper's business sections.

By a happy twist of fate USA Today's resident computer and Internet geek-turned-editor Bruce Schwartz happened to work in the Life section, so the paper's technology coverage had always run in that section. This freed it from the problem many of my tech-

writer brethren faced. They might write a fascinating cultural story that touched on several facets of the online world, but their editors required that end-of-trading stock prices be ingloriously

truly new world order. As Howard Rheingold pointed out in his 1993 classic, "The Virtual Community," the Net wasn't just about the possibility of one-to-one communication, it was about

the possibility of one-to-many. It represented the chance for anyone, anywhere, to post their own manifesto, to speak to the world. The Internet stood to fundamentally change the age-old proposition that

the power of the presses belonged to those who owned them. Suddenly, you didn't need a press to broadcast your thoughts to the world.


But that time has passed. The possibilities are still there, but they're hidden behind the billboards for WalMart and eGreetings. Many of the people who once might have done cool things merely for the sake of doing them now are hoping to get noticed, get bought out and get rich. The word "interactivity," which once meant connection between human beings, now too often simply means, "You can watch

'Friends' and click on Ross's sweater and buy it!"

The Internet that streams at me every day as I sit at my desk is Singapore as compared to Borneo, and I find I liked covering Borneo better. Most of what needs to be written these days truly is a business story; it's about money and sales, real estate and corporate power. And I'm not the only one. More and more of my colleagues, folks who've been doing this thing for longer and shorter periods, are slipping away into other beats. Those of us who weren't business reporters don't want to become them, and increasingly that's where this train is headed.

The frontier has been settled, the prairie's been fenced, the sheriff has come to town and the businesses on Main Street have begun their move to suburban malls. It's time to get out of Dodge. ■

*Elizabeth Weise has recently begun the process of switching from the Internet/technology beat at USA Today to covering the scientific, cultural and ethical issues raised by biotech and nanotech.*

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## **Most of what needs to be written [about the Internet] these days truly is a business story; it's about money and sales, real estate and corporate power.**

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shoehorned in to make the story work for the business section.

Now, three years further down the road, Bruce and I agree the world we both began covering back in the early 1990's isn't the same beat we're covering today. We all knew this day would come—it was in the very nature of our reporting to bring it about. The Internet wasn't supposed to be a secret kept for only academics and scientists; it was a worldwide communications medium.

But we were there during the brief, heady moment when it seemed as if the Net might hold the possibility for a

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## Digitization and the News

For better or for worse, the digital revolution is changing journalism.

By Nancy Hicks Maynard

**I**n much the way refrigeration changed food production and consumption, digitization potentially changes everything about the manner in which we produce and consume news. All presumptions about its freshness and perishability vanish.

For most of the 20th century, the public had to follow unfolding news, catching it as it presented itself or losing it forever. Any viewer who wanted to see a local story after its broadcast was simply out of luck. Newspapers and magazine readers had a slightly

better chance of finding recently published articles, but locating large quantities of older reporting was the province of scholars or pricey research firms. Now, digital databases, most available through the Internet, turn that pattern upside down. The public needn't pay attention all the time. Increasingly, it doesn't.

Convergence of information media on digital platforms means anyone can be a scholar or editor. Friends are becoming more reliable filters of information than established news brands.

Technology allows for more news, produced and available at lightening speed, often at lower costs than before. And the process is accelerating still, facilitated by equipment upgrades of Y2K remediation and government-mandated conversion to high-definition television, most of it digital. Whether or not the public embraces HDTV, television stations have hardware in place.

Journalists worry. Will quality suffer? Will commerce contaminate hard-won integrity?

Actually, the end of the journalists'

world is nowhere in sight. But as the digital revolution marches ahead, much about the ways we define, gather and produce news will have to change, too.

## Quantity, Quality and Speed

Volumes of stories, delivered instantaneously, have changed America's information diet. News is now less a series of discreet "meals," a morning newspaper, a noon radio update, and an evening broadcast. Rather, it's a robust, all-day buffet, containing fast food, junk food, fine dining, and everything in between. The public can choose to partake of what it wants, when it wants, in any format, and consume as much or as little as it desires. This system challenges consumers to select a balanced fare of entertainment and public interest offerings. In turn, news organizations must decide how much information to collect and how to package and present it.

On its best days, technology improves the news. Database reporting unearths important breaches of public trust, invisible without easy access to raw information and knowledge about how to use sophisticated computer programs to sort it out. Patterns of police brutality, discriminatory lending practices for homes or cars, and inequitable application of the death penalty are important public topics that have benefited from computer-assisted reporting. For all the fluff served up, the impact of these stories provides more than equal counterweight, although they have become a smaller part of a larger, diversified information business. The trick will be to protect enterprise journalism, to create a device akin to Al Gore's famous "lockbox" that distinguishes them from entertainment, e-commerce and a host of other sins that coexist in the digital cauldron.

On the other hand, digitization can impede quality. In quickening the journalistic process, layers of editing as well as production disappear. As a result, rumors are apt to make their way to the public more often. Because the Internet allows for instantaneous, continuous coverage, the concept of a news

cycle has all but disappeared. So has the ability of a single executive to manage it.

## Cycles of Consumption

Internet users have developed a pattern of news consumption that is different from adults who aren't wired. They watch more cable but less broadcast news; they read more weekly papers and specialty magazines but fewer dailies and general interest publications. Between these groups, distinctions intensify with time. Internet users appear to be more intense consumers. They catch breaking news online or on cable; they read with less frequency but more depth, a practice enhanced by hyperlinks on the World Wide Web. Users tend to bypass incremental updates and common daily news fare, preferring the weekly overview or analysis. Theirs is a rhythm of attention in opposition to the current production cycles.

With this pattern falling into place and more than half the nation's households plugged in, news media are due to rethink packaging and resource deployment. Full audience capacity for interactivity is a key but unknown variable.

## Production Costs

Cost will determine how closely production patterns adapt to these changing styles of consuming news. Photos of the winning World Series home run arrived at editors' desks within seconds. There was no film to transport or processing required. Just a phone line or cellular connection. The savings are huge. Technology also extracts large chunks of cost from broadcast field operations, miniaturizing equipment and staffing needed to operate it. Transportation and shipping expenses also fall sharply as a result.

Newspapers save untold billions automating front-end production systems, all but eliminating typesetting and page makeup departments. Now, the industry awaits technical solutions to post-production operations. Inte-

grating customer databases with mail room and distribution units is an anticipated next step. Consumers place high value on choice, even in a mass medium. The Arizona Republic has 70,000 subscribers who pay an extra dollar a week *not* to receive Sunday advertising inserts. But its systems can't yet put together the customized print product many readers crave.

## Ultimate Convergence

In media talk, convergence refers to a receiving device: the computer, television, cable box top, telephone, or satellite dish. But what about convergence of function? What about the newsroom and convergence?

Because of regulatory waivers, the Belo Corporation in Dallas and Tribune Company in Chicago own daily newspapers, broadcast television stations, cable news channels and Internet sites, with overlapping staffs and facilities. More cities are seeing converged news organizations as partnerships form among different companies and the newspaper industry challenges the FCC's (the Federal Communications Commission) prohibition of television and newspaper ownership in a single market.

News staffs work across media. Newspaper reporters also appear on cable news or television programs. Broadcasters write or produce stories for the Internet. Camera operators simultaneously shoot videotape for television and digital stills for publication but both are also available for the Web site. Can a single newsroom that merges these functions become the standard?

A merged newsroom already exists in Tampa. And Bloomberg, the financial reporting company, was a pioneer in setting up a single, digital newsroom for its various Wall Street and consumer information products. MSNBC's cable network and Web site run convergent newsrooms in metropolitan New York and in Redmond, Washington. They support each other, as well as NBC network news and CNBC, the business network.

To help prepare for this future, the California-based Robert C. Maynard

Institute for Journalism Education has begun cross-media training. Here, journalists are taught to design a newspaper's front page, produce a five-minute broadcast, and build a Web site.

### Moore's Law vs. Murphy's

Clearly, convergence will come. Unless, that is, it won't.


Unchallenged new wisdom—Moore's Law—asserts computer power doubles every 18 months. Whether it does or not, Murphy's Law shows up regularly in the news industry's march to its digital future. Often, logical outcomes never arrive. E-commerce makes sense, but the bricks and mortar distribution support for online sales proved

to be a surprise. Similarly, online advertising on traditional media sites made sense, except there was no sales and marketing infrastructure to support it—no agencies, no accepted audience measurements, no efficient way to purchase. Similarly, the single, cross-media digital newsroom makes sense, but there are cultural, aesthetic and technical impediments. Not all journalists can do all jobs. If they could, not all should. Different skills underpin effective storytelling in television and print. Successful convergence requires deftly defined distinctions.

While digital convergence may not develop as imagined today, its effects are powerful and lasting. Best case, industry visions come true, or something approximating them will. Worst case, consumption patterns continue

to change but insufficient infrastructure grows to support traditional values or providers. Preservation of journalistic standards will require content and technology to come together in a coherent way. Will they? Stay tuned. ■

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## The Internet, the Law, and the Press

From e-mail use to global distribution, legal decisions might hamper press freedoms.

By Adam Liptak

**T**he Internet is a powerful journalistic tool. It is a rich if not always reliable resource, an efficient way to communicate with sources and colleagues and, for better and worse, an essentially instantaneous way to reach readers everywhere. But it is merely a tool; it has not in any fundamental way altered the essentials of gathering and publishing the news.

Yet, as the law starts to grapple with the Internet generally, the incidental effects of that struggle on journalism may well disturb the bedrock premises that support our understanding of the status and nature of the press. The impact of the Internet on journalism in this broader sense is rich in ironies.

- The Internet, which seems so evanescent, creates a durable, comprehensive and difficult-to-protect record of the newsgathering process. This record has the potential

to upend the balance of power between the press on the one hand and sources, competitors and litigants on the other.

- The Internet, which democratizes speech, will therefore inexorably withdraw from journalists the special status they have achieved in certain kinds of accreditation and in their ability to protect their sources and resource materials.
- The Internet, because it is global, will allow the laws of the most repressive nations to influence the conduct of journalists in the freest ones.

### The Trouble With E-Mail

It used to be that many journalists felt put off by requests that interviews be conducted in writing. Part of this was macho posturing: "Nobody tells me

how to conduct my interview!" And part of it, perhaps, was a reluctance to create a generally available record of the interview. Written questions are tangible and lasting, and they might surface years later in libel litigation, say, to demonstrate bias, preconceived notions or foolishness.

E-mail has changed this. Written interviews are now routine, and there is much to be said for them. While there is a cost in strategy and spontaneity, there are significant compensations for sources and readers. There is a higher rate of response, probably; more considered responses, certainly; and accurate quotations, necessarily.

On the journalist's side, the compensations are fewer. Since e-mail is an invitingly offhand and informal medium, the sober reflection that went into written questions reluctantly supplied in the old days is diminished. The result is a not always attractive record

of the newsgathering process, which can also often be said of notes. Unlike notes, though, the e-mail record is typed and comprehensible and is seldom capable of being truly expunged from the hard drives and servers on which it resides. It is in the hands of potential adversaries from the outset in any event and capable of being forwarded to countless further recipients with the push of a button.

The press's Achilles' heel in American libel litigation is inquiry into the newsgathering process. The Supreme Court set the bar awfully high for public figures seeking to establish libel, requiring them to prove not only the publication of a false and defamatory statement but also that it was published with at least serious doubts about its truth. This requirement was intended to be and is close to an absolute bar: What journalist publishes damaging statements she strongly suspects are false? In order that it not be a *literally* absolute bar, the courts have, understandably, allowed searching inquiry into the newsgathering process. Plaintiffs are allowed to try to prove journalists' bad faith through circumstantial evidence of how the story was gotten and composed.

Snippets of evidence arising from this process have caused the press trouble in the past. A copy editor's observation in a memo that she found a major theme of an article "impossible to believe" created substantial grief for The Washington Post in a libel suit, though the newspaper ultimately prevailed. Richard Jewell, the former Olympic bombing suspect, is trying to capitalize on another copy editor's remark to a colleague in his libel suit against The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "They can't do it this way," she said, about a columnist's comparison of Jewell to Wayne Williams, a convicted child killer. "They" did, though, and Jewell's lawyer was delighted to learn of the editor's concerns.

In the old days, offhand comments like these seldom surfaced in subsequent litigations. They were oral and therefore easily forgotten and hard to prove or, if written, were often simply and irretrievably gone. The e-mail era magnifies the mischief stray comments

can cause in two ways. First, some journalists' e-mails fairly bristle with investigative zeal and dark humor. Second, even the most rigorous corporate "document retention programs" (that's Orwellian newspeak for document destruction programs) can't seem to delete e-mails from computers and servers. E-mail, it turns out, has the half-life of plutonium.

The problem is not confined to libel suits. News organizations have been quite successful in protecting confidential sources, notes, unpublished photographs, and similar materials from subpoenas—so long as only they have sole possession of the information. They have been less successful in protecting telephone and travel records held by others. Indeed, not infrequently, reporters learn of subpoenas to phone and travel companies only after their records have been produced to prosecutors, litigants like tobacco companies, and others.

That is bad enough, but those sorts of records do not directly identify sources and say nothing about the substance of what was discussed. A phone record, for instance, shows that two unidentified people talked for a specified length of time on two identified phone numbers. It reveals nothing, directly at least, about the substance of what was said. E-mails are different. They generally identify the sender and recipient and, more important, memorialize the substance of what was said. Yet most Internet Service Providers have shown no particular reluctance in complying with subpoenas for e-mail records. Here, too, there is not even uniformity about whether account holders are informed before their records are produced.

The e-mail interview gives rise to a final problem. As ABC learned in its investigation of the diet supplement Metabolife, there is nothing to stop the subject of an investigation from posting unedited interviews and other materials on its own Web site weeks before the journalistic piece is ready to air. ABC's initial response was to protest this as an invasion of its editorial processes. This was, as the network later tacitly acknowledged, probably misguided: Subjects of news investiga-

tions have as much right to free speech, and on their own schedule, as the press does. But whereas an aggrieved subject of an upcoming exposé in the old days could do little more than make legal threats and call lonely news conferences, the Internet era allows the hunted to scoop the hunters.

## The Trouble With Democracy

News organizations like to say that they are mere surrogates for the public who neither seek nor deserve special rights. But they do accept a few. The press pass is one example. And shield laws protect the press—but not others—from having to comply with subpoenas. Both require the government to decide who is and isn't a member of the press.

This was never especially appetizing or legitimate, but it was not hard to implement. The local police chief had a pretty good idea who the press was in his town and, so long as he didn't deny a press pass to a reporter whose work he disliked, the courts were not likely to interfere with his allocation of the passes. There were gray areas—student papers, "shoppers." But the practical appeal of knowing whom you could allow past the police lines trumped the theoretical queasiness.

The same dynamic applied to shield laws. In the gray areas, there were academics, freelancers and book authors. But the importance of protecting the core journalistic processes, and particularly the confidential source relationship, from unwarranted intrusion overrode the problems of principle.

Everyone is a publisher now. And if everyone has a Web site, everybody is, arguably, in at least some circumstances, a journalist. The problem is not so much that one can't distinguish the electronic equivalent of the lonely pamphleteer from The Wall Street Journal. Clever people can surely come up with neutral criteria that consider subject matter and circulation. The problem is that deciding whose speech is worthy of assistance or protection is an illegitimate function for the government. And it is harder to look the other

way in the Internet age.

It is, unfortunately in a way, impossible to envision a world in which everybody who asks nicely gets a press pass and everyone who claims to be distributing information to the public gets protection from subpoenas. One can certainly imagine a world, though, in which no one gets either.

## The Trouble With the World

It is not difficult to withhold controversial printed matter from countries that value reputation more highly than they value free discourse. You just don't ship the book or magazine there. It's not particularly unusual for American publishers to limit the distribution of their wares, even on an issue by issue basis, from Britain, Singapore, Malaysia and other countries friendly to libel plaintiffs.

But it is, for now at least, seemingly technically impossible to limit access to American Web sites from anywhere at all. Yahoo!, for instance, recently

told a French court that it cannot comply with a French law prohibiting the sale of Nazi memorabilia without withdrawing the offending auction listings worldwide. An English court recently instructed The New York Times to delete a passage it had held libelous from the Times's Web archives and other databases. The Times was technically unable to tailor its compliance to just its readership in the United Kingdom. It decided to substitute this message for the offending statement:

"PASSAGE DELETED. USERS OUTSIDE THE UNITED KINGDOM MAY OBTAIN A COMPLETE COPY OF THIS ARTICLE BY CONTACTING LEGAL@NYTIMES.COM"

Of course, a foreign lawsuit is only truly worrisome if the defendant has assets at risk. American courts have consistently declined to enforce libel judgments obtained in countries insensitive to our commitment to free speech. But global companies have assets everywhere, and a victorious libel plaintiff can probably collect his money not only where he won it but also in

scores of other countries that will unthinkingly honor the libel judgment as a matter of international comity.

And this doesn't involve only money. Many countries, especially Latin American ones, are not shy about prosecuting journalists for *criminal* libel. Two Times journalists avoided prosecution in Mexico a few years ago only because the authorities concluded that the offending article had been published only in the United States. It's hardly clear that they would have reached the same conclusion in the Internet era.

The Internet is a wonderful thing. But it may do enormous incidental damage to the secrets, status and swagger of the American institutional press. ■

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# Meeting at the Internet's Town Square

Will information fragmentation splinter society?

*Dan Rather, managing editor and anchor of CBS Evening News, addressed the World Affairs Council on matters of the Internet and journalism in November 1999. Excerpts from his remarks follow.*

Mark well, I'm no expert on the Internet; I approach it as someone who cares deeply about the news and as one who inevitably sees new media through the lens of television. The obvious difference between television and the Internet is that the Internet takes a step through that "fourth wall," to be interactive. For the news, I think this affords an opportunity to not only report to the viewing public, but to truly *reach* them with the information they need to know and the

information our democracy needs the people to know. It's a lesson known to every college professor, to every teacher—or, at least, the really good ones: If you want your students to retain what you say, don't just lean against a lectern and let pearls of wisdom drop from your lips. *Engage* them. *Question* them. Consider how much better you would remember the content of the evening news if you were, in some way, a participant....

The future, if we dare look into its murky cloud, seems to be taking us toward a marriage of television and the Internet. It may not be very long at all before any distinction between the two belongs distinctly to the past. We now have streaming video online, Web-casts, and partnerships between television news programs and Web sites like the

HealthWatch partnership at CBS that most recently got me thinking on all this.

It's an exciting development in many ways, this move towards interactivity—particularly in the news, and particularly if we remember that *no* amount of technological wizardry can take the place of quality content. But there are certain places where I think we need to stand guard at the dawn of this revolution. Even if we take the Internet on its own terms, we can't ignore what our experience tells us about the dangers we might face in putting and getting news online.

.... When everyone's talking, you can't always believe what you hear. Of course, we should *always* practice a healthy skepticism, no matter what our source of information. But certain news



programs, certain newspapers, and certain journals have a demonstrable record of truth telling, of accuracy in their reporting. I pretend no false modesty in saying that I hold CBS News high—very high—in this regard. And of course I also recognize the records of our network competitors in this. We've all built reliability through years of hard work.

The thing about the Internet is, just about anyone can set up a Web site that looks like and has the feel of news organs we've learned to trust. Broadcasting the news, especially, has traditionally been an expensive proposition. And if you don't cast the die for truth-telling from the start, if you don't burnish it with every story you do, then you, your network, your newspaper, your magazine, are throwing that capital investment right down the drain. Once caught in a lie, or in a pattern of error, you will be tuned out.

As journalists, we have an ethical code. This is important to us, important enough that reporters have given their very lives to get you the real story. But even if it were not, it would still obtain in large part because to do it any other way would simply be bad business. And even if the news itself is not a business, television is; publishing is.

On the Internet, a legitimate look less often assures that journalism is being practiced. A voice crying in the wilderness of the Internet may not even care if you believe it tomorrow, let alone the next day. The accountability, the reliability, is not, until tested, always there.

The Internet as town square—a gossiping, teeming hub of communication—is undeniably part of its excitement. But those of us who do the news and care about doing it *right* must remember that we are bound to separate gossip from fact. We might hope that journalists in established media might tame this impulse on the Internet, or at least aid in separating the gossip from the news. But we have reason to fear that the trend is working the other way.

Certain precincts of the Internet threaten to be another place, like the supermarket tabloids, to which legitimate news organs can point and say, "Hey, *we're* not saying this ourselves, but *we're* going to take a look at what *they're* reporting, just so you know." We need to be closing these back doors for gossip to find its way into the news, not opening more. We ought to make it crystal clear that if you feed from the bottom, you're not going to be kosher.

If gossip has found its way onto the news through a back door, at the front door, traditionally, is the gatekeeper:

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**...the Internet is the realized ideal of the town meeting. But no one foresaw a town meeting where you wouldn't have to listen to everyone in the room.**

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the managing editor. This is my title at the CBS Evening News, anchor and managing editor. It means that I, like others who hold this title in print and broadcast journalism, are responsible for using hard-won professional judgment to separate real information from misinformation, the trivial from the important, the impartial from that which too narrowly serves a specific interest.

With the Internet comes the potential to act as one's *own* managing editor, one's own gatekeeper. It's an exciting possibility but one that we must learn to use wisely. Now you can get news from more or less traditional sources but *just* the news you say you want. This doesn't seem so bad, on its face. Isn't this, after all, a big part of what the Internet is all about—tailoring an experience to an interest or a personal schedule, bringing the like-minded from across the country, around the world, at all hours, together in cyberspace?

Well, it's a double-edged sword. And we ought to recognize that this trend could contribute to the balkanization of our society and of our lives, public and private. In a way, sure, the Internet is the realized ideal of the town meet-


ing. But no one foresaw a town meeting where you wouldn't have to listen to everyone in the room.

While winnowing the information gusher to a more manageable, personalized stream makes perfect sense for specific areas of interest, we ought to be careful that we don't all fall into the habit of looking at the whole world *only* through this sort of hyper-focused lens.

In America, where informed citizens are a *necessity*, the journalists, the managing editors among us, have understood—not always perfectly, but almost always in good faith—our role in fostering a common share of knowledge and understanding. With the enormous challenges we're likely to face in our weeks and months and years ahead, we can afford now less than ever to become wrapped in self-configured cocoons of in-

formation.

Perhaps the time has come for us to rediscover the value of shared experience, of shared information, of some common, daily element that keeps our hand in public life. The stakes are simply too high for us to fold on this. For the past 50 years, television news has played this role of the public square—for better or worse—and it looks as if the Internet will play the role in some way in the future, with or without television. But we must make a conscious decision that we *want* to maintain a common society within the structures of the new media or we risk walking and talking past each other with virtual blinders on. The great debates of our time might be monopolized by those with the greatest personal or financial stake in their outcome, and all before we know it. ■

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# Why the Internet Is (Mostly) Good for News

Concerns about news trends on the Web sound all too familiar.

By Lee Rainie

When you visit a news Web site, the people who control the site know quite a lot about you. At a minimum, they know the domain you have come from (a dot-com, dot-org, dot-gov, dot-edu). They have a good idea what state or country you have logged on from. They know what Web site or search engine you have come from. And they know what features on the Web page you've clicked on, including the banner ads or hyperlinks to other Web pages.

If you visited the site before, you probably had a "cookie" surreptitiously installed on your computer by the site, allowing the site to start building a profile of your particular tastes. Virtually all news sites and other commercial online enterprises install cookies without notifying Internet users. A cookie is a bit of encrypted computer code that sits on your computer's hard drive and identifies your computer the next time it—and you—visit the site. (If you want to see how many cookies have been planted on your computer, search for a file on your main drive named "cookies." Then see if you can guess where all those files came from.)

In addition to allowing sites to track what users do as they click from page to page, feature to feature on a Web site, cookies allow Web operators to do a bunch of other things. They can direct a site to provide personalized layouts, shopping carts, and search options each time you return to the site. They can alert advertisers to put specific customized ads tied to your interests on the pages you visit. They permit sites to create "mypersonalnews.com" Web

pages that provide you stories and features that appeal to you. And cookies allow advertisers to know how many and which readers of a news story click on an advertisement and how many of those ad-clickers actually buy something. This is the Holy Grail of the advertising business: knowing down to the penny and down to the individual customer which ads and which news stories generate sales.

The capacity of Web sites to tailor information and learn so much about each visitor has caused shudders among journalists and social critics. Many commentators worry that widespread customization of information will lead to a dystopia of atomized Internet users, unaware of the world around them.



June 8, 2000. The headline reads: "The Hissing You Hear May Be the Air Coming Out of Salon's Balloon." Courtesy of the San Francisco Chronicle.

Many reporters fear that widespread use of Web-tracking technologies is the final step towards turning news into an entertainment commodity where the popularity of some types of stories privileges them over important stories that don't have the same pizzazz. Indeed, the alarm took tangible form this spring when Salon.com, a respected Internet-based news operation, made cost-cutting decisions by firing the people who worked in departments that were not logging sufficient "page views"—the number of Internet users who click on a specific Web page.

Writing in *Broadcasting & Cable* magazine, a respected trade journal, commentator Russell Shaw summed up the anxiety about the Salon layoffs

this way: "What happened at Salon was an affront to all matters journalistic.... The 20 percent reduction in staff at Salon has produced a site that, while still capable of thought-provoking pieces, has tended to become more salacious in much of its daily story budget. Salaciousness drives clicks. Clicks drive page views. Page-view counts are shown to media buyers, who will buy ads to run on the Web pages of editorial sections that get the eyeballs."

The issues here are very important: Does the Web's capacity for precise and fine-grained measurement represent a fundamental new threat to journalists? And how destructive is the Web to the obvious benefits that flow from

Americans' traditional approach to news, built on the idea of serendipity ("I didn't know that!") and a mixture of pieces that

are more or less balanced between those that are important and those that are entertaining?

Weighing the pluses and minuses, I think the Internet has been good for news, if not always for the news business. Let's start with the arguments about the menace posed by very specific readership measures. Online measurements are clearly more precise than previous tools, but there is no evidence that they are being used any more aggressively or harmfully than old techniques that gauged news consumers' preferences.

News organizations have been fiends for data about the interplay of editorial and commercial content for a very long time. Circulation lists are probed for

insights into audience tastes; features are pilot tested in certain markets before they are launched in the full paper; Nielsen ratings have been used for years to determine the fate of anchor folk and story selection; surveys and focus groups are often conducted to find out everything from what kind of stories have the most draw to what kinds of graphics leap off the page or the screen; “impact” analyses are done by ad agencies and news firms’ ad sales staffs to find out what kind of ads work with what kind of stories; cover sales are plumbed for their meaning about what stories “work” and what stories don’t have big appeal; letters to the editor are dissected as proxies for sectors of the readership, and drastic changes in content are made during television’s “sweeps months” because broadcast producers know what draws especially big audiences.

Those who don’t think newsrooms are keenly attuned to commercial realities and market feedback haven’t witnessed the agonized discussions at a news organization about what to put on the front page, how to lead the broadcast, whether a comic strip should be canceled, or whether a correspondent should change her hairstyle to boost her Q score, a value that measures her appeal to viewers.

Media critic and Internet analyst James Fallows argues that fear about the new audience metrics represents a typical “Year Zero” belief about the Internet—an embrace of the idea that nothing happening online has ever happened before. “They are ignoring the evidence that this is the latest installment of arguments about an old tension,” says Fallows. “This is a minor difference in degree from what has come before and there is no reason yet to think that it will destroy the balance between stories that will draw a big enough crowd to keep your business in operation—what people *want* to know—and stories that for various reasons editors think readers *should* know.”

The anxieties about viewership measures are tied to concerns about the impact of customized news. The connection goes like this: If the news becomes a quest to give Internet users

precisely what they want, then they will all isolate themselves in info-bubbles and civic life will wither even further. But this vastly overstates the threat and ignores the benefits of tailored news. If individuals now have an easier time finding news of intense interest to them, but not to the general community, that is a big advance. Imagine being a student from Thailand, studying in Des Moines. The local paper will never tell much of anything about daily events in Bangkok, but you can find out whatever you want on the Net. To the extent we judge journalism by its ability to help people find information that is useful and relevant to them, this helps the cause.

What about the counterargument that this removes people from exposure to important information that doesn’t fit their mypersonalnews.com profile? The evidence about the way people get news online challenges that fear. Research by the Pew Internet & American Life Project shows that 80 percent of online news consumers are encountering and approaching news on the Internet the same way news consumers always have. Fully 42 percent of those who get news on the Internet on a typical daysay they chance upon and check out news stories while they are doing other things online. This is the essence of serendipity and it is an indication that old-fashioned wire copy reports are featured on many kinds of Web sites. Another 38 percent of those who get news online click onto news sites to learn the news—behavior that apes the long-standing practices of news consumers.


If anything, the arrival of the Internet in the news world has increased the flow of news and has rooted many news operations even more in their communities—both of which are beneficial things to those who worry about social capital. Many news operations’ Webmasters noticed several years ago that their traffic jumped after the lunch hour, presumably when people returned to their desks after being away and wanted to check what was happening in the news and in the financial markets. In some newsrooms, this post-lunch hour period is called the “second prime time,” and many of the most

sophisticated sites have created a mid-day update or “breaking news” feature for their service to make sure those prime-time consumers get a news fix.

Even more important in the grand scheme of nourishing robust communities is the fact that many newspapers have become more engaged with underserved parts of their readership, thanks to Internet. A typical site now has in-depth coverage of community issues, calendars of community events, coverage of every conceivable sports team down to the peewee level, bulletin boards for debate about local issues, features for readers to scream back at the editors, and reviews of restaurants and local cultural activities. They act as Web portals and databases for their communities. The most venturesome sites, according to Jan Schaffer, executive director of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, allow for a proliferation of voices in the news through self-publishing and interactive participation on local issues.

While online news brings many advantages to consumers and communities, it has not yet become a profit center in any news organization. The unconcealed reality of the Internet is that users expect information to be free and users have pummeled every news operation that tried to charge for its material, except the interactive Wall Street Journal. The rest of online news Web sites depend on advertising to raise pretty pitiful revenues, and none of the sites are close to breaking even. So I submit that if the leaders of journalism want to stop worrying about incursions by advertisers—or advertising metrics—into newsrooms, they should get busy finding ways to produce content that somebody, particularly subscribers, will buy—and pay for—online. ■

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# Taming Online News for Wall Street

‘Today’s journalism has acquired a drive-by quality. . . .’

By Arthur E. Rowse

*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

The cybernetic tablets inscribed back when the Internet was beginning to become a sensation—let’s say the mid-1990’s—promised many wonderful things, including a rebirth of journalistic independence, new media profit centers, more news depth, and more diversified news and discussion. There was also renewed hope for salvaging representative government by raising the level of citizen knowledge of—and participation in—public affairs, including electronic town meetings and voting on the Internet. We finally seemed to be approaching the point of disproving press critic A.J. Leibling’s most enduring message, that freedom of the press is limited to those who own one.

Suddenly, any common drudge could become a worldwide publisher with his or her own Web site. Costs were no longer a problem. Infinity was the limit. Nothing inspired such hopes more than the arrival of Salon and Slate, the pioneering Internet magazines. With only \$50,000 in seed money

from Apple in 1995 and larger sums later from Apple and Adobe, former Hearst journalist David Talbot created the well written, sometimes sordid Salon. Its Initial Public Offering (IPO) in June 1999 attracted some \$26 million, topped by \$15 million from private sources. Talbot counted on advertising to provide the necessary revenue. Microsoft had a different slant on financing. It launched Slate in 1996 on the assumption that, after an initial run of free editions, quality journalism could attract enough online subscriptions to make a profit without the need for advertising and its pressures to alter the true picture.

By the first year of the new millennium, however, such dreams were fading fast. Salon’s stock price, which once reached \$15, was flickering around \$1 in October, while its operating funds were steadily disappearing. A year after its successful IPO, it revamped its look (to the dismay of many fans), then revamped the revamping and laid off 13 employees. For the first time, writ-

ers were being kept or fired on the basis of viewer “hits” on specific articles. Reality also struck APBnews.com, a creative webzine hooked on crime and justice. [See story about APBnews.com on page 31.] It was forced to dismiss its entire staff of 140. Web publishers were learning some lessons that have long governed printed matter.

Buffeted by similar forces, the profit-conscious Tribune Company fired 34 employees from its Web site, including 20 at the Los Angeles Times. And with a (third?) finger to the ill winds, The New York Times and several other traditional news producers decided to hold back plans to solicit public funds for their Web operations. Microsoft’s window of opportunity also narrowed, forcing the firm to wipe Slate clean of any cost to viewers in favor of subsidized publication. Neither ads nor subscriptions seemed to work for enterprising online journalism.

The crash of dot-com stock prices last spring helped prick the bubble of Internet advertising. According to The Washington Post in October, only about five people out of 10,000 actually click through ad links to other news/info sights. People also click past news that costs money. Princeton Research Associates report that only 11 percent have ever paid for news on the Web.

Reality was also catching up to individual pioneers. Although Matt Drudge (President Clinton calls him “Sludge”) was up and running for many moons before he hit big time with his stolen Monica Lewinsky scoop in early 1998, he still shows no visible means of support, not to mention riches. In October, he claimed some 55 million hits, though Media Metrix, the “Nielsen Rating” of the Internet, put his “unique visitors” at a more modest 889,000,

## Top General News Sites on the Internet

*“Unique visitors” counted by Media Metrix, October 2000*

1.	MSNBC.com	9,454,000
2.	CNN.com	8,023,000
3.	ABC News*	4,091,000
4.	Pathfinder.com	3,762,000
5.	NYTimes.com	3,644,000
6.	USAToday.com	3,542,000
7.	WashingtonPost.com	3,021,000
8.	Slate.com	2,852,000
9.	FoxNews.com	2,007,000
10.	LA Times*	1,719,000

\* Represents an aggregation of commonly owned/branded domain names.

[AOL News Channel was counted separately because of its membership fees. Its total was 16,016,000.]

ranking him 18th on the news list. That meant approximately 54,111,000 were repeat visits. Yet this brash young opportunist operating out of a tiny apartment with an outdated computer was turning out to be far less creative than advertised. Despite his reputation for scandalizing the political left with documented and undocumented allegations—like an Internet version of Rush Limbaugh—Drudge has become almost completely dependent on mainline news services for his headlines since his tipsters from the Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy lost their political motivation.

Enterprising journalism is also rare at the sites of large news organizations. The predominant America Online, with all the output of Time magazine and CNN available to it, still relies on AP for news of the nation and world. Even big newspapers lean almost exclusively on AP and Reuters for their Web sites, largely because of the need for rapid updates. A spot check of such addresses in October showed that newspapers tend to offer little more news on their Web sites than what they print. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution's [ajc.com](http://ajc.com) seems typical, with its use of AP for all national and world news stories online.

Newspapers also don't seem to be rushing to link printed stories to their Web sites. The Chicago Tribune, widely admired for its melding of radio, TV and print news operations, daily tells readers that it "offers expanded coverage of the day's news, with content produced specifically for the World Wide Web, audio and visual enhancements and other text of the portal newspaper." But in the few observed editions, none of the stories in the main news section carried shirrtails to Web sites. Ben Estes, editor of [chicagotribune.com](http://chicagotribune.com), said merely that the decision varies by story.

The Cox-owned Atlanta Journal-Constitution was a notable exception, regularly ending major stories with references to outside Web addresses, not its own, for more information. The Washington Post used to carry numerous story tag lines referring to its Web site but seems to have cut back. Requests for an explanation were not answered. The only item on the Tribune's corpo-

## FREE NEWS AND PORN JUST A CLICK AWAY

Wel.com to your online news site.  
Updated 15:27et10/31/2000.

Enter zipcode --here for local news,sports,weather stock quote: Dow/Nasdaq

See CBS fall shows on prime.time: lateshow 11:30et/pt.  
Visit officialsite of Dave's TV clubhouse \\http.www.html <<searchthesite>>

Learn why *NEWSMENU* is "ActiveX" control for Internet Explorer\*  
 Yes, download.now;  No, go directly to headlines;

FAQ: Sometimes *msnbc newsmenu* shows only one layer of stories. Why is that?  
FAQ: When our site is very busy, we reduce the number of stories...so we can serve more users more efficiently.

Customize~your~page: [sign.me.up](http://sign.me.up) AOL MAIL Go  
My Calendar: [dot.org.anize](http://dot.org.anize) your life. Shop@AOL.com! click>>>>here  
Office Depot, Your #1 Supplier  
[//MyCNN/video/audio/headlines/free-e-mail/feedback/](http://MyCNN/video/audio/headlines/free-e-mail/feedback/) (Sign up for e-mail updates!)  
[Shop.USATODAY.com](http://Shop.USATODAY.com). Brokerage service: open your account today!  
[Click here](#) for latest headlines via AP.REUTERS.BLOOMBERG.

Ooops, FATAL ERROR in your harddrive: Ref:555xpr@yze//oo300pr33999zoo... [gobackto start](#), click OFF.  
If you'd like to make a call, try Dell@888.123.4567x8910. If too busy, switch to C-SPAN1 OR C-SPAN2. Have a \*nice\* day.

—Arthur E. Rowse, with slight embellishments

rate Web site on October 24 was brief: "Tribune declares quarterly dividend; sets annual meeting date." Newspapers don't seem to be trying hard to add depth to their Web presence.

On network evening news shows, however, references to company Web sites are extensive. That might be why TV-owned sites lead the list of most popular ones. MSNBC.com and CNN.com continue in first and second place (with 9.5 million and 8.0 million "unique visitors" respectively), far ahead of others specializing in news, according to Media Metrix data for October. [See accompanying table on page 19.] Surprise: Of the 20 most popular news/info addresses, the 12 offering full news menus were all parts of traditional news organizations. The one exception, Microsoft's Slate, has a broad sweep but its coverage is not like the others. Three of the other seven focused on weather, two were info browsers, one was the Discovery channel, and one was a campaign site for George W. Bush.

An informal check of a week's evening news programs in late October showed that CNN, NBC and CBS all exceeded ABC in references to their

Internet sites. Naturally, TV Web sites contain far more volume than their regular news programs. Like publisher sites, they also offer lots of color, ads, promos, links and lists, resulting in a rather cluttered appearance. (This article does not address the broadband applications of audio and video, a further diversion enjoyed by only about three million out of some 35 million users of the Web.)

The flip side to this fractured, glitzy stuff, of course, is a motley parade of quirky, frenetic surfers with less and less interest in news details even when available. News sites are turning into little more than bulletin boards increasingly loaded with retail pitches. [See box above.] The newest craze to customize news to fit viewer wishes further downgrades the potential broadening effect of the Internet. Web journalism seems to be catching a virulent form of tabloidism. It might not be long before Jay Leno and crew all have their own news sites, drawing news seekers away from serious sites with their own take on the headlines. They already are the news anchors of choice for countless dropouts from network news.

The Internet is also encouraging the steady downsizing of serious news that has infected mainstream media, especially during the last decade. The main catalyst has been Wall Street's power to insist that publicly owned media firms toe the standards for all widget makers: higher profits every quarter. It's basically this pressure that causes news executives to increasingly omit or cut serious news of the nation and the world and play up trivia and emotion to boost audience figures and ad volume. Under such pressure, it is virtually impossible for even the most conscientious editor to give full attention to what's important for citizens to stop democracy from hemorrhaging.

Today's journalism has acquired a drive-by quality, as it hits on a hot topic one day, then runs away from it the next, before anyone can digest the meaning. The TV version is parachute journalism. The Internet adds to the damage by creating drive-by news consumers who skip blithely from bulletin to bulletin while feeling they are keeping up with things. To be sure, the World Wide Web in total offers an ever-growing array of news and information. But its hot-button nature tends to emphasize the worst of journalism

rather than the best. The effect can't help but diminish citizen awareness of public affairs and interest in voting. Media managers have become so hung up on quick ratings and profits that—almost like mad lemmings—they revel in their own freedom while virtually ignoring their obligation to keep the electorate informed enough to maintain a fully representative system of government.


Not only do the mainstream media completely dominate news on the Web. They are continuing their corporate consolidation and homogenization online with shared ownerships, mutual links, even the same ads, photos, news stories, typography and layout. The trend toward massive sharing, including trading journalists, rather than competition has also been cyberized. Forget the promises about diversity. The news business is using the Web to create the most powerful cartel of all. And government regulators continue to doze.

Like many other rebels, the once-proud Salon has been sucked into the fold. Consider its plans for politics2000.com announced a year ago. Its press release boasted of special ties to CBS News, America Online, C-

SPAN, United Feature Syndicate, and Isyndicate. It also noted an equity and content agreement with Rainbow Media Holdings, Inc., a subsidiary of Cablevision Systems Corporation and NBC, to produce a TV series. Among organizations agreeing to carry Salon "content" were AOL, a part-owner of Salon, as well as AltaVista, Reuters, CNN.com and CNET. Among "advertising sponsors" were IBM, Microsoft and Intel, plus 275 others.

Is this the new shape of cutting-edge journalism? With Salon on life supports, Slate on subsidies and Drudge living off the wires, it looks as if the future is already past. ■

*Arthur E. Rowse is the author of "Drive-By Journalism: The Assault on Your Need to Know," published this year by Common Courage Press in Monroe, Maine. Rowse, a veteran journalist and media critic, retired from U.S. News & World Report, after serving on the city desks of The Boston Globe, the Boston Herald/Traveler and The Washington Post.*

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## While TV Blundered on Election Night, the Internet Gained Users

In the next election cycle, look for greater integration of TV and Internet coverage.

By Hugh Carter Donahue, Steven Schneider, and Kirsten Foot

**A** review of Election Day reporting on Internet news sites reveals a lot of information about consumer demand, news site performance, the prevalence of corporate linkage, and the strategies used to attract viewers and display the news. Indeed, while broadcast journalists were reeling from two wrong calls on Florida, Web news sites were better able to publish and refresh accurate information. It was not so much that Web news sites got it

all right while TV journalists got it all wrong. Each relied on flawed data and both posted wrong calls. The crucial difference is that the news sites on the Internet made election data easier to find and digest and kept it updated in a more timely fashion.

Throughout Election Day and into the evening, demand was greater than expected. CNN.com scored 98 million page views on Election Day and 156 million page views the following day. It

posted 120 million page views on the second day out. On Election Day, the CNN Web sites (CNN.com, allpolitics.com, CNNFN.com, CNNSI.com) broke the previous record of volume by 150 percent. Users sought streaming video and video on demand, again breaking records for video at CNN.com. USAToday.com posted 13.6 million page views on Election Day and 15.8 million page views the next day.

The larger than expected demand

affected the sites' performance. Information seekers overwhelmed MSNBC.com periodically through election night. The Drudge Report, which advertised that it would publish exit poll results earlier than others, found its site bogged down. Many people could not log on.

Performance featured all of the Internet's synergies and collaborations. Networks' streaming video capability on NBC.com and ABC.com enabled broadcast video to be integrated onto each site. CBS.com featured video clips of Vice President Al Gore and Governor George W. Bush casting their votes. CBS.com updated its Electoral College map every minute and a half. Yahoo.com, MSNBC.com, CNN.com and washingtonpost.com featured real-time reports and demographic analysis of voting trends, enabled visitors to track projections from the broadcast networks on the Electoral College vote, and created pull-down menus that people could use to track state races. The Associated Press linked to real-time election results and state outcomes. Yahoo!'s streaming media capacities supported live video from broadcasters for state and local races; Yahoo! also featured Reuters video reports and audio from National Public Radio among various methods of communication.

Coordination was at the heart of online news performance. "Constant integration and coordination with CNN news group is standard practice," remarks Carin Dessauer, executive editor/Washington and election director, CNN Interactive. "For election coverage, this approach included on-air analysts contributing through chats, writing, question and answer sessions, and ongoing coordination of incoming video."

Corporate linking was discernible. For example, anyone seeking political news at MTV.com was immediately shunted to CBS.com, indicating the consolidation of Viacom and CBS operations.

The unexpected demand on the Web sites required adaptability. Lightening the load of pages, either by stripping out information like graphics or placing that information on other pages at

news Web sites, became standard practice at surge times immediately after poll closings.

### **The Look of Things to Come**

Hyperlinks will loom much larger in online election news reporting. Through the use of hyperlinks, the Web empowers users to mount their own, idiosyncratic co-consumption or co-production of various Web sites. These links then take on a narrative thread and energy of their own making. Users will increasingly seek to develop these editorial and expressive capacities with higher broadband speeds and the diffusion of easy ways to hyperlink content.

News organizations will win competitive advantage in the marketplace by publishing stories with embedded links. These will provide users with the flexibility and appearance of participation that they desire. Indeed, news organizations would be shrewd to begin implementing more interactive features and capacities, including more robust spaces on news sites that feature ongoing, real-time hyperlinked content contributed by users. These mechanisms would help to build and sustain market share.

News organizations should be ever attentive to disintermediation; that is, to being bypassed by new entrants, which employ current information technology more capably to provide election results as well as other news and information.

Surely, some of the synergies that took place among news organizations in the 2000 election will serve as models for future collaborations to cope with such new entrants. These collaborations constitute successful efforts by news organizations to brand Election Day news.

News organizations would be wise to understand the implications of election results as a commodity. The huge number of hits on the Florida Division of Elections site is but a portent of what is to come. As more and more secretary of state sites and election division sites become able to post real-time election returns and as the Internet reaches


more people at faster speeds, news seekers can readily go to a site that simply links to or aggregates the voting returns and thus bypasses print, broadcast, cable and Internet news sites entirely. This could easily take place as secretaries of states and election division authorities increasingly move toward common standards for Internet distribution of reporting electoral outcomes.

News organizations might well consider forming a consortium, this one Internet-based and focused on vote returns posted to official secretary of state or election division sites, to aggregate voting returns. Doing so would anticipate competition from new entrants for this time-sensitive and newsworthy data.

The emergence of at-home Internet voting will pose fresh challenges to the abilities of Internet news organizations to accurately report election results on the basis of exit polls. One potential strategy for news organizations is to develop techniques to sample the preferences and demographics of at-home voters.

In summary, the Internet creates many new opportunities for print, broadcast, cable and satellite news organizations to add value to their content and to reach more readers and views with election news and results. Sensible, targeted, efficient collaborations between—and synergies among—these organizations will enable greater accuracy of election news reporting at faster speeds, thereby realizing twin objectives of news reporting: getting the news out first and accurately. ■

*Hugh Carter Donahue is associate director, Information and Society Program, Annenberg Public Policy Center; Steven Schneider is editor of NetElection.org, and Kirsten Foot is a communications scholar at the Annenberg Public Policy Center in Philadelphia. The authors wish to acknowledge Elena Larsen, Masaki Hidaka, and Frances Mesa for their research.*

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# Preserving the Old While Adapting to What's New

In today's journalism, digital imaging tries to crowd out the still photograph.

By Kenny Irby

“Amid all of this technological razzle-dazzle, one thing remains the same,” observed Jens-Kristian Sjøgaard, renowned picture editor at Denmark's largest daily newspaper, *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*. “We must maintain our high ethical standards, mustn't we?”

As the 21st century dawns, it is fashionable to join in on the great debate about how to maintain the integrity and value of still photography as computer imaging tries to crowd it out in photojournalism. In fact, many contributors to critical thinking circles from the camps of reflective practitioners and practical scholars choose to write off the still photograph, declaring that its time is past. But I argue that now is not the time to write off such a meaningful form of communication.

For Mr. Sjøgaard and 16 of his colleagues representing Denmark, a country of five million people that until recently was known primarily for its fine quality furniture and craftsmanship, times are changing, too. This select delegation made up of photojournalists (photographers, editors and one Web producer) journeyed to St. Petersburg Beach, Florida, to study convergence in photojournalism in a seminar entitled, “Technology provides new possibilities and new challenges to photographers.”

In recent international photojournalism competitions, the Danes have done very well. And I know a bit about Denmark's journalism culture, having traveled there to teach and consult, by working with numerous visual journalists from this high quality-minded country, and studying the recent works of

fine Danish photographers such as Claus Bjørn Larsen, Bo Svane and Tine Harden. Right now, however, Danish newspapers are losing money. Their high standards, short work week, generous wages and production costs are to blame, according to Sjøgaard. “Indeed we are accustomed to working with the best materials,” he says.

When this Danish delegation arrived in central Florida, they found themselves in a region of our country that is a hotbed of convergence experimentation. The Danes visited three leaders in media convergence—the Sarasota Herald Tribune, the Orlando Sentinel, and the Tampa Tribune. Each of these organizations is jointly producing news coverage for a daily print publication, a 24-hour broadcast cycle, and a

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**Let me state this even more bluntly. For American photojournalists, film is dead. But photography, as a vital form of communication, is alive and it needs to be nurtured.**

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minute-to-minute Web site.

The Media General NewsCenter in Tampa, Florida offers a contemporary glimpse at what much of journalism might operate like during the 21st century. [See stories about the Tampa convergence experience on pages 25 and 52.] As one might expect, we saw many reporters loaded up with all different kinds of digital equipment. And this view unfolded in front of us with tour guides and translators speaking Romanian, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Japanese and Chinese, all in the same day, as various journalism groups toured the site.

In fact, photojournalists from around the world are keeping a watchful eye on the ways in which this organization is refining its focus and recreating the medium of photographic storytelling.

Dirck Halstead, Time's former White House photographer and founder of the Digital Journalist Web Site is often associated with photojournalism's epitaph: “Photojournalism, as we know it, is dead.” Halstead's position is rooted in the technical changes in camera capture systems and the movement toward full-motion video. Another view, held by Colin Jacobson, former magazine picture editor in the United Kingdom and instructor at Cardiff University School of Journalism, argues that what photojournalism needs instead is

renewal and reinvention. “It's not the spirit of photojournalist that is at fault here, but their lack of desire to renew and reinvent the medium,” Jacobson wrote in the introduction of the book, “The Best of Photojournalism 2000.”

The voices of Sjøgaard, Halstead, Jacobson and countless visual journalists seeking to preserve the ever-important craft of photographic storytelling all have something to contribute to critical discussion about photojournalism's future. To ensure that photographic storytelling remains a vital and respected form of communication, I believe that four aspects of it must be made priorities. Without urgent attention being paid, the medium is doomed.

- Content is key. Photojournalists as well as their publications must strive to produce and publish photographic reportage that is compelling and mean-



ingful. No longer should the aesthetic value supercede the journalistic value. Journalistic photographs, captured by courageous men and women who document life's visages—from the pedestrian to the extreme—deserve the right to be seen far more than do decorative page fillers or dressing material.

- An ethic of integrity is essential. Honesty and accuracy must remain the watermark of every image, along with the need for balance to be observed in our coverage. Balance serves as a great reminder that there are often multiple truths to be reported in our visual storytelling. Photojournalists must hold fast to the purpose of informing the

about the technical system by which images are stored, such as on a strip of film or a digital pc-card.

- Diversity is a process, rather than an experience. We live in an ever-changing world that is condensed by the vastness of the Internet and the speed of telecommunications. As Americans, we think nothing of traveling to far-flung regions of the globe and expect that photographers will deliver images that vicariously take us to places that we never see and seldom hear about. Increasingly, as journalists, we are more thoughtful about in what direction we point the camera and when do we worry that our images might reinforce

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**Photojournalists must harness the powers of change and use them to find ways to improve the quality of still photojournalism, extend their storytelling skills, and preserve the archival value of edited images for present and future use.**

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world about life's wide array of facets and encounters, but always with the intent to inform rather than to deceive and to help rather than to harm. Therefore, the photographer's quest need be one of the conscious observer who has thought through his or her journalistic purpose in advance, rather than acting like a pesky insect on the wall.

- Learners have an inheritance. In this era of swift technological advances, "technophobia" is a posture of ruin. Photojournalists must harness the powers of change and use them to find ways to improve the quality of still photojournalism, extend their storytelling skills, and preserve the archival value of edited images for present and future use. There is a tremendous need to be able to reacquire previously unpublished images. Somewhere in this great debate about technology, we must acknowledge the harsh reality that readers and viewers are aware of the power of graphic software applications to alter images. I believe that readers/viewers are more concerned about the value of accurate information in a photograph than they are

stereotypes. Yet we should also recognize that we have many miles to go before all of America is involved in the storytelling *about* America.

Therefore, as we seek to understand the world around us through photographs, we must refine our focus. Think of photographs that have attempted to capture the essence of, for example, a Broward County supervisor examining a "chad" left on a ballot to determine a voter's intent. Or the photograph showing little four-month-old Miracle Jackson's body, found in a plastic bag, being removed from the crime scene. Or the ability we had to witness the triumphant expression on a gold medal-winning athlete's face. Or the debate that ensued after a photograph showed the terror felt by Elian Gonzalez as Immigration and Naturalization Service agents with weapons rushed into his relatives' Little Havana home to seize him. Or when we peered into faces of those living in the Balkans, a place where there were so many heart-wrenching images of victims of senseless violence in Kosovo and beyond.

It is time now to strengthen photo-


journalism and ensure its credibility. We do this by holding true to our ethical responsibilities as journalists, while also embracing changes made possible by technological innovation. "The ethical issues are as real today as they were when I started in this business," says Alan Diaz, the Miami-based Associated Press photographer who captured Elian's terror.

Let me state this even more bluntly. For American photojournalists, film is dead. But photography, as a vital form of communication, is alive, and it needs to be nurtured. Of course, photojournalism is evolving during these ever-changing digital times. We live in a time of instantaneous transmission of visual imagery. Digital cameras, Adobe System's image management software program PhotoShop, and advance telecommunications devices like satellite dishes and digital cell phones make the world a very different place in which to produce journalism. The possibilities of digital delivery of images are limitless.

Photojournalists can learn a lot from the Danish approach. After a week of studying and measuring and fact-finding, the Danish team returned to their country with the intent of advancing and refining the quality of photographic storytelling, sharpening the focus of their work and recreating their approach.

In the wise words of historian Eric Hoffer, "In times of change...learners inherit the earth and the learned are wonderfully prepared for a world that no longer exists." ■

*Kenny Irby is visual journalism group leader at The Poynter Institute for Media Studies, where he teaches seminars and consults in areas of photojournalism, leadership, ethics and managing diversity. While a photo editor at Newsday, he contributed to three Pulitzer Prize-winning projects and was a photographer, picture editor, and deputy of photography.*

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# Wanted: a 21st Century Journalist

Drop the arrogance. Be interactive. Have technological savvy.

By Patti Breckenridge

**W**hat kind of journalist will thrive in the emerging 21st century? One more adept than the 20th century version at teamwork, technology, marketing, business economics, and the anthropology of communities. No longer is it enough for reporters and editors to have a flair for language, an insatiable need to know, and a religious devotion to the First Amendment.

A majority of newspaper readers consider journalists out of touch with mainstream America. They believe the media is ignorant and arrogant in its coverage of local issues. A 1998 newspaper industry self-study also showed that:

- Journalists make so many factual, spelling and grammatical mistakes that readers are skeptical about their newspapers' ability to get anything right.
- The public suspects journalists' personal biases play a strong role in determining which stories are covered, how they are written, and how prominently they are displayed in the paper.
- Members of the public who have had actual experience with the news process are the most critical of the media's credibility.

No wonder circulation figures have declined for nearly half a century.

This study by the American Society of Newspaper Editors led to an array of experiments to build reader trust. Two years later, though, concern over the future of the industry is still so deep that editors and publishers are undertaking the most extensive reader survey in history.

The results of that massive study won't be unveiled until April. But already there is discussion about the kind of journalist needed to help turn



Representatives from The Tampa Tribune, WFLA-TV and TBO.com reside on the multimedia assignment desk which is located on the second floor of the NewsCenter. The third floor (top) houses the newsroom for The Tampa Tribune. *Tampa Tribune staff photos by Allyn DiVito.*

things around and about the changes media organizations must make to attract and keep this new breed of journalist.

One thing is certain. Today's journalists must temper their arrogance. This is the interactive age, epitomized by the Internet. Newspapers will need

to move beyond their comfort zone as masters of monologue. Today's journalists must welcome calls from readers, promptly answer a steady stream of e-mail from the public [see pages 28-30], pay attention to focus groups, and spend more time getting to know everyday people rather than just those in the towers of power.

Journalists have already stopped assuming they know what is best for readers. Economics forced that shift. Many people are finding ways to stay informed without newspapers. To lure them back, journalists are striving to treat the public more and more as advisors, not just end users. "For their own survival, newspapers have had to become sensitive to what their communities want them to do," says Bangor Daily News Executive Editor Mark Woodward.

That extends beyond just listening more intently to the public. It means journalists must begin schooling themselves in the anthropology of community building. They must understand the nature of alienation and the need for bonding to provide relevance, depth

objectivity meant they should let their words speak for themselves rather than engage in any promotion. But the economics of survival have convinced some journalists that marketing can be another way to get their story out.

- They must develop products jointly with the business side to better meet the needs of both readers and advertisers. For decades, journalists feared that working with the "money-grubbing revenue producers" would result in pressure to favor advertisers in news coverage. Indeed, the credibility crisis at the Los Angeles Times earlier this year proved that can happen. But the best-led newspapers will figure out a way to make these partnerships work without compromising their ethics.
- They will be partnering with their counterparts in television, radio and the Internet to better serve their "shared" customers.

At our NewsCenter, built to facilitate this kind of convergence, a multi-media desk is the pulse of this brave

new world. Editors from The Tampa Tribune, WFLA-TV, Tampa Bay Online (TBO.com), and our Archive &

Research Center sit side by side, allowing them to make quick decisions about how best to share coverage of breaking news. When a massive fire broke out in our downtown entertainment district, Tribune reporters at the scene phoned in commentary as WFLA went live with the story. In turn, WFLA video was fed to TBO.com. An Internet editor helped gather additional information online that provided depth for the Tribune's stories. An A & R researcher combed years of clips to provide new angles as each medium's deadline approached. [A WFLA reporter writes about her experience filing stories across these various media on page 52.]

The notion of newspaper reporters working regularly with "those shallow

people" in TV news or TV reporters working with "those boring people" in the press would have been unthinkable even 10 years ago. Now it's happening here, and it's the wave of the future everywhere, as different media learn to recognize and leverage each other's strengths to create greater value for the customer.

For the print journalist, this means learning new skills (talking to a camera), new language (voice-overs and interrupt-for-broadcast earpieces), and making decisions based on how customers need information rather than on when the presses next roll. TV journalists face similar challenges as they, too, learn a new language (pagination, maestro sessions, ledes), and as they write for a medium in which words are more important than images.

Those who work in isolation in the 21st century will fail, whether it is news organizations or individual journalists. So, too, will those who ignore the need to master a wider range of tools. No longer are typewriters, notepads and tape recorders enough. Journalists need to know how to use pagination workstations, spreadsheet and database software for computer-assisted reporting, mapping programs for graphic packages and tools needed to partner with TV, radio and the Internet.

Where will newspapers find this new kind of journalist? Can they afford this multi-dimensional talent? Will they be able to keep this new breed once they find it? These are tough questions for publishers, editors and recruiters.

Many observers believe newspapers have to do some changing of their own before expecting to attract or keep the ideal journalist of the 21st century. First and foremost, newspapers must become innovators themselves. Historically, the newsroom culture has been downright cynical about change. "Most organizations are not willing to take a risk," says Karen Dunlap, the dean at the Poynter Institute. "They're not willing to applaud the effort. If it fails a little bit, there's a much greater inclination to say, 'What the hell was *that?*,' the cynical remarks, the critical remarks."

In other words, the very arrogance that alienates readers alienates the true

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## Those who work in isolation in the 21st century will fail, whether it is news organizations or individual journalists.

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and analysis in a time-starved, information-soaked, solution-craving society. We are, after all, social animals. Newspapers must feed more than our intellect. They also must feed our hearts and souls.

Today's journalists must be team players in another sense as well. Not only must they work more closely with their communities. They can no longer hide in their newsrooms when they are in the office.

- They must partner with their brethren in marketing to help tell their own story, something that in the past has been viewed as selfish, as boorish, even unethical. Reporters have long thought that the canon of

innovators in newsrooms. “Almost every newspaper employee has seen some poor soul tentatively throw out an idea and have it ripped to shreds,” says Sharyn Wizda, features editor at the Austin American-Statesman. “The attempt to do something different is rarely rewarded on its own if the end result isn’t a blockbuster; because folks are too busy pointing out *what went wrong*.”

This general lack of respect for people explains a lot of what is wrong with newspapers, according to trainer and consultant Beverly Kaye, coauthor of the new book “Love ‘Em or Lose ‘Em: Getting Good People to Stay.” “It is a ‘buyer’s market’ where the best journalists have their pick of where to go,” Kaye says. “And you know, what people are asking for is really so simple. They’re saying, ‘Recognize me. Praise me. Ask me what I want to do.’”

Newspapers also must make greater strides in providing training for their journalists. This not only is key to attracting the best professionals; it’s essential to keeping them. And it’s essential to creating the kind of journalism that today’s Americans want and expect. “If newspapers think they do enough training, we are completely out of touch,” says Bill Ostendorf, managing editor of visuals at the Providence Journal. “Editors have discovered this is part of the credibility problem.” Errors occur because reporters know too little about the subjects they cover. More than half of journalists received fewer than 20 hours a year of training, according to a 1998 study by The Poynter Institute.

Salaries are a problem as well, especially if newspapers want to attract an even more sophisticated brand of journalist. The pay for reporters and editors is on par with nurses, high school teachers, firefighters and telephone line installers, according to the September issue of American Journalism Review (AJR). It doesn’t come close to that of lawyers, engineers, airline pilots, and other professional groups. Gains made in previous years have slowed. Experienced newspaper reporters averaged two percent increases this year, “the worst raises have been in at least five years,” according to AJR.



Editors from the various media working together at the Tampa NewsCenter.

Compensation will become particularly tricky in a converged world. When a newspaper reporter covers a story for TV and online as well, should they be paid more than those who work in only one medium? Different models are being explored at this stage. The most common arrangement, and the one we use at the Tribune, is this: Convergence duties are considered part of the job, but no one is expected to work longer hours. If a reporter files a report to Tampa Bay Online, participates in a two-minute talk-back with an anchor during a WFLA broadcast, and then writes a story for the next day’s Tribune, they simply spend less time on the newspaper that day, perhaps postponing work on another story.

The trickiest questions may arise with photographers. Tribune photographers are beginning to carry video cameras, and by next year WFLA photographers will use digital cameras. So they will be producing images for each other’s organization and for TBO.com. Pay and perks for those two groups are different at this point. Will there need to be some changes? Probably.

One last issue: The larger the newspaper, the greater the likelihood that a majority of its journalists come from out of state. To get the best they can afford, newspapers recruit nationally.

That makes bonding with the community a daunting task for journalists. In an era when connecting with readers is more important than ever, newspapers must devise ways to help new hires forge those connections quickly.

The industry need not wait for the April results of its massive reader survey to begin making changes essential to regaining the public’s trust.

- The first target should be newsroom arrogance. Better leadership and more careful hiring is the answer.
- The second target should be newsroom ignorance. Better training is the answer.
- The third target should be the salary structure. It will be next to impossible to hire and keep the kind of journalist needed to reestablish credibility with readers without better pay and better perks. ■

*Patti Breckenridge is assistant managing editor for organizational development at The Tampa Tribune. She headed the Tribune’s online publishing group and, as the paper’s first training and recruiting manager, developed the nation’s largest newsroom training program.*

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## Is Including E-Mail Addresses in Reporters' Bylines a Good Idea?

*At The Miami Herald, the jury of journalists is still deliberating.*

By Mark Seibel

More than a year after The Miami Herald added the individual e-mail addresses of its reporters to their bylines, the verdict is decidedly mixed on whether e-mail contact with the public is useful or disruptive.

There are the testimonials: Investigative reporter Manny Garcia calls e-mail "invaluable," and cites a number of tips that helped him flesh out stories on government corruption. So does Joe Tanfani, also a member of the I-team, who says many useful follow-up ideas come in after one of his stories is published. Reporter Luisa Yanez is another enthusiast: "On several occasions, I've gotten an e-mail that has helped me follow a big story. I did a story on a state senator's funny business and someone e-mailed me more examples of his shenanigans. And I did a story on an embalmer and someone who was suing him e-mailed me as well."

But even the fans acknowledge that the useful tip is the exception. The bulk of e-mails tend toward the opinionated, not the factual, and a depressingly high number of those are personal attacks on the reporter—attacks that in former times might have been directed to the editor, if the reader even wanted to have his opinion known. Now, with the ease of e-mail, not only can anyone's least-thought-out view be expressed instantaneously, but with the relative anonymity of the Internet it can be done in the most scurrilous language possible.

That's something any editor should know before deciding to invite direct e-mail communication with reporters. Your reporters are going to find that much, if not most, of what they receive lacks civility, let alone utility. And it will all require time to answer, or even to ignore. "It was a rescue. Not a raid. Moron," read one reader's e-mail to reporter Carol Rosenberg in response to a story she wrote about the Immigra-

tion and Naturalization Service's action taking Elian Gonzalez from the home of his Miami relatives and reuniting him with his father.

The final word captures the tone of much of the electronic correspondence Rosenberg received during the Elian controversy, so much so that she developed a program that automatically responded to such e-mails by suggesting the sender append his name and address and send the message to the editorial page for publication. Few, if any, did.

I can hear some saying, So what? Reporters are, or should be, a tough lot. Sticks and stones may break your bones but words will never hurt you. Some would even argue that it is good for reporters to know what readers think of their work. I'll admit some sympathy for that position.

But the daily exposure to electronic insults, screeds that unfortunately they can't avoid because they pop up on the screen as soon as the reporter signs on, in fact takes a toll. I have seen otherwise good reporters begin shying away from critical stories because of the angry e-mail they've received. No one, not even a reporter, enjoys being assaulted verbally, and e-mail assaults not only are inescapable—you can't hang up on the insulting e-mailer—but they are encouraged by your employer.

There's another downside to soliciting e-mail comments direct to reporters: the amount of time required to deal with them. That's what troubles reporter Frances Robles, who received her share of lowbrow commentary during the Elian Gonzalez case. One example: After she wrote a piece on demonstrators outside the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, an e-mailer sent this: "The burning question, however, for me is: do the non-Miami Cubans also all have fat asses?"

"The vast majority of people who take the time to write are people with strong, strong, strong opinions," Robles notes. "If you respond with insight, it triggers a letter-writing volley that nobody has time for. It you write back something very short, people are offended. One reader whose e-mail I ignored sent me a snippy note months later asking: Why do you bother putting your e-mail in the paper if you're not going to write back? I had to admit: She had a good point."

But how much time should a reporter spend each day dealing with e-mail? Alfonso Chardy, who wrote most of the stories that won the Herald a Pulitzer Prize for the Iran-contra scandal back in the pre-e-mail era, guesses he gets between 15 and 20 e-mails a day. The problem is not the content—most are innocuous—but the hour or so he spends opening them, figuring out what if any response he needs to send, and then disposing of them. He sighs, "It's just like getting an additional 20 phone calls a day. There's nothing wrong with it. But it just adds to your work."

The key, of course, is whether the work is worth it. There's no denying that e-mail is a useful tool. I routinely beg PR people to get rid of their fax machines and send their releases by e-mail. For reporters, e-mail can provide access to sources who otherwise might be inaccessible—our political reporter regularly exchanges e-mails with the governor, who otherwise would be unavailable for phone calls.

But as for unsolicited e-mails? Well, most reporters would find it more useful to spend an extra hour on the street. ■

*Mark Seibel is assistant managing editor at The Miami Herald and a 1992 Nieman Fellow.*



## Responding to E-Mail Is an Unrealistic Expectation

*At The Courier-Journal, a columnist sends back postcards.*

By Betty Bayé

Increasingly, newspapers are tagging columns, articles and editorials with phone numbers and e-mail addresses to help readers contact reporters and other writers. And that's great—at least on the surface.

The problem is: Just when are reporters and writers supposed to engage personally any and all who wish to debate, condemn or (God forbid) even praise? There are just 24 hours to a day, at least six to eight of which, as a rule, are devoted to sleeping. Even ink-stained wretches are entitled to a couple of hours a day to tend to family matters or to doing something that isn't more work.

Moreover, most journalists don't have clerical assistance, and their days, with some variations, go pretty much like this: They arrive in the newsroom, grab a cup of coffee, read the wires and newspapers, meet with editors, get assignments, read background materials, and go out to cover events. They eat lunch (often at their desks), do phone interviews and additional research to double-check sources for accuracy, write stories, wait for stories to be edited (and, if the editor isn't satisfied, re-write or do additional reporting), and plan for the next assignment.

While it's fabulous public relations for newspapers to pretend that they're part of an interactive medium, they're really not, at least not in terms of realistically being able to provide the sort of one-on-one attention implicitly promised to readers when they see writers' e-mail addresses or phone numbers at the end of stories. Such interaction is best accomplished by the

likes of C-SPAN and radio and TV call-in shows, which are set up to be interactive.

Finally, it's not as if readers, disgruntled or otherwise, lack forums for airing their views. Many newspapers have ombudsmen who are intermediaries between the newsroom and the public. They're supposed to spend time with individual readers and then convey the public's concerns to the newsroom, often meeting with and inter-

dorsements are more likely to be published than ones that praise us.

I believe that it's worse than not responding to the public at all to encourage people to write detailed, thoughtful e-mails and letters to individual reporters and writers with the expectation that they will receive something similar in return. As a columnist, I receive quite a bit of mail. I try to get back to as many people as I can. But more often than not, I can do no better

than send out printed postcards that carry my column photo and convey thanks to the reader for taking time to write and an apology for my inability to respond in depth. I do sign the postcards.

It's not ideal. In the end, I am convinced that people get much more mileage writing a letter to the editor than waiting days and even weeks to hear

from me—and then only getting a postcard, which realistically is the best that I can do. And letters to the editor do, in fact, make a significant impact on the reporter or writer.

Cyberspace is a wonderful invention, but newspapers really shouldn't promise more than they can deliver, especially when doing so requires even more from the people who, in addition to traditional reporting and writing, are also now having to meet new expectations created by the computer revolution. ■

*Betty Winston Bayé, a 1991 Nieman Fellow, is editorial writer and columnist at The Courier-Journal in Louisville, Kentucky. This year her book, "Blackbird," was published by August Press.*

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**While it's fabulous public relations for newspapers to pretend that they're part of an interactive medium, they're really not, at least not in terms of realistically being able to provide the sort of one-on-one attention implicitly promised to readers when they see writers' e-mail addresses or phone numbers at the end of stories.**

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viewing individual editors and writers for explanations about why and how a particular story was written and tracking the ways in which errors were made.

At my newspaper in Louisville, Kentucky, The Courier-Journal's ombudsman—who is a woman, but I am simply not going to call her an "ombudsperson"—writes a regular column published most Sundays, the day of highest circulation, in which she informs the public about the process and reasoning behind certain newsroom decisions. She may conclude that the wrong call was made.

Meanwhile, most newspapers have Letters to the Editor sections in which, at no cost, readers may express their views. At The Courier-Journal, as I suspect at many other papers, letters critical of our editorials and political en-



## Interactivity—Via E-Mail—Is Just What Journalism Needs

*At The Christian Science Monitor, reporters welcome contact with readers.*

By Tom Regan

It's time we were brutally honest with ourselves. Journalists hate the idea of regular contact with readers/listeners/viewers. Oh, we want them to interact with us enough to keep our papers in print or our stations on the air. But we don't like them, well, talking to us. We would just prefer that they allow us to do stories about them and their lives and then move on. We want to tell them what to think, or what the news is, but we're not crazy about the idea of them giving us feedback about our choices.

But I'm here to tell you that interactivity is for real. And it's the best thing to happen to journalism in a long, long time. At a conference in Camden, Maine, called "Being Human in the Digital Age," one of the speakers was John Perry Barlow, cofounder of the Electronic Freedom Foundation and an outspoken defender of the First Amendment in all its manifestations. Barlow believes that we are entering the era of the relationship-based economy. The period of one-to-many production is ending and the time for one-to-one (or peer-to-peer as some

call it) production is beginning. Napster, the software that allows one user to share music with another or many other users, is an example of peer-to-peer production.

For many of us in journalism, this new paradigm will require that we rethink the definition of our jobs. Interactivity, or regular interaction with the people who read/watch/listen to us, will become a key part of what every reporter will do.

Some reporters will want constant interaction, such as writers like Jon Katz or Steve Outing, whose work depends on constantly conversing with the people who read them. Other reporters will set up intelligent filters, so that they'll get more of the mail that's important to them to answer and less spam. An interim step would be for media outlets to hire an e-mail administrator, who would screen all e-mail. Most e-mail could be dealt with quickly, with an e-mail template answer. Important e-mail that should be responded to by the actual reporter would be sent to the appropriate party.

We've used a combination of these

methods for several years at the Monitor. Almost all staff, including senior editors, have their e-mail addresses on the Web site, including all stories. We've also got a "customer service response" person who acts very much like the filter mentioned above. In the three years we've been doing this, we've not had a single reporter ask to have their e-mail address removed. In fact, the only time we hear from reporters is when there are problems and they are not getting e-mail from readers.

Hosting forums, or taking part in event-like chats, will also become a regular part of every reporter's job. The Washington Post's Online Live forum is an excellent example of this. But as the technology changes, so will the ways we interact. Several sites are starting to use voice chats. Video chats are about two to three years away.

The reason I believe so strongly in interactivity is that I believe it will help remove the wall that exists between media and their audience. This is particularly true for newspapers, the medium the stands to gain the most from this kind of interactivity and contact. ■

### E-Mail Deluge

... A number of Web sites now make it very easy for activists to create e-mail campaigns quickly and Web petitions for little or no money. And many of these sites are optimized for quickstarts on late-breaking issues, making them ideal for instant controversies like the impeachment of a president, the deportation of Elian Gonzalez, or a contested presidential election.

The wide circulation of "media lists," with personal e-mail addresses of prominent newspaper editors and television news directors, has extended the edges of the revolution directly into the media's e-mail in-boxes.

Michael Cooke, editor in chief of the Chicago Sun-Times, has watched the number of e-mails he receives "balloon" since shortly after Election Day. On Monday, he received about 1,450 e-mails, most of them urging him to oppose any "re-votes" in Florida. At least that's what Cooke said, based on some sampling.

"Basically, I just delete them," he said. "I scroll through the list looking for my boss's name. If I don't see his name in the 'from' box, I don't even look at it.

"This is the first time I've been spammed like this, and it's annoying.

Now instead of going out to lunch, I just sit there deleting e-mails."

The [Boston] Globe's editor, Matthew V. Storin, reports a similar deluge. Between Friday afternoon and Monday evening, he received 2,193 e-mails, the vast majority related to the voting in Florida. Later, he gave an update: Between 11 p.m. Monday and 10:40 a.m. yesterday he received 310 e-mails.... ■

*Excerpted from a story by D.C. Denison, The Boston Globe, November 15, 2000. Reprinted by permission of the Globe.*

# On the Web, It's Survival of the Biggest

'The real issue is not about the quality of journalism, but the business of media.'

By Mark Sauter

If start-ups ran on journalism awards rather than venture capital, APB Online would have been a business success. But they don't and it wasn't. Instead, one of the most respected news organizations to launch on the Internet went bankrupt. Shareholders wiped out. Creditors largely unpaid. Employees laid off. Millions of dollars lost. A poster child for the dot-com crash.

Some in the press have called the trials of APB a test of whether quality journalism can survive on the Internet. They're missing the point. The real issue is not about the quality of journalism, but the business of media. At hand is whether the Internet can midwife significant, stand-alone journalistic institutions. The Web—the best medium ever invented for the transmission of news and information—already offers plenty of fine journalism and always will, from niche “zines” to the online extensions of major networks and newspapers. But can new mass media players—companies started outside of and in competition with the old media's giants—be born online? Can and will the future equivalents of today's CNN's, ESPN's and Wall Street Journals gallop in from the digital frontier, rising as true national brands above the flotsam and cacophony of the million-channel medium?

In the spring and summer of 1998, my two cofounders (both ex-investment bankers) and I set out to join the army of online pioneers trying to answer those questions in the affirmative. Marshall Davidson, our CEO, had

been trying to launch a television network for crime, justice and safety—a sort of ESPN for this hugely popular genre—on cable. But the Internet's emergence as a popular medium suggested such an endeavor might now be possible without the interference (and onerous financial demands) of the cable operators, networks, newspaper chains, and other traditional gatekeepers. We decided to forsake cable, at least for the time being, and strike out on the Web.



In a section of the APBnews.com newsroom, Mubashar Iqbal, APBnews.com's chief technical officer, works on a server problem.

*Photo by Hoag Levins.*

Our plan was simple and consistent with the launch of many earlier media brands: develop popular content, use it to obtain distribution, win a large audience, and then “monetize” our visitors (in APB's case, through sponsorships, e-commerce, syndication and other revenue lines). At the same time, we would work to spread APB offline, into television, magazines and other media outlets, using them to acquire revenue and drive traffic back to the

Web site. As with the launch of many well-known cable networks and magazines, this plan assumed a multi-year “burn to break even,” in which investors would fund APB until the company turned profitable. But unlike those earlier launches, often paid for in large part by parent media companies of some financial patience, APB had no parent. We turned instead to other sources of capital.

Back in 1998 and 1999, many venture capitalists and fund managers were taking a new interest in journalism. Some of these investors might never have considered backing the launch of old media properties, with their long waits for profitability, relatively modest valuations, and expensive hordes of pesky journalists (or “content creators,” as they're now sometimes known). In contrast, the new wave of online media companies seemed capable of going public fast at substantial valuations. Part of it was due to business efficiencies the Web appeared to offer, from reducing the cost of “publishing” to providing an immediate worldwide audience. The rest of the attraction was simpler—no matter the underlying logic. The stock market was assigning unprecedented valuations to Internet companies. The bigger the “space” (the niche or potential market), the better.

All of this attracted many sophisticated investors eager to participate in the APB business plan. One well-regarded firm—one of the best run and most responsible we encountered—invested more than one million dollars in APB without meeting anyone from



the company in person. In the end, we were offered more money than we could accept under our business plan.

And off we went. No wild parties, fancy offices or lavish salaries—just a detailed business plan and plenty of seven-day weeks. From the beginning, APB was built upon a bedrock of journalist excellence, not because the co-founders believed in its social value (although we did), but because strong journalism was necessary for business reasons. APB's content had to be of unquestioned quality for us to make deals with the major Internet portals, television networks, and print publications. This was especially true given our genre, which was prone to sensationalism, and our launch medium, which was viewed with suspicion by many in old media.

We proceeded to hire (in the early days at the local Starbucks, since we had no office) a superb team of journalists with experience everywhere from CNN to The New York Times. They included: Hoag Levins, former executive editor of Editor & Publisher magazine and its Web site; Karl Idsvoog, television investigative journalist and 1983 Nieman Fellow; Syd Schanberg, legendary reporter and columnist; Bob Port, former AP investigative editor; Michele Riordon-Read, ex-ABC News producer, and many more.

With ink in their blood and keyboards at their fingers, the APB crew set out to apply the ethics of the old media to the technological promise of the new, taking advantage of the breadth, depth and interactivity of the Web to pursue enterprise journalism in new ways. For example, the day Frank Sinatra's voluminous FBI file was released, APB put it online live in its entirety, along with numerous stories outlining its context and significance. We rated the crime risk around the campuses of all 1,497 American four-year colleges, supported by our reporting, and the full, unexpurgated responses of all colleges that offered them. We sued the federal judiciary to get financial disclosure reports for judges onto the Internet—part of APB's unique public records effort, which involved thousands of Freedom of Information Act and other data requests.

## Postmortem Awards for APBnews.com

In November, when nominations for the first Online Journalism Awards were announced, APBnews.com had four, the most of any Web site. These nominations came despite the site's owners declaring bankruptcy in the summer. In number of nominations, APBnews.com beat out ongoing news sites such as CNET's News.com, salon.com, businessweek.com and WSJ.com. APBnews.com received nominations for its breaking news and its creative use of the medium. These awards are co-sponsored by the Online Journalism Association and the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. ■

This sort of work won numerous awards for APB Online, including the first Society of Professional Journalists SDX Award to a stand-alone Web site, the first Scripps Howard Foundation award to an Internet news company, an Investigative Reporters and Editors special citation, and the National Press Club Award for best journalism site. Brill's Content called us one of the top news sites on the Web.

The result: APB constructed one of the best distribution networks of any Internet start-up. Our stories ran on AOL, MSNBC.com and Yahoo!. They were seen in Reader's Digest and heard on radio stations across the country. We had pending agreements to air APB reports on network, local and syndicated television. An APB line of books from a major publisher was planned. Such deals helped APB capture a large and loyal audience, often more than one million unique users a month, in the top ranks of online news sites.

By early 2000, it was time to raise more money to continue pursuing the plan. Even a cable television network, the original impetus for the idea, seemed possible. But then came April 2000. They called it the Nasdaq crash, the hours when the bloated values of Internet stocks began to nosedive. Many inside the industry, including us, had always believed those valuations would come down sooner or later. But few

imagined they would drop so far, so fast. Back in 1998 and 1999, APB's founders anticipated that capital for our business might one day become more expensive. But we never conceived it would disappear altogether. Yet that's what happened.

The fund managers, once raring to back new media brands, were now hunkered down, their portfolios tumbling. Two giant media companies that had once shown interest in being our partner backed away, their own Internet properties hemorrhaging value. In a few weeks, it all began to fall apart. Suddenly no one was interested in a long "burn to break even." Instead they wanted a "clear and quick path to profitability." APB did not have one. And the company was almost out of money.

As they say on the street, we were "undercapitalized" for this new market reality. Our plan to focus more on gaining audience than generating revenue in the early going was now out of favor and there wasn't the time or cash to change gears. The summer of 2000 was the longest of my life. Unable to raise capital, we filed for bankruptcy. In early 2000, APB had been valued at \$104 million. In September of that year, the company's assets were sold for \$575,000. Others can debate how much of APB's fate was due to the decisions and skills of its management. But no one can dispute that in large part, what the market had given in 1998 and 1999, it took away in 2000.

Some of APB's managers decided to stay on with the new owners (SafetyTips.com) hoping the financial climate would change and the site, its expenses slashed, could survive long enough to find funding, albeit as a much more modest business. "I've always believed that good journalism is good business. Wherever I've worked, delivering great content has built both the ratings and the brand. But you can't build either quickly. If USA Today had had our budget, it would have been out of business in six months," said Idsvoog, APB's vice president.

Hoag Levins, APB's executive editor, believes the online journalism model will be proved over the next several years, as increasing household access and usage take the Web to a

“flash” point of consumer and advertiser acceptance. “Savvy investors are buying into the ownership of a piece of that ‘flash’ when it occurs. In the context of this unavoidable reality, Wall Street’s sudden demand for guaranteed Web site profits next quarter is as shortsighted as it is ridiculous,” Levins said.

As I write this in the fall of 2000, that “flash” seems far off as the valuations of online media companies continue to slip. CNET and SportsLine, two fine Internet brands that went public before the crash, have watched their market caps plunge. Salon, FOXNews.com and others have been laying off staff. TheStreet.com, according to Business Week Online, has seen its market capitalization drop to some \$84 million, even though it has \$88 million in cash on hand. In effect, the market is assigning no—or negative—value to the underlying business. Even The New York Times has withdrawn its plans for a tracking stock to cover its digital-media properties.

Hoag Levins is probably right. This drought won’t last forever. Online advertising continues to grow, with more

and more major corporations spending large amounts of money on the Web. But most of that money is concentrated on the Internet’s top destinations, which among the news sites means those belonging to the offline media giants. Sooner or later, the stock market’s appetite for Internet companies, once ludicrously large and now nonsensically nonexistent, will achieve some sort of equilibrium—especially for the New York Timeses and MSNBC.coms of the world. But that turnaround will take time and may never fully reach the independent players.


I don’t have the heart to wait. When APB was sold, I declined an offer to stay on. I’m now the chief operating officer of Parlo Inc. and its Web site [www.parlo.com](http://www.parlo.com), a multimedia e-learning company that provides language education and cultural information to customers around the world. Unlike APB, Parlo doesn’t have to prove the need for its services—the worldwide demand for language instruction is huge and growing among consumers, institutions and businesses. Unlike APB, Parlo need not demonstrate that cus-

tomers will pay for these services—they already do. And importantly, unlike APB, Parlo can ignore the capital market’s current blind pessimism about online journalism.

Nowadays, I go to work happy. Certainly there are mornings when I miss the adrenaline of a breaking story, the fascination of going through a newly declassified FBI file, or the feedback from a visitor who was made safer by information on the APBnews.com site.

Maybe I’ll try it again sometime. Perhaps there will come a day when it makes sense to launch a major new journalism brand online. But for me at least, it probably won’t be anytime soon. ■

*Mark Sauter spent most of his journalism career as an investigative reporter on national and local television and also worked in print, radio and books. He was cofounder, chief operating officer, and executive vice president/content of APB Online Inc.*

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## Merging Media to Create an Interactive Market

New strategies are used to fund the expensive business of newsgathering.

*Jack Fuller, president of Tribune Publishing Company, addressed a group of editors and publishers in August 2000. With the purchase of Times Mirror, Tribune Company now owns newspapers and TV stations in the nation’s three top markets. Fuller spoke about developing integrated multimedia approaches to newsgathering and distribution. An excerpt follow.*

**W**e are now positioned to take a multimedia approach in the top three markets of the country. Moreover, we can take greater advantage of the national advertising

boom, offering advertisers large numbers of very high-demographic readers in the three biggest cities in the country.

In the interactive market, we now have the spine of a national network. This should permit us to deal more effectively with whatever threats and opportunities arise. Tribune Interactive should now be a much more attractive candidate for partnership with any firm hoping to get a foothold on an audience. And we should be far more attractive to the national advertisers that are the biggest players in the Internet.

Among all the strategic advantages of the Times Mirror deal, the newspaper-television combination has been

the most novel. Let me tell you a little bit about why we think it is important.

Ever since becoming editor of the Chicago Tribune I have been focused on trying to figure out what it will take to preserve and strengthen our great newspapers in the new century. Since I started working as a reporter 36 years ago and only became involved in the business side seven years ago, I confess that I came at the question with a primary commitment to the public service aspect of our work. Long before ever thinking about national consolidation, I began wondering how to build a stronger foundation of financial support locally for the expensive business of newsgathering. It has seemed clear for a long time that, whether we like it

or not, in a fragmenting world there will be increasing pressure to reduce costs. Now a lot of editorial costs have turned out to be eminently reducible, without affecting quality (which I define as how well we fulfill our social mission). But we all know of many newspapers that have reduced editorial costs so much that they are hollow imitations of their former selves.

I know that there is a very energetic belief within the journalistic community to the effect that the way to avoid this kind of anorexia is simply for companies to be less greedy. I don't think that line of argument is very useful. In fact, it is a form of denial. The pressure on costs results from the public market's demand for financial results. You can call that greed, or you can simply call it the force of a dynamic marketplace. And the forces aren't going to abate. As media fragment, all forms of journalism will be squeezed.

The best way to continue doing quality journalism in this kind of environment, it seems to me, is to spread newsgathering costs over multiple distribution platforms with multiple revenue sources and multiple audiences. In plain language, that means presenting our journalism to audiences larger than we can get in the ink-on-paper newspaper by using television, radio and the Internet.

There is another reason we have worked so hard to build a multimedia orientation in Tribune newspapers. With bandwidth exploding, soon the Internet will blow through the distinctions between print and television, just as it is beginning to blow through the distinctions between print and radio. We're going to need to employ people and deploy systems capable of creating news reports with all the elements: text, graphics, audio and video actualities. The companies that have the raw materials and the skills to create multimedia products will be best able to ride the waves of change. The best raw material is still a daily newspaper, with its enormous newsgathering ability. But video and audio content and the talent for video and audio presentation are also necessary.

Not everyone at Tribune agrees with me, but I can see a day when we will

produce the newspaper, the TV news show, radio news and Internet news services out of a single newsroom. Of course, there will be specialists in each medium. But certain core functions will be common and not redundant.



*Photo of Jack Fuller courtesy of the Chicago Tribune©.*

This will give us a cost advantage over our competition. ...[W]e won't waste money on duplicated effort and overhead and will be able to concentrate our resources on newsgathering, writing and editing.

Because Tribune Company's ownership of the Chicago Tribune, WGN-TV and WGN Radio predated the federal rule against cross-ownership, we have had decades to experiment with this concept. The history has been mixed. At first, the relationship between the newspaper and radio was very close. Radio newscasts originated from the Chicago Tribune newsroom. The call letters of the station, WGN, stood for World's Greatest Newspaper, which was then the Tribune's modest motto. In the early days of television, WGN-TV began in a similar fashion. My father was a journalist for the Chicago Tribune most of his career, and I can remember when I was a boy watching with less than complete fascination as his boss, the financial editor, reported

on the business scene on his WGN-TV show once a week.

Over time each medium drifted away from the newspaper as it established its own unique identity, sort of the way our Internet offerings are today having to strike off on their own. Moreover, as the federal government began to look with more and more hostility at cross-ownership situations, the lawyers began telling us that to preserve our grandfathered status, the best thing was to put up big stone walls between the newspaper, radio and TV.

So it has really only been during the last decade that we began to rekindle the relationship between the newspaper and broadcast. In both Chicago and Orlando, the development of all-news cable stations in which the newspaper was a key partner helped stimulate the experimentation. At the time we started CLTV—which is a kind of local CNN in the Chicago metropolitan area—the idea of print and television inhabiting the same space, let alone working intimately together, was thought to be a heresy on both sides. Once we got deep into the planning, we realized that it was important to protect the sense of identity of both the print and the television journalists because it turned out they were afraid of each other. The young TV reporters saw all these seasoned print journalists who might try to lord it over them. The print journalists saw one more step in TV's incursion into their world. In effect, we had to solve the problem of getting the lions to lie down with the lambs by first recognizing that each side thought the other was the lion.

One powerful factor worked in our favor. And my first hint of it came one evening when my wife and I were seated at a dinner party across from Thea Flaum, who had been the original producer of the Siskel and Ebert Show. We were just getting ready to go on the air with CLTV at the time, and Thea was curious about how everything was going. I told her that my biggest concern was how the newspaper reporters would take to the idea of being on TV. "Oh, don't worry about that," Thea said. "Vanity is your friend."

Frankly, we have not had great difficulties in getting TV and print journal-

ists to work together.... WGN's meteorologist—by far the best and most sophisticated in the city—began putting out the newspaper's weather page, which has been an enormous hit with barometer junkies.

What hasn't happened yet is the development of a common newsroom serving any of our operations in Chicago. It is still, I think, too soon for that. Certain technological developments—such as digital cameras that can produce both video and still shots of high enough quality to reproduce well in the newspaper—need to ripen to help drive us closer together. Fragmentation has to proceed, too, until the writing is on the wall. But the time will come. I am pretty sure it will come.

The changes I've been talking about are, of course, unsettling. And every one of them begets a new set of questions—ethical questions, if you will—that relate to the very purposes of journalism. I believe it is absolutely necessary in such times that newspaper enterprises have a very solid grounding in the fundamentals of journalism values. They are going to need to go back to these fundamentals time and again to resolve new issues. But they are also going to need to feel the earth solid under their feet if they are going to be

confident and bold enough to adapt successfully to the radically evolving information environment.

The need for grounding in the fundamentals, I believe, goes way beyond the editorial staff. The whole organization should understand the unique nature of our business, the special responsibilities it places on us. When I visited for the first time with the editorial staff of the Los Angeles Times, someone asked me whether I was going to rebuild the wall between the editorial and the business sides of the newspaper. I took a deep breath and told them what I believe: that I don't like walls. It's a lousy metaphor. Walls increase the possibility of stupid things happening behind them. Better for there to be a lot of people in the conversation, including editors who have enough business sophistication to participate fully, because this makes it a lot more likely that somebody will speak up and tie a can to a bad idea. That said, I went on, at Tribune we have a kind of a simple-minded rule: When there's a debate among the departments about what goes in the editorial columns of the newspaper, the editor wins.

That went over pretty well, but afterwards I realized that I hadn't said everything I might have. It isn't just the

confidence that editors control the editorial content that gives a newspaper strong values. What really builds great papers is when everyone in them understands "the truth discipline" and why it is absolutely essential to live by it every day.

We're trying to deepen that understanding at Tribune. We have started formal programs to do so. I believe that if journalistic principals had been generally understood at the Los Angeles Times over the past several years I wouldn't be here talking to you about the acquisition. That's pretty strong evidence that news values are at the sweet spot. The social obligation of the newspaper, which gives rise to the duty to disclose conflicts of interest and tell the truth despite them, is not in conflict with the company's fiduciary duty; it's part of it. ■

*Jack Fuller became president of Tribune Publishing Company in 1997. As editor of the Tribune's editorial page, he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1986 and, in 1989, he became editor of the paper and later publisher and chief executive officer. He is the author of "News Values: Ideas for an Information Age."*

## Web Journalism Crosses Many Traditional Lines

'Why shouldn't journalists help create a new model for financing our work?'

By David Weir

As journalists have migrated to the Web in recent years, we've tried to bring our traditional working values with us.

- Do original work; advance the story.
- Be timely and relevant.
- Be accurate; supply attribution.
- Be fair; remain independent; try to understand all sides.
- Maintain confidentiality; protect sources.
- Penetrate secrecy; keep power accountable.

This is just a partial list, of course, and not necessarily representative. But what has been intriguing to me has been how these and similar values are faring in the new interactive media.

The record is decidedly mixed.

One of the first things many journalists notice when they start working online is that somehow the tables have been turned. We have long believed we have a broad mandate to act as the "fourth estate"—as a watchdog on the powerful institutions of government and the private sector. On the Web,

however, it is often we who seem to be under scrutiny.

A case in point was what happened to CNN and Time magazine when they published their "Tailwind" story. Veterans outraged by the report started organizing a response. Within days, they had located former servicemen and were able to undermine the story's credibility. At first, CNN-Time tried to stonewall the vets, who were lobbying angrily for a retraction. Within days, however, the media empire raised a white flag, issued a rare public retrac-

tion, and apologized to those military personnel, past and present, who had been offended by the report.

Forget for a moment that the producers of the story apparently violated core values like accuracy and attribution; what was remarkable in this case was the speed with which CNN-Time was brought to its knees. No long, drawn out court challenge, boycott, or citizen's campaign was necessary—just the instant backlash via e-mail lists on the Internet. Prior to the emergence of online, networked communities, this simply could not have happened.

Indeed, it is the overall speed of new media that differentiates it most from the old media. Speed is its most attractive yet frightening quality. It is possible to post stories anytime, day or night, on a Web site. This flexibility helped launch the 24/7 news environment, triggering, in turn, a direct challenge to most of our core journalism values.

How can any of us maintain our customary degree of care for accuracy when we are rushing our stories to publication so quickly? The Lewinsky scandal afforded almost every reporting organization an opportunity to embarrass itself—and plenty did.

There were public retractions by newspapers like The Dallas Morning News and The Wall Street Journal; poorly sourced reports by the television networks, and questionable ethical calls by rumor-hungry Web-based publications.

Meanwhile, there are plenty of ways in which the Web is opening up new possibilities for journalists. The writing style online is less formal, allowing reporters to mix and match forms that previously had to be kept separate. Although critics find fault with the mixture of factual reporting, opinion, interpretation, analysis and personal anecdote that characterizes much of the best online writing, there's no denying that this kind of work allows writers to connect with their audiences in new ways.

In fact, at the core of the new media experience is an evolving shift in our relationship with our audiences. Users copy, cut and paste, and e-mail our stories around their own networks after we post them. Many readers take advantage of our linked byline slugs to tell us exactly what they think of our efforts and us. While some of this is flaming, other responses come from would-be sources or informers interested in adding new information to whatever it is we are covering. Tipsters have always approached us, of course, but not in the volume nor at the speed that the Internet facilitates. People who would not be inclined to write a letter or place a phone call may now send a quick e-mail on impulse after reading one of our stories.

This can create a time management problem for some reporters, since reading and sending responses to all those e-mail messages cuts into time they'd otherwise be spending on reporting and writing. On the other hand, a jour-

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**Every Web journalist—with stock options as part of the compensation package—faces the prospect of frequent meetings with those from what used to be known, in newsrooms, as the 'dark side.'**

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nalist can never have too many sources or too solid a grounding in the community. Indeed, it is our awareness of a networked community that is closely following our work that is one of the unique features of Web-based media.

As more journalism goes digital, a giant, though disorganized, sortable electronic archive is being created, and it extends throughout the world via hypertext links. This means that anyone (including other journalists) can copy or adapt our work to their own purposes, often without our knowledge. How copyright law applies is not entirely clear in new media. Who owns what work remains murky. In the process, the collective commitment to originality among media organizations might be at risk.

Part of this erosion in the value of original work might be generational, as the first journalists working entirely in an "always on" media environment create their own set of relevant values. Large Web-based media tend toward aggregating news content from feeds as opposed to investing in the expensive process of gathering original material. That, in turn, places a greater premium on selection, presentation and interpretation of the facts. Critics often observe that Web reporters seem much more interested in repackaging and interpreting information they pick up from other sources than in developing their own. Although I've seen plenty of original digging at places like Salon, I'd have to agree that on the Web that is the exception, not the rule. There is simply no proven model yet in which original content Web publications can be brought to scale and to profitability; thus, for now, content aggregators will predominate.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing journalists online is the broad assault on the church-state line. Unlike newspapers, magazines, radio or television, where the issues involving standards and formats are long since settled, the Web is an open frontier from the perspective of marketers, salespeople, sponsors and business development folks. Every Web journalist—with stock options as part of the compensation package—faces the prospect of frequent meetings with those from what used to be known, in newsrooms, as the "dark side."

Since nobody has yet figured out a sustainable business model for online news media, it often seems like every old value is being re-evaluated. Non-journalist colleagues raise all the most prickly questions that strike at the core of what we say we believe in: honest, accurate information for our audience. They ask about things like how to induce users to click on sponsor advertisements, buy merchandise promoted next to our content, or otherwise help the company meet its business objec-

tives. This kind of conversation used to be forbidden, of course, for journalists, as we stayed on the far side of our own Chinese wall. In Internet media, however, we are issued stock options, which serve as tickets to sit at the big table, where businesses are trying to devise ways to survive in a fast-paced, information-based economy.

From a traditionalist perspective, perhaps the only thing worse than participating in such meetings might be the prospect of not participating. My own view is that this is one of the things that make new media exciting—we are inventing it on the fly. After all, we were never really in the “news” business anyway, because there was never a news business per se. News doesn’t pay for itself directly; rather it attracts

audiences that media companies have to find ways to monetize, through advertising revenue, subscriber income, and newsstand sales.

One aspect that is truly new about online media is the need to figure out a fresh business plan. Why shouldn’t journalists help create a new model for financing our work? When you think about it, who is better prepared to determine the standards and values for interactive media companies? We know from experience that media companies will rise or fall on their ability to gain and maintain their users’ trust. And trust, in the end, is what our value system, whatever its flaws, has always been about. Besides, if, as journalists, we find ourselves in the role of helping to insure that an open and honest flow

of communication with our audiences survives in the business plans of new media companies, maybe we will eventually begin to rediscover where our values came from in the first place. ■

*David Weir has been a magazine and newspaper reporter and editor, an author, a radio and TV executive, a screenwriter and a graduate school journalism instructor. For the past five years he has been working online, for the content teams at Wired Digital, Salon.com and, most recently, Excite@Home, where he currently is vice president for network programming and product design.*

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## Independent Journalism Meets Business Realities on The Web

‘Who is going to pay for independent voices to be heard?’

By Danny Schechter

Come with me on an appointment to the well-appointed offices of a major philanthropic foundation. Join me on my rounds as a wannabe hell-raiser turned fundraiser, an independent journalist by conviction who has had to become a businessman by vocation. During my Nieman year I sat in on a business school class, but little did I know then that my life would turn into an ongoing business school in which a failing grade can lead straight to bankruptcy court.

Today, like many days, I am out beating some very well endowed bushes for support of the Media Channel ([www.mediachannel.org](http://www.mediachannel.org)), which our company, Globalvision ([www.globalvision.org](http://www.globalvision.org)), created in 1999. It’s a nonprofit public interest Web site that brings together more than 520 affiliates, including the

Nieman Foundation, under one virtual roof, and is now the largest online media issues network in the world. Our mission is to try to do something concrete and continuous about the declining standards of and public trust in journalism.

This is an issue that Nieman Fellows have been debating for years, in pursuing the foundation’s mission to “elevate the standards of journalism.” But today the situation is far worse. This is due to the increasing concentration of media ownership brought about by corporate mergers, as well as by market fragmentation. This has fueled a growing sense—seconded by, among others, FCC Chairman William Kennard—that our media institutions are now undermining our democracy rather than strengthening it. Merger mania has had an internal effect within

the media world as well, fusing the news biz and show biz to turn many TV outlets, in television writer Larry Gelbart’s words, into “weapons of mass distraction.” Reporting from other parts of the world has been slashed, as has much news of civic import at home.

### Developing a New Media Constituency

To challenge these practices, we are trying to develop a new constituency within our demoralized profession, as well as among the public, which in every poll expresses dissatisfaction with the quality of media coverage. That’s what [mediachannel.org](http://mediachannel.org) hopes to help do. Our site relies on the Web’s ease of connections to link critiques about the media to tools that can be used for change. For example, we encourage

participation in campaigns to get journalists out of jail and protest media decisions or omissions. Through a simple click, we can mobilize e-mail campaigns and link users with other groups who share similar interests. On our site, we can create space for collaborations on strategies and joint programs. More than just a clearing-house of analyses about the problems of media, we report on solutions and offer resources to help achieve them.

To report on these developments, debate these trends and propose reform strategies, [mediachannel.org](http://mediachannel.org) connects a wide variety of individuals and organizations. Many come at these issues with differing perspectives, but until now, there was no one place where journalists and consumers of the news could find out about one another, about the work they do, and the content they produce. Until there was a Media Channel, no one place existed to find this kind of reliable information from all of these worldwide sources.

Just as public radio and public television positioned themselves as desirable non-commercial alternatives to the commercial broadcast spectrum, we were confident that the importance of public online media would eventually be recognized and supported. Part of this confidence was derived from our belief that democracy is at risk when the public is not well informed about issues of civic import. Therefore, it follows that the battle to revitalize journalism must, by necessity, become a critical component of the larger effort to resuscitate our anemic political culture. Despite all the talk about “information superhighways,” we wanted our smaller roadway to emerge as a popular independent destination for those looking for well reasoned, robust discussion and commentary about what is and isn’t being covered and, then, what can be done about it.

## Searching for Funding

Early on, it was apparent that trying to change the media with a Web site

and media issues network could not become a commercially viable proposition. We recognized that we needed to find ways to attract funding from nonprofit, socially responsible supporters. So we decided to go the dot-org route, affiliating with OneWorld.net, a large and successful global nonprofit online network based in the United Kingdom with hundreds of civil society/NGO partners. We customized their technology to become the backbone for our site. Like many Internet aficionados, we hoped that our evolving space could become a home for much more diverse content and in-depth reporting than is found in the increasingly entertainment-oriented mass media, as well as in staid media reviews. We were also among a number of online media outlets determined to establish a public-service beachhead on the Internet. This would not be easy amid the inundation of IPO-financed

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**Early on, it was apparent that trying to change the media with a Web site and media issues network could not become a commercially viable proposition.**

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dot-com sites determined to turn this exciting new medium into a shopping mall and hyper-commercialized arena for entertainment, pornography and the promotion of old media enterprises.

We are still believers. But after a year and a half in the trenches, we now know how difficult it is to build and sustain even well-known independent media voices, particularly during this era of mergers and consolidation. Sometimes we feel like ants in an age of elephants, but we also remember how the tortoise beat the hare.

The challenge always returns to money: Who is going to pay for independent voices to be heard?

Our first stop in the search for funding took us to foundations that we had reason to believe would share our public interest mission and be willing to help us to succeed. But what we soon

discovered is that those who inhabit the world of philanthropy haven’t yet totally wrapped their collective heads—or their funding agendas—around the notion of assisting new media online initiatives. Many have yet to warm to backing old media such as documentaries or issue-oriented series, much less the fast-moving world of the Internet. To add to our problems, few progressive foundations seem to have as a priority the issues confronting journalism or to grasp the Internet’s potential for helping to address them. A few invest money into making media products, such as The Markle Foundation’s support for Oxygen Media. But far fewer appear ready to help change the ways in which media operate.

Lack of knowledge and initiative on the liberal side of the funding spectrum stands in stark contrast to the practices of conservative philanthropies, which for many years have made

media a funding priority, pumping large subsidies into right-wing publications, training journalists, and often buying up media outlets. Even Ralph Nader, who has advocated for media reform for years, leaves his thoughts about changes occurring in media to the very end of his just published “Ralph Nader Reader.”

This means that before we can get philanthropists to write checks, there is a long learning curve to convince them that change is necessary and possible. What I have found is that funds to study these issues are often more available than resources to do something about the problem. Perhaps because of Globalvision’s track record in producing nonprofit programming for 13 years, several foundations allocated enough money to get [mediachannel.org](http://mediachannel.org) up and running. They include The Rockefeller Foundation, Open Society Institute, Arca Foundation, Reebok Human Rights Foundation, Puffin Foundation, and recently we have been thrilled to add the Ford Foundation to our funding roster. To secure each of those commitments required months of proposal writing (and rewriting), follow-up calls, meetings and more meetings.

You never know how much work goes into raising money until it's your turn to try. Two axioms sadly hold true: "It takes money to raise money," and "Those that have money tend to get money."

We quickly discovered that fundraising itself is a demanding and frustrating business. Folks I thought would and should support what we're doing didn't for reasons that range from trivial to arbitrary. Let me cite an example. A foundation known for supporting innovative media projects rejected us, despite staffers there telling us over the course of a year how much they liked what we are doing. They listened and listened. But when we tried to present a well-thought-through revenue and content model that they asked us to submit, we spent months just trying to secure a meeting. They were too busy reassessing their priorities. We read about their plans for backing public interest media in *The New York Times* only to find out that is not what they really had in mind. (So much for media accuracy!) We watched as this foundation invested millions in one of Oprah Winfrey's commercial ventures. (Does one of America's wealthiest entertainers really need foundation support?) In the end, they turned us down without even letting us make the pitch we had spent months fine-tuning. This experience was like the scene from the film "The Shawshank Redemption" in which prison inmates are rejected for parole before they even have their hearings.

## **The 'Wall' Comes Tumbling Down**

In big media, there is (or used to be) a wall between editorial and business units. In a small media business like ours, it is often hard to keep these two sides of our work as separate as we'd like. I might be a journalist who prefers writing to begging for funds, but running a venture like ours offers me little choice but to get down (and dirty) in the money troughs. This means that time that could be spent on enhancing our editorial work has to go into crisscrossing the world looking for money. We may not be bartering any of our

editorial space, but it is no secret that editorial priorities often reflect calculations about what funding might be available. A media site such as ours aspires to be above reproach when it come to accountability and ethics, but we live in a real world where we can't operate without making tough decisions dictated by budgetary considerations. When I worked for ABC News, I once saw a sign that said, "Definition of network news: When you care the least and spend the most." In our shop, it's often, "When you care the most but can only spend the least."

The good news is that we were successful in our first round of foundation grant-seeking. The site is up and running. Our hope now is that our achievement will inspire more foundations to focus some of their resources in this area of media development. It is ironic that the independent and critical media in Belgrade, Yugoslavia receive more subsidies than their counterparts in Boston, Massachusetts. Much of their money comes from organizations outside that country and from private donors, but there always seems to be much more of it available for those battling oppressive governments abroad than corporate monopolies here at home.

Because no foundation ever provides all of what is needed, a lot of time is invariably devoted to reaching out to many different sources just to get enough money in the bank to prepare a budget, hire a staff, and pay the bills. Since support is usually doled out one year at a time, staff time and resource issues often get twisted around by the necessity of keeping the money pump primed.

I'm not alone in this kind of struggle. An old buddy of mine, now in Congress, tells me that every day he is forced to devote hours to dialing for dollars, a prerequisite in politics that distorts how our democracy functions. I can testify that working in independent media isn't all that different. And foundations realize this, too, which is why some of them have started to take on the trappings of venture capital funds. Maybe it's the market logic of our times seeping into every crevice of public life, but most now insist their

grantees become more businesslike and find other ways of supporting themselves. One reason: Those willing to give you start-up money do not want you knocking on their doors again and again. So they insist on seeing real business plans and sustainability strategies as a hedge against over-dependence on their grants.

When I'm in a mood to grumble that the world owes me a living, this approach seems pernicious. When I recognize that, in fact, it doesn't (which is most of the time), I appreciate that grantees are encouraged to be more focused and disciplined. On the positive side, this has had the effect of forcing us do to more planning about hard-nosed business models and to develop multiple revenue streams. On the negative side, it leads to producing business plans that are then evaluated by risk-averse program officers who often make lousy venture capitalists because of inexperience and naiveté about what it takes to run a business. They often impose a higher bar of due diligence than even the private sector. Their questions can sometimes sound like the Spanish Inquisition as they probe for details on the capitalization of the venture before you have even started reaching out for financial assistance. As you listen to their concerns shift from social values to financial bottom lines, our noble mission can start sounding pretty fuzzy-wuzzy. Soon our mission seems to get lost in concepts such as "monetization."

Sure, to stay in business a venture has to function like a business; we must earn more than we spend. On the other hand, some foundations have to be reminded that there are two bottom lines: One is about money; the other is about public service.

## **Fusing Our Goals**

To blend these two goals, we have shaped [mediachannel.org](http://mediachannel.org) as a public-private partnership, or in the words of Jonathan Peizer, the thoughtful technology chief of the Open Society Institute, a dot-corg, a fusion of dot-org and dot-com symbolizing the integration of our mission-oriented nonprofit work and meticulous business strategy. (For



more on Peizer's thinking, read his essays on [mediachannel.org](http://mediachannel.org).) Our business model envisions providing services for those who want to improve the media. On the site we provide services for media reformers and policy advocates worldwide and also services for journalists. Though not all of our proposed services are up yet, plans call for a section of classified ads, online courses offered through affiliate


ally help Globalvision achieve its commercial aspirations through a global news service designed to report unreported and underreported stories—"news not in the news"—by mid-2001. Our investors put their money where their convictions are. They, like us, want to do well and, in the process, do good. These investors also introduced more businesslike approaches to us, which we hope will lead to higher

important work. But can we continue to grow? We hope so, especially if and when other media mavens who share our values decide to leave their unhappy media sinecures, loosen their golden handcuffs, and throw in with a socially responsible media venture like ours with colleagues who want to make a living and a difference.

As much as we may want to marry money and meaning in our media work, we've learned not to minimize the importance of running a business capable of making money. But in this age of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" and in this new virtual market called cyberspace, this isn't always easy. As a friend of mine recently joked, "How does an independent journalist end up with a million dollars?" Her answer: "Start with two million."

We are determined not to let that happen. Economic strength helps any company become more successful in whatever it does, but as the demise of so many once cash-rich Internet startups demonstrates, money alone is never enough. Capital is necessary, perhaps, but rarely sufficient. Good ideas matter as do values and commitment. In our years as journalists turned media entrepreneurs, we have had good times and bad, been upwardly global and downwardly mobile. But we are working to change that equation as we also try to be an innovative force for change in journalism. ■

*Danny Schechter, a 1978 Nieman Fellow, is the executive editor of [mediachannel.org](http://mediachannel.org) and the author of "The More You Watch, The Less You Know," (Seven Stories Press); an e-book, "News Dissector: Passions, Pieces and Polemics 1960-2000" ([electronpress.com](http://electronpress.com)), and "Falun Gong's Challenge to China" (Akashic Press).*

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## **I might be a journalist who prefers writing to begging for funds, but running a venture like ours offers me little choice but to get down (and dirty) in the money troughs.**

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schools, discounts on professional purchases, and access to tiers of fee-based, specialized information, to cite just a few. Other sources of potential revenue are still in development, and we know that if the site is to survive, it will, in time, need to be self-sufficient.

The problem is that no business can achieve sustainability overnight, as so many dot-com businesses have discovered, as so many have fallen like dominoes. We believe it will take us three years to get to the point of sustainability, and we are proceeding step by step to get there in a phased-in development cycle. Our bottom line is that we trust that there is a viable market for what we are "selling."

Mediachannel.org is produced by Globalvision New Media, a company that was established with the idea of critiquing news as well as generating coverage of it. We have plans for a new syndication service, and we've found some investors in Europe where, not surprisingly, there is more openness to projects critical of the U.S.-dominated media culture. Those investors brought in—first as a consultant, then as the chairman of our board—James Rosenfield, the former president of an American television network. Soon Walter Cronkite was invited to join us as an advisor along with other respected journalists. These investors recognized that by aggregating content and affiliates [mediachannel.org](http://mediachannel.org) could eventu-

ally help Globalvision achieve its commercial aspirations through a global news service designed to report unreported and underreported stories—"news not in the news"—by mid-2001. Our investors put their money where their convictions are. They, like us, want to do well and, in the process, do good. These investors also introduced more businesslike approaches to us, which we hope will lead to higher

levels of financing (in the short term), and a possible merger with one of our affiliates, a leading high quality global media outlet, down the line. Who could have thought that a loud, self-styled critic of media mergers like myself might one day be involved in attempting a media merger? But the reality is that independent media have to build synergies just like big guys in order to survive. As [mediachannel.org](http://mediachannel.org) demonstrates its global reach and editorial range, corporate underwriters are being approached in a way that echoes the public broadcasting model. One leading transnational corporation is already on board and others are in discussion with us. Many companies want to reach the opinion leaders in the audience we are developing, and this makes our site appealing from that perspective.

### **Creating a New Business Model**

What we now have is an evolving new business model. Will this strategy succeed? Nothing is forever, but Globalvision has been in business for 13 years since being cofounded by me and Rory O'Connor, who also had worked for years as a print, radio and network television journalist. So far, we have done more than simply survive, even if we have yet to fully thrive. We are proud of a prolific body of

# Economics 101 of Internet News

Supply expands, but has demand been adequately nurtured?

By Jay Small

**S**ssss...bzzfft...whine...screech...“Eighty-nine, WLS, Chicago.” Ahh, I’m dialed in.

In the mid-1970’s, even in a hazy coal town in deep southern Illinois, any youngster with a decent AM radio could pick up distant stations such as WLS. It was fun to listen to John “Records” Landecker and others spinning Top 40 music from the city. Between the likes of Wings and The Steve Miller Band, WLS sometimes played a certain memorable commercial.

In it, to the tune of Olivia Newton-John’s saccharine hit, “Let Me Be There,” a chorus extolled the virtues of “the new 24-hour-a-day Chicago Tribune.” Did they say 24-hour-a-day? The idea that there could be enough journalists—enough *news*—in one place to write, edit, print and sell newspaper editions throughout the day was tough to grasp.

Mind you, at that time the Chicago Daily News was dying, and the remaining papers in the city postured to fill the void. But I grew up watching my dad and his dad put out a Monday-through-Saturday newspaper, The Daily Register, in Harrisburg, Illinois. It was only one edition per afternoon and it almost never exceeded 20 pages or 6,000 circulation.

So this small-town boy was dazzled by the big-town ways: all-night radio you could pick up from 300 miles away and all-day newspapers fresh off the press.

Today, no one is amazed by AM radio, especially not its endless banter. And no one is amazed that news and information are available from myriad sources day and night, though the “24-hour-a-day Chicago Tribune” and other all-day papers of that era have pulled back somewhat from their ambitious print cycles. But 24-hour news isn’t just the domain of broadcast networks

such as CNN, either. News-oriented World Wide Web sites number in the thousands, operated by legacy print and broadcast media companies, and more than a few Web-only upstarts. Anyone using a computer with Web capability can go to the site of that little newspaper in southern Illinois as readily as the site of the mammoth Tribune.

Even as we contemplate the sheer volume of Web news content, engineers are developing methods to clear the next hurdles, permitting faster delivery to people at home, in the office or on the go: faster wireless networks,

est comes in over the air. This isn’t like the Web, where you must go out and pull down the information you want. It comes to you, when you want it, in a format you choose. (Copy desk chiefs: How do you edit for an intelligent agent?)

Further still, those devices may be components of a larger home or office “sphere” of interconnected electronics, synchronizing data with each other and with servers on the Internet at large. (Designers: Can you break that richly illustrated features cover into data components for a multi-platform user interface?)

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**With today’s Web, we have greatly expanded the supply of news and related information. But—and this is the question journalists should ponder most intensely—have we adequately nurtured the demand?**

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advanced home networks, and low-cost, portable devices that draw on both for communications, entertainment and information.

Consider the nature of news reports and the effects on newsrooms and business managers once cellular phones, touch-screen “tablets” and the like can send and receive data over the airwaves—from just about anywhere—much faster than the analog modem you probably have on your home computer. (Assigning editors: Do you have enough reporters to promise your news content is always up-to-date?)

Further, imagine using “intelligent agent” technology to behave like personal valets: beeping, flashing, vibrating or otherwise getting a user’s attention when a fresh copy of a favorite magazine or a news item of likely inter-

This explosion of access and distribution points has its risks.

In elementary economic terms, when the supply of any good or service greatly exceeds the demand, the market value of that good or service falls. With today’s Web, we have greatly expanded the supply of news and related information. But—and this is the question journalists should ponder most intensely—have we adequately nurtured the demand?

The evidence, again in economic terms, suggests we have not:

- Consumers, with a healthy assist from content providers, have pushed the hard-money value of news content on the Web to near zero. A few newspaper-run sites tried paid subscriptions in 1995 and 1996, but

almost all converted to free sites, ostensibly to boost their dismal traffic enough to justify higher prices for advertising. The Wall Street Journal still makes users subscribe to its Web site, but few other newspapers charge for access to the articles they post. (News archives don't count—it's one of those strange Web phenomena that people seem willing to pay a small sum for old news but nothing for current news.)

- The Web economy, meanwhile, has also driven the hard-money value of Web advertising to near zero. It's too much supply (a half-trillion Web pages, most with available ad space) and too little demand (the Web is not effective at delivering commercial messages serendipitously; just ask yourself when you last clicked on a banner ad).

Compare the Web model to the traditional ways newspapers make the cash registers ring. It's expensive to print and deliver each page of quality content in high fidelity to household doorsteps. People know this, but they want one or more parts of the end product enough to pay a portion of that cost. Ad space on such delivered pages is a limited, desirable resource. Advertisers know this, so they more than cover the rest of the cost of making and delivering the end product.

The cost to generate quality content stays pretty much the same even if the distribution method changes. Besides that cost, however, it is much less expensive to make one page of content available on a Web server than to deliver it in print. And once a server is set up to house the first page, it costs almost nothing extra to post the next thousand, or million, pages.

The Web represents mass aggregation and availability of content, like a library, not mass distribution, like a newspaper. Web "demand" consists of people hunting for individual bits of information from a diverse collective using inadequate, even maddening tools. That's not the same as Jane down the street ordering specific compilations of content for periodic delivery to her home.

Web readers feel they've paid

enough just to get on the Web, then worked too hard just to find the stuff they want to read. They view ad messages as barely tolerable and hardly compelling. So ad space on Web pages is an almost unlimited, but much less desirable resource. Advertisers know this, so most Web ad inventory is unsold and the rest goes for fire-sale prices.

Good journalism—the sum of skilled newsgathering, writing, editing, presentation and general management—is an expensive series of steps taken to produce quality content. The Web economy just can't afford it. Thus, without subsidies of capital and content from the core organization, you'd be hard-pressed to find any so-called "online newspaper" that could survive financially on its own. Indeed, media groups have started trimming back their largely Web-focused interactive divisions. The Tribune Company reduced staff count in its Tribune Interactive division as part of absorbing Times Mirror. Other entities are quietly turning their attention from experiments with Web-specific news content toward online activities with a clearer return on investment—such as Web/print advertising bundles.

And all this would be depressing if the World Wide Web were the end game for getting journalists' work into consumers' hands. It isn't.

In the mid-1990's, we all glommed onto the Web because it was the easiest way yet to combine the depth and breadth of print journalism with the instantaneous availability of broadcast. We loved to experiment with hyperlinked nuggets of text, audio and video clips, and rapid redesigns of our directory pages. Writers enjoyed unlimited space and the absence of finite deadlines. Finally, a TV station had a medium where it could act like a newspaper, and a newspaper had a medium where it could act like a TV station. What fun! We just forgot to ask if that's what our bread-and-butter constituents—consumers and advertisers—needed us to do.


Luckily, the Web is just a first taste of what the larger Internet might yield as a future platform for journalism. Think ahead to that world of widely available network access to deep, rich media

content that can be picked up through a variety of devices, places and uses. Think about a device that looks and feels like a book—maybe it's "War and Peace"—but with a swipe of a smart card, the text on its pages becomes articles from the Sunday New York Times. Think about pulling your minivan into a gas station and having the latest movies or TV programs instantly downloaded into a player the kids can use in the back seat. Think about being able to read, hear or see digital media (books, music, video) from your home collection while 1,000 miles from home.

Sure, newsrooms will need to adapt. Tweak all you want. Experiment with nonlinear storytelling, or three-shift-a-day news teams. But remember the fundamentals. Journalism largely as we know it today—without core changes to newsgathering techniques, writing style, news judgment or story priorities—has a place in that world. So does advertising. It's reasonable to assume that the two can continue to live closely together to mutual benefit in the next generation of digital devices.

This time around, I'd humbly suggest that friends in my old world of journalism take a cue from friends in my new world of consumer electronics: Let the methods of delivering the news flow from the business model, not the other way around. ■

*Jay Small grew up in a newspaper family and worked as a journalist for 15 years before joining Thomson multimedia, maker of RCA consumer electronics, in April 2000 as manager of digital media services. He led the development of Internet services at The Indianapolis Star, amid stints as an industry consultant and technology columnist.*

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# The Web Pulled Viewers Away From the Olympic Games

From Sydney, it was a tale of two technologies, yesterday's and tomorrow's.

By Gerald B. Jordan

The way in which Americans "watched" the 2000 Olympic Games from Sydney raised a significant question: How much longer will exclusive broadcast rights hold sway over the way that viewers take in these events? What these Olympics revealed is the emerging wired world, as people went to the Internet for results rather than await a prime-time revelation from NBC. And ratings—for a variety of reasons—suffered.

This truly is the era of the storied Jim McKay introduction to the ABC sports anthology series in which he beckoned viewers to come along as cameras spanned the globe for athletic competition. Only now, viewers at home are doing so increasingly at their convenience, giving rise to the prospect that as video and audio get easier to transmit and hand-held computers make that information easier to receive, anytime, anywhere, consumers will be their own programmers, and will not wait for scheduled programs. For example, a TV crew without broadcasting rights to the Sydney Games could not have sent images and audio from the competition up to a satellite for broadcast at a local station. But if someone with a digital camera sits in the stands and transmits streaming video back home, can that be prohibited? More and more, situations like these are going to need to be addressed.

The rapid advancement of technology is going to make transmission easy and so widely available that all the video cameras now capturing images might soon be quite capable of sending those images to Web sites, e-mail accounts, home TV's, and enough sources that exclusivity won't hold up. So local track clubs might get immediate coverage of events. Aficionados of events not considered widely popular might arrange their own loosely operated network of presentation. And col-

lege students could get an instant look at athletes from their schools.

Information no longer will wait. News can't be contained. There simply are too many sources. And with the Internet, what once was a fountain-head is now Niagara Falls.

NBC television was the U.S. focal point of the Sydney Games, but a worldwide audience went to the Internet for Olympics news. Cruel though the circumstances might have seemed, the NBC Web site ([nbcolympics.com](http://nbcolympics.com)) drew more than 66 million page views from home audiences surfing the Net. That's an average of more than four million page views daily during the Olympics, according to The Nielsen//NetRatings Web Olympics Index. (The survey of 165,000 United States and foreign Internet users was conducted September 16 through October 1 through a partnership formed by NetRatings, Nielsen Media Research, and ACNielsen.)

More than 56 million page views were recorded for [olympics.com](http://olympics.com), the official Olympic Web site, and [sports.yahoo.com/olympics](http://sports.yahoo.com/olympics) garnered more than 46 million page views. On Yahoo!, interest built as the site documented a 650 percent increase in traffic during a four day period at the start of the Olympics. Because of the exponential growth of the Internet, these figures will prove significant to those who are planning coverage of the 2004 Games in Athens. In 1996, NBC had two full-time staff on its Web site for the Atlanta Olympics. For the 2000 Web site, NBC had 40 full-time staff and 100 part-time staff in Sydney and 150 staff in San Francisco to drive the network site as well as [MSNBC.com](http://MSNBC.com), the cable affiliate.

With the 15-hour time difference, the Sydney Games were the perfect games for the Internet, Kevin Monaghan, NBC vice president for business development, told the Atlanta Constitution in a July interview. So perfect for the Internet that the compelling Nielsen Web numbers contrasted with the tepid Nielsen TV numbers read like a tale of two technologies, yesterday's and tomorrow's. NBC paid \$705 million for the broadcasting rights to the Sydney Games and attracted, on average, slightly more than 14 million households, the lowest rated Olympics since Mexico City in 1968. The

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**Information no longer will wait.  
News can't be contained.**

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13.8 rating the Olympics broadcast drew over 17 nights was well below the 17.5 to 18.5 ratings forecast by executives at NBC Sports. (NBC promised sponsors a 16.1 rating, according to The Associated Press.) Cable channels MSNBC and CNBC both averaged a .7 (seven-tenths) on their Olympics coverage. (Each rating point represents about one million U.S. homes with television. For the cable channels, a point equals 760,000 households for CNBC and 650,000 for MSNBC.)

Don't cry for NBC. Even with the rights fees, another \$100 million in production costs, and an agreement to extend additional commercial time to sponsors to make good on audience exposure, NBC still projects profit in the tens of millions of dollars, executives told AP. But the trend suggests that as technology becomes more available for individual use, the networks' capacity to deliver big audiences will continue to be diminished. That could change expectations for what is paid

for exclusive rights and even draw into question whether broadcasting rights can continue to be exclusive. In this age of new media and technology, there is clearly a lack of monopoly.

NBC presented “the wait-and-see Games,” wrote Mark Hyman in Business Week. It’s reasonable to presume, then, that the Athens Games will be Internet-observant (as will the Salt Lake City games during the winter of 2002.) In 1999, the number of online households exceeded 40.5 million, and by 2004, 67 million U.S. households will be online, according to Veronis and Suhler’s Communications Industry Forecast.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) will be discussing Internet coverage plans for the 2004 Games at Athens at a December meeting. In Sydney, the IOC prohibited athletes from sending their own stories or journal entries out to Internet sites. This time, one issue is whether real-time video can be posted on the Internet. With so many Internet users at home and in offices with the ability to use broadband communications, streaming video and RealAudio, keeping an embargo on Olympics results—not to mention on event coverage itself—will present daunting challenges to those who have a stake in retaining the exclusivity of coverage. Think of the IOC trying to control a technology that no one can control. What comes to mind is that little Dutch boy’s finger.

President Clinton’s promise of a computer in every classroom has implications far beyond lessons learned for school. There will certainly come a time when kids no longer need to teach their parents about using a computer. And when that day comes, Dean Jutilla, public relations manager at Yahoo!,

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the newsobserver.com website. The main content area features a large headline "The Road to Sydney" and a sub-headline "Jones: 2 down, 3 to go". Below the headline is a byline "By NED BARNETT, Staff Writer" and the start of an article. To the right of the text is a photograph of Marion Jones running. Below the photo is a caption: "Marion Jones runs away with the gold in the 200. (AP Photo by Chuck Lacey)". The page also includes a navigation menu at the top with links like HOME, NEWS, BUSINESS, SPORTS, etc., and a sidebar on the right with sections like "Newspaper Services" and "Travel Recreation".

A Web story from The (Raleigh) News & Observer, September 29, 2000, reporting Marion Jones’s win in the 200 meters. The story appeared on the Web before the race was seen on U.S. television.

contains that will mean a big difference in media use and preference. Already a study by Cyber Dialogue reports that one-third of Internet users say they watch less television as a result of Internet use. The Internet is by far the fastest growing media technology: 38 years passed before 50 million Americans had access to radio; 13 years before 50 million Americans bought television. Yet 50 million Americans had access to the Internet in five years, according to the Information Technology Association of America. In 1996, only three percent of U.S. classrooms were linked to the Internet. Now more than 90 percent are.

Live coverage has been the staple of sports broadcasting for a generation. Will a nation of computer-outfitted households ever again be content to watch prime-time events that end hours before they are telecast? The pace of new technology development means that audiences might be able to catch live events while they, too, are on the run, by using their palm-size comput-

ers showing a streaming video of events.

The 2000 Olympics offered a glimpse into the information future. That glimpse must be terrifying for some, including those who rely on enormous rights fees to stage events such as the Olympics. For others the glimpse is exciting, even exhilarating, as technology will no doubt emerge in ways not even imagined by those who now jog with CD stereo sound, drive while using cellular telephones, and are always plugged in through their laptop computers. Who knows? By 2002, skiers in New Hampshire might be watching a downhill Olympic race on their handheld Webs while sitting in a gondola going back up the mountain for another run. ■

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# Not Just a Newspaper on the Web

At [projo.com](http://projo.com), value is added when newspaper and Web staffs work together.

By Andrea Panciera

About five years ago, as newspapers began to launch themselves onto the World Wide Web, a loud disclaimer arose from the online staffs: We're not just the newspaper on the Web, we asserted indignantly. We're different, we insisted. We're interactive. We do more. We do it faster. Friendlier. And, on top of all that, we're free.

All of that was probably true. Especially the free part.

Yet, despite our look and feel, most of us were indeed the newspaper on the Web. Maybe we packaged it differently, adding archival depth or searches. Maybe we got the news online faster than it hit the street. And maybe we added programming that let our readers more easily interact with us and with each other. But if you looked hard, it was painfully clear: From news stories to classified ads, the bulk of our content continued to be harvested from the pages of the paper itself.

Across the country and around the world, journalists experimented with approaches. Should we, like our paper parents, lead our home pages with news? And, if so, what kind? Should we become portals of useful information to our communities? Should we adapt ourselves to beat our broadcast competitors by valuing speed, perhaps a bit too much? Or should we let our users determine what we published, in part because it was so easy for them to tell us, either by their e-mails or by us tracking their traffic patterns on our sites?

Many of us wondered: Where was and what should be our own coherent editorial voice?

At this early stage, finding such a voice was wishful thinking. Why? We simply didn't know enough about our new medium to use it to its best advantage. Even if we thought we had the knowledge, most of us didn't have the

resources to implement it. So we plowed along, teaching ourselves HTML, all the while regarding our programmers as demigods and trying to convince many on the print side of our organizations that we weren't out to devour them, but to lead them to the future of publishing instead.

We had to start bringing in revenue, too. Those Web programmers—and producers and designers and the hardware and software they work with each day—are certainly not free. We created niche content areas such as health and travel to attract niche advertising. We redesigned our original designs. We struggled to maintain content areas such as restaurant and lodging listings that became dated almost immediately after they launched. We upgraded computers and servers, and we tossed out old code and did it all over again with new code. We added breaking news without having a staff of online reporters to write it. And, before the cables were even laid down for broadband delivery, we started thinking about how to do wireless.

they have become more demanding. We all hear the same questions. Where is all that editorial innovation you're supposed to be generating in this new, expansive medium? How come you don't have all the stuff The New York Times or Washington Post or some other fill-in-the-blank Web site does? And, jeppers, you can't even give us some of what your own paper can—like the brides, the comics, the sports agate, the daily Jumble or a copy of a story from 100 years ago.

Sigh. Just when I was feeling good because the server decided not to break down. But after six years as an online editor, I have to admit that the questioners have a legitimate point. It's time for all of us to be doing more with our new medium, to shape the direction of both newspaper Web sites and newspapers. It's a very big job. Despite extraordinary efforts, it's more than most tiny online staffs can handle as quickly as the market requires or as perfectly as the print side might demand. The requirements of speed under which our new media enterprise

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**It's time for all of us to be doing more with our new medium, to shape the direction of both newspaper Web sites and newspapers.**

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All of this was usually done with a bare minimum of staff. It wasn't unusual for our half-dozen or fewer people, often working in pods isolated from the rest of the company and desperate for bigger operating budgets, to be fueled by a drive to do something new and the desire to make it a success.

Still, it has not been enough. As more and more people—from our online readers to fellow print employees to the industry at large—tune into the efforts of newspaper Web sites,

exists means that we don't always have the luxury of time to perfect our product before we put it out for public consumption.

What's the answer? Though hard to accomplish and, at first blush, seemingly contradictory, the answer lies in finding ways for these entities to work together. What makes this hard is that uncomfortable clashes between traditional and emerging cultures will inevitably occur across a range of issues and attitudes involving editorial control,

the speed of change, and competition for tight financial resources. But the result can also be an enlivening of an old culture through the infusion of fresh ideas and a sharing of resources to benefit the long-term good of the entire news organization—and its audience.

How does one go about doing it?

While I don't have sure-fire solutions, I do know one thing: It doesn't happen overnight. A foundation needs to be laid to encourage cross-departmental communication, generation of ideas and, eventually, sharing both the burden and the rewards of transforming the best of those ideas into constructive action.

Here's a look at how we've been building that foundation at [projo.com](http://projo.com) and The Providence Journal:

We began by removing physical barriers between online and print staffs. No longer are we in separate rooms, or even separate buildings. About two years ago, online production staff took up residence in one end of the main newsroom. Online advertising staff gained cubicles in the newspaper's advertising department. It was this in-your-face tactic that forced print staff to recognize our existence while giving them the chance to see how we operated and to use us as teachers of computer basics, from how to browse the Web to online sales techniques to answering e-mail.

**Examples of recent [projo.com](http://projo.com) projects done in tandem with Providence Journal staff:**

Rescuing the Right Whale  
<http://projo.com/specials/rightwhales/>

An Upstream Fight  
<http://projo.com/business/tourism/>

A Nearly Perfect Summer  
<http://projo.com/specials/newportsummer/>

Os Deportados:  
America's Unwanted  
<http://projo.com/specials/deportados/>

Near-Miss at Green Airport  
<http://projo.com/news/nearmiss/>

In our market, where broadcast competitors feed off Journal stories and no wire service could fill the bill, we made a commitment to breaking local news on the Web. This resulted in a dedicated online reporter being transferred from the print staff, one who would be aided by reports from print reporters on the scene or in the know.

During the past year, we've made more strides, bumping the number of online reporters to two in order to provide backup and expand hours of coverage. A year ago my own desk, along with those reporters, was moved to the middle of the print newsroom, next to assigning editors and city reporters.

Sometimes it feels like we're straddling an old wooden fence, uncomfortably balancing between the ever-developing methods and new services of the online staff and the set patterns and daily duties of the print staff. But the online reporting staff is not alone anymore. This summer, we narrowed the focus of two online production staffers to features and sports, changing seating and hours so they can communicate more directly with their print counterparts. That helps us keep on top of what that department has up its sleeve, while making it easier to brainstorm on how the Web can play off that print material.

We're looking at instituting similar links with other editorial departments. And we're working on a redesign of the entire newsroom that will make the online staff an integral part of daily operations, while anticipating the growth of news coverage and delivery in a variety of forms, around the clock. We're also increasing the number of special projects and series that we've brought to the Web from the paper, adding online-only features as we've learned them, such as production of existing audio and video or animation of graphics and photos.

In the past, we've had to wait for such projects to be proposed by newspaper staff and be added as an afterthought to the planning, reporting and editing process. It's a system where the paper has led the parade. It's reactive, not proactive, and it can result in projects that essentially look and feel

like "the newspaper on the Web." We're ready to stop doing that. And I think our timing is good.

Our parent company, A.H. Belo, is one of the publishing organizations now introducing bar-code technology to its newspapers and TV stations that will point to pages of related content on the Web. Using a scanning device, readers will be able to capture the URL of a specific Web page embedded in the code. Software installed on their computers will then interpret the code and call up the Web page automatically on the computer screen.

By its very nature, it aims to bring the two mediums together by adding a value to the original while bringing attention to the new one. The move also coincides with [projo.com](http://projo.com)'s most recent efforts to increase news updates, experiment with telling stories in multimedia form, and expand its advertising sales. As a result, it's been the biggest impetus to date for the print and online staffs to coordinate their efforts as they push to make sure that a reader who makes the effort to scan those codes gets a good deal in return on the Web.

As a start, we've promised each other that we will seek out projects that lend themselves to Web enhancements and work together to make them happen. That might mean a print reporter needs to learn how to gather digital audio or a Web designer must figure out ways to emphasize his artwork and animations as the entry point to a series. Or it might be as simple as crossing the newsroom to have a little creative chat—something we couldn't do two years ago.

Despite advances, we haven't yet figured out how to make it a smooth crossing. At times, it's been downright painful as we coordinate projects geared toward print deadlines, staffing and audiences, with both groups doing things we've never done before while promising in that oh-so-inflexible print that the Web version will be there, live and on time.

That's when we need to remember to look at the results. Recently, we produced online versions of a series documenting efforts to save the right whale, explored the potential for tour-

ism along an old mill river, and shared the summer with wealthy Newport society. [See box on page 46.] All have aimed at bringing stories to life by providing the voices of real people or showing the Web viewer the scene as if he were there himself. Our stories have merged in-depth print narratives with action, all the while maintaining the editorial standards and sensibility that print journalists say set them apart from most of their broadcast counterparts.

We've given those online versions special attention in the pages of the paper by labeling them as "Digital Extras." It's a move that not only helps promote the Web site but, just as importantly, adds a "digital" element to the paper, making it seem more current and more willing to recognize and

accommodate the growing number of ways our audience gets its information. Perhaps some day that will be a primary function of the newspaper, letting it serve as a pointer to other forms of information and communication, while remaking its pages to focus on what it can do best, such as summarizing the news and providing post-event analysis.

The approach we are now taking is, to me, the editorial voice that we've been searching for on the Web. This is how we can be more than "just the newspaper on the Web." This may also be how so-called print journalism survives. For when it comes to telling a good story that serves our community, it doesn't matter whether it's on a press web or a worldwide one. All that matters is that we are one. ■

*Andrea Panciera has been the online editor for The Providence Journal Company since mid-1994, starting with the development of its first online service via Prodigy and remaining through several incarnations on the Web. She began her newspaper career as a reporter and editor for her hometown paper, in Westerly, Rhode Island, leaving to attend the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. She worked at New York Newsday and as an adjunct professor at Columbia before joining the Journal, where she held a variety of assigning and desk positions before assuming her current post.*

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## Broadband Technology Brings News Video to the Web

Consumers—not journalists—decide what stories will be watched.

By Jonathan Klein

Some of my best journalist friends think I've become a threat to democracy. This is not some paranoid rant—The New York Times found the accusation fit to print. Others have expressed their concern privately.

It's all because, after 16 years as a producer and executive at CBS News, I have just launched a broadband news network, The FeedRoom, backed by a \$30 million investment from NBC, Tribune Company, and Warburg Pincus. The FeedRoom aggregates the latest news video from NBC and Tribune's local television stations, among others, from wholesalers like Reuters and The Associated Press, and from a wide range of print entities that are beginning to broaden their offerings into multimedia, such as USA Today, Good Housekeeping, and Consumer Reports. Viewers with high-speed Internet connections can browse a menu of thumbnail-size still photos; click on the photo and the corresponding video begins to play on a large central screen along

with associated text and Web links to more information.

As I understand the argument, the threat to the body politic arises from the fact that in The FeedRoom, ordinary citizens—not professional journalists—decide what news they will watch and, more ominously, what they will not watch. My sister could spend half an hour immersed in the latest crisis from the set of "Friends" while completely missing news about the latest crisis in the Middle East. My mother could follow every implant, transplant and bypass story in our Health channel, but accidentally bypass what the new Congress intends to do about Medicare. The citizenry, swept up by a blizzard of choice, becomes woefully misinformed about the real issues with which they must grapple as active participants in a deliberative democracy.

That's a disturbing prospect, especially to someone like me, whose devotion to democracy was amply demonstrated as far back as the 11th grade,

when I was voted out as class president and peacefully handed over the reins of power. But The FeedRoom did not invent viewer choice: We're simply embracing it as the most significant trend in communications over the past 20 years. We did not invent the high-speed broadband Internet, either—we're simply using its fat pipes to bring television news to the computer.

We've learned that viewer choice leads to less dumbing down and more depth than television producers have chosen to offer in a long while. On the day I write this, The FeedRoom's Campaign 2000 channel offers 21 different election-related news videos from 10 different mainstream sources, as well as related wire copy and links to campaign Web sites. Broadband offers my television brethren, perplexed to the point of paralysis by eroding audiences and increasing marginality, an invitation to the interactive party that has been closed to them so far. All they have to do is R.S.V.P.



It turns out that broadcast television was the Alexander Kerensky of the communications revolution, brushed aside by the Bolsheviks of cable and the Web. Two decades ago, Ted Turner made news available any time, raising the bar beyond broadcasters' reach. Then, even more significantly, Steve Case made information available *anywhere*—even on your desk at work—and Americans had literally millions of different information sources at their command online.

Internet One, as we'll call the narrowband, slow-speed, text-intensive Web that exploded in popularity during the past six years, favored stodgy print providers like wire services and newspapers, eager to reuse the oceans of ink their core businesses pump out every day. The indexers of this ink—the Yahoo!'s and AOL's—did even better. In this environment, television suddenly found itself the stodgy one; stations' Web sites offered pitifully little content compared to information-laden print outlets, and online users, more mercilessly results-oriented than General Electric's CEO Jack Welch, ignored them.

According to the latest Pew study of American news habits, the number of Americans who go online for news every day has risen nine percent during the past two years. But more of that audience goes to the online wire services of Yahoo! or AOL News than to all of the branded television providers' sites (CNN.com, ABCNews.com, MSNBC.com, et al.) combined, and local newspaper sites outdraw local television sites two to one. Meanwhile, Pew reports, during that same two-year period network and local television news viewing dropped six percent, with the youngest and best educated viewers deserting in droves for online news.

But Internet Two has now squealed to the curb—a video-rich, multimedia roadster to Internet One's Model T—and television news organizations have a chance to hop on board and leave the competition's jalopies in the dust by offering “television, only better” to the 38 million broadband viewers whose ranks are growing by 500,000 per month. Given the high quality of video streaming available today—between two and 10 times faster than the herky-

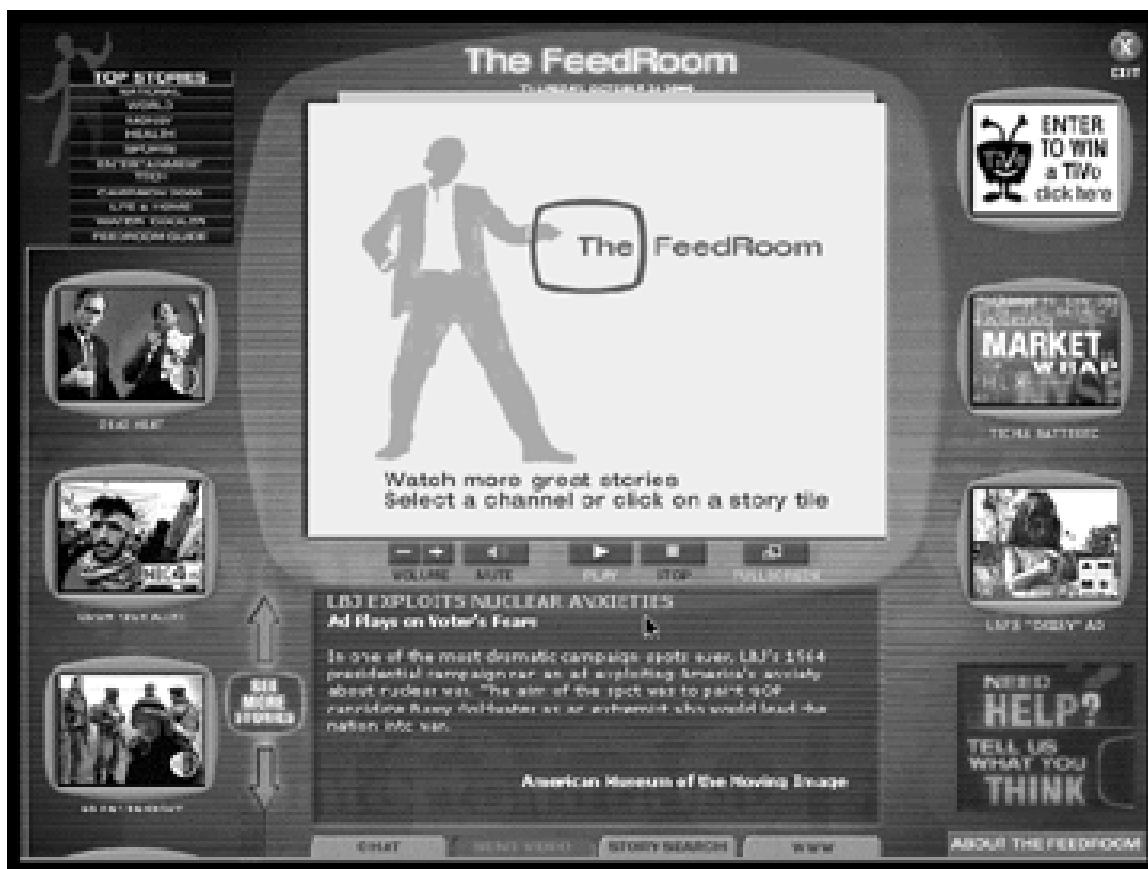
jerky nickelodeon shows of narrowband—the stage is set for television news over the home computer.

Broadband viewers want news, according to a new study by McKinsey & Company that compared narrowband and broadband user behavior. News and information sites show the largest gains among broadband users of any type of online site; perhaps because broadband connections are always on, like a dial tone, they are ideally suited for the constant updating of information. Jupiter Communications has found that among the millions of online users who stream video, news is even more popular than entertainment or sports video, and news sites encourage the longest visits of any category.

The FeedRoom enables the 35 television stations in our network—which belong to NBC, Tribune Company, Granite Broadcasting, and Journal Broadcasting—to offer 24-hour news coverage over the computer, via co-branded local FeedRooms. In addition, the national [www.feedroom.com](http://www.feedroom.com) site aggregates all of the local stories as well as a slate of national content. Viewers watch the latest news video presented on an atomic

level; that is, the individual one-minute-30 news segments that comprise a newscast made accessible in any order they wish. As one viewer put it, “This is like television that I control.”

The advantages of choice are apparent upon arrival. Say you're looking for the weather report, one of the main drivers of local news viewership. On television you have to wait 13 minutes for the weather segment and then you've got to sit through all kinds of computer-generated legerdemain to get to what you really want to know: what to wear tomorrow morning. In your local FeedRoom,



you can click right away on the five-day forecast thumbnail and play only that part of the weather segment that interests you, delivered by an on-air personality you have come to trust. Narrowband users click an icon and get weather data; broadband viewers can click and get Al Roker, all day.

What's more, viewer control turns passive viewers into active participants. How many times have you walked into the office on Monday morning and asked a coworker, "Did you see that story on '60 Minutes' last night?" In broadband, you could actually discuss that story with others who have watched it, drill for more information on the subject, send a clip of the story to a friend, or even watch unaired portions that were left on the cutting room floor. "60 Minutes" could stretch for endless hours, as your immersion in the subject matter grows deeper and more rewarding. That kind of multi-dimensional experience would be good for news divisions and good for their viewers (and good for democracy, for that matter).

The FeedRoom's technology engine allows the most precise knowledge of news viewer habits and interests ever obtained. The video database that powers The FeedRoom records every click every viewer makes—anonously, unless they want to volunteer their name or e-mail address in order to receive customized traffic reports or news updates. We'll know that Viewer 3675Sigma goes right for the sports channel every time, calling up every new Yankee story; then she scans the Money channel followed by the latest movie review. We can make sure that 3675 gets her fix every time by presenting those stories upon her arrival, making it more likely that she will return. And every time she does, her visit will begin with a quick set of headlines culled from the day's top stories, as determined by our editorial staff of 40 former television, radio, print and online journalists. We have not surrendered editorial judgment—but we have stopped creating a "lineup," because each viewer creates her own, choosing a unique path through the thicket of video generated by the world's most dogged journalists.

In fact, despite all that choice, or perhaps because of it, our viewers tell us that they still want an editor. There's just too much information flying around out there for any one individual to make sense of it all. They're too busy to cull through the myriad satellite feeds beaming this way and that; they couldn't possibly take the time to link video to text or to hunt down related Web sites. Our viewers want to make the final choice as to what they watch, but not the initial choice. They want more options—not infinite options. Yahoo! made a mint—and made itself an indispensable information source—by making sense of the Web; now television news organizations can do the same by making sense of the world once again for a new generation of viewers.

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### **The audience is calling from the other side of the digital divide.**

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And there is money to be made in doing so. The same targeting technology that lets you create your own 24-hour news channel can also inform you of products you are most interested in buying. That type of targeting is worth a lot more to advertisers than banner ads that everyone ignores, which is why the FeedRoom sales team is seeing broadband advertising rate as high as \$100 per thousand viewers, compared to the \$15-25 norm for television and five dollars or less for banners. As broadband penetration continues to soar—it has more than tripled in 2000 alone—news departments will generate revenue several times over from the same piece of news footage. Because media companies own more of their news footage outright than they do other forms of content, news divisions can become much more significant corporate players in the digital world.

The FeedRoom is constantly called on by the builders of tomorrow's delivery platforms—set-top box, wireless,

terrestrial digital, wired homes—all of whom are hungry for content. News departments are content factories and will be in a position to dictate the terms of sale. Certainly, there is a danger that commerce and editorial content could become confused by viewers or commingled by overreaching sales executives, especially because online viewers tend not to be offended by advertising residing nearby editorial content. That calls for extra vigilance by the managers of broadband news sites.

Fragmentation has been a fact of American life throughout our history. The idea that there was ever one monolithic American audience engaged in an ongoing national conversation is comforting but inaccurate; even during the Washington Administration, Democrat-Republicans read one pamphleteer and Federalists another, and most people simply pulled a plow, oblivious to it all. There have always been as many audiences as there are audience members, a reality that FM radio and then cable television and ultimately the Internet were nimble enough to exploit but that broadcast television could not—until today.

Give up trying to inform everyone about everything and you begin informing more people about the truly important things—important as defined by *them*. Address each viewer's individual interests and needs and be freed from the guesswork that leads to silly sweeps series and Sansabelt news-casts—one-size-fits-all.

Heed the inner voice whispering that television news is no longer quite the calling you thought it would be right out of journalism school. The audience is calling from the other side of the digital divide. Respond, please. ■

*Jonathan Klein founded The FeedRoom in September 1999, following an award-winning 16-year career at CBS News, where he was executive vice president (1996-1998) and for many years worked as executive producer, producer, director, creator and documentary filmmaker on a variety of news shows.*

# The Wired Revolution

At Reuters, journalists package multimedia news to fit consumers' needs.

By Katie King

Last spring, Reuters' top war correspondent Kurt Schork was killed in a rebel ambush in Sierra Leone. Reuters Editor in Chief Geert Linnebank, in his eulogy honoring Schork, said the pragmatic reporter might have assumed that because he wrote for a "wire," his byline did not reach the public at large.

"Kurt Schork was Reuters' finest war reporter. He shed a lot of light on a lot of awful places. He wanted to, and often did, help bring about change. Actions were hastily reversed, official policies changed, public opinion mobilized under the sustained battering of Kurt's incontrovertible reports," Linnebank said. "Kurt, the pragmatist, knew that if his byline did not gain fame with a broad public audience, it really did register with those of influence and power."

But Schork's reports from these war zones did reach an incredibly wide audience because of the Internet. The month Schork died, 34 million people saw Reuters' news stories online around the world, according to Reuters Media Research estimates based on government reports and professional online data collection companies. By fall 2000, that number had grown to 50 million people each month.

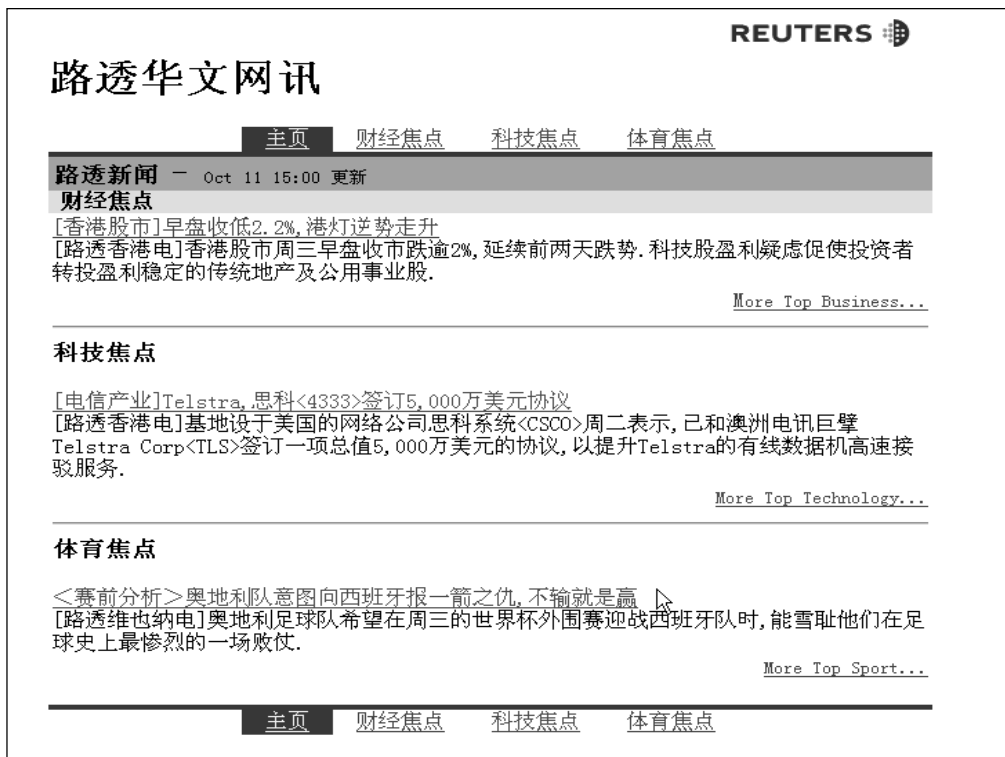
At its most basic, that is the revolution the Web has wrought for the wires. It is about access, with little or no filtering, for a vast number of end users, general-public news consumers. From relative obscurity outside of newspaper copy desks and financial trading rooms, wires like Reuters, Dow Jones, The Associated Press (AP), United Press International (UPI), France's Agence France-Presse (AFP), Germany's

Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA), and others have become household names as the work of extraordinary wire journalists like Schork becomes widely available for public consumption.

The Internet has pumped lots of positive change into the world of journalism and the wires. I can only speak for the revolution at Reuters, a 150-year-old international news and financial information company, whose British roots anchor its commitment to accuracy, freedom from bias, global breadth, and speed. (Our Web address is [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com).)

In the early 1990's, as the Web was putting forward its public face with the launch of user-friendly browsers, some forward-thinkers at Reuters noticed the strong synergy between the Internet, described as a global network of networks, and Reuters, which is a global network of news production. Common characteristics included the ability to make news available in real time, 24/7; the ability to be at once global and local; the ability to present news in a nonlinear fashion, and the ability to showcase multimedia, multicultural and multilingual content. And they noticed that, with the glut of unreliable information out there, reliability was a premium.

At Reuters we call this sea change the "News" Millennium. It means that technological change is challenging our old perceptions of how news is delivered and consumed. The Internet is a medium without limitations. Newspapers and magazines publish only daily, weekly or monthly. Television and radio have time limitations and have no choice but to present their news in an unchangeable linear order. But the Internet provides real-time, multimedia news around the clock with no technological limits on story



A screen grab showing the demo home page of the Reuters' Chinese Online Report, a real-time multimedia publication edited and filed by a team of Reuters journalists in Taiwan.

length and nearly unlimited access to related content of interest to the news user. The technology allows the user to create a unique news experience that is personal, interactive, nonlinear and multimedia capable.

To complicate matters, online news consumers want it both ways. They need experienced newsgatherers and publishers to help them sort through the information overload on the Web. But in a multi-channel universe, they also want to be their own publishers, taking part in deciding what news is most relevant. So the question for news organizations like ours is how to create high quality, appealing multimedia news publications for online clients and end users.

At Reuters, one answer has been our multimedia Online Reports product suite. It features packages of news, segmented into channels. Typical channels would resemble sections of traditional publications: top news (the front page), business, entertainment, sports, science, health, technology, etc. Each category lists stories by priority with XML (Extensible Markup Language) tags. These tags indicate what is the number one story and continue through number 10. Pictures, news graphics, and video clips are tagged as well to indicate which stories they are associated with. These publications feature careful editorial selection and prioritization of content by experienced Reuters journalists around the world. The format can be adapted to any language and any combination of content. From just a handful of Online Reports desks 18 months ago, we now have 22 of them publishing multimedia news in 11 languages across 18 countries.

What has been especially exciting for journalists at Reuters with the development of these new publications for the Internet, is that each desk has a group of specially trained multimedia journalists/producers who “own” their publication. They become “local” publishers, whose online publications sell worldwide. Our Arabic-language Online Report, for example, is selling well in the Middle East and in the United States. These Online Reports teams are empowered to continually work to improve their publications and

respond to clients and readers.

Typically, the online clients will request additional topics of multimedia news presentation, based on their own readers’ feedback. One client might want more about technology or Internet news. Another might ask for specialized “top picture” displays or specific favorite sports news publications, which vary dramatically from country to country. The Online Reports’ journalists also act as a global team, sharing information about the packaging process and “best practices” for multimedia development and filing.

Reuters employs more than 2,300 correspondents in more than 160 countries. Each day they produce between two and two and a half million words—the equivalent of three copies of the Bible—in 24 languages. Hundreds, sometimes thousands of pictures and hours of video accompany that text output. Before the Internet, Reuters delivered this vast stream of content down wide pipes to wire editors at client sites. A limited amount of this content found its way into newspapers, magazines or TV or radio broadcasts.

Now, the Internet has forced us to reinvent how we package our news content and present it for online publishers and their end users. Client publishers can be anyone who has an online site. From the smallest new dot-com to the largest portal, these publishers understand how important it is to provide quality breaking news on their sites to attract and keep the end user, the news consumer. But few of them can afford news staff to publish 24/7. In fact, many of our traditional clients are now also taking advantage of our new real-time multimedia products for their online sites in addition to subscribing to the wire service products.

One of our critical challenges to continued success in global news publishing is adapting to the continually changing technologies. Internet publishers require Internet delivery, so Reuters added that option to its delivery suite in early 2000. The Reuters Internet Delivery System offers clients multimedia products with content tagged in XML but we are also now


testing NewsML, a news encoding language based on the established XML format.

The U.K.-based International Press Telecommunications Committee, a news industry standards body, approved NewsML in October. One of its key features is that it uses “metadata”—information about a story such as its author, subject, content, coding, etc.—to match up elements for a multimedia package and also to categorize text, photos, video and graphics for historical databases. Metadata is invisible to users but it is essential for enabling clients to search for our news quickly and easily in a Web environment.

Segmentation and NewsML will allow us to adapt our Online Reports’ news stories to the new information delivery mechanisms, including mobile telephones and other hand-held wireless devices that are burgeoning, especially in Europe. We are actively developing products that address these client needs across platforms, including audio for voice portals, video on demand, and live streaming video.

All of this innovation is still based on the basics, which means solid reporting, writing and editing and quality news picture and video coverage. The revolution lies in thinking about how the technology makes it possible for the important work of fine “wire” journalists to reach as many end users in as many ways as possible. ■

*Katie King, a 1994 Nieman Fellow, is vice president, general news at Reuters Media. She has worked with Reuters for 15 years as a foreign correspondent, multimedia editor, and Internet news specialist. She joined Reuters NewMedia, Reuters’ founding Internet news development division, in 1994 and launched the company’s first daily multimedia news publication later that year. Since January 1999 she has been coordinating Reuters’ global multimedia product strategy and development.*

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# Multimedia Reporting in a Never-Ending News Cycle

A Tampa reporter covers a murder trial for TV, newspaper and the Web.

By Jackie Barron

**C**onvergence. Multimedia. Web reporting.

These are the new buzzwords heard in newsrooms everywhere. Heard, but not always well understood. And what these words imply about change can seem overwhelming to the traditional broadcast journalist whose reporting focus and style had remained pretty much the same during the past decade. What has changed for us is the expectation that we will be able to cover more stories within the same deadline constraints. Now, in the multimedia news environment that has arrived in Tampa, Florida, these expectations are exacerbated as journalists are forced to master and put into practice time-consuming new skills. The real concern is that while we are busy expanding the quantity of our reporting, its quality might suffer.

Recently I reported on a federal murder trial that took me from Florida to Texas for the conclusion of a case I had followed for three years. What made this assignment different from any I'd done before was that in this era of "media convergence" I was expected to not only do my television reports, but also write for The Tampa Tribune and the paper's Web site. I'd spent plenty of time gathering background reporting for this story, so I thought preparing for live shots, writing at least two television stories a day, a newspaper article and a daily online journal just might be possible, if I was ready to go without sleep! What kept me motivated was the knowledge that this kind of multimedia reporting had never been done before at our station, and I wanted to accept the challenge.

My coverage of the month-long murder trial ritual started each morning at six. That was when I wrote a daily Web journal describing my perspective on the courtroom drama from the day before. By 10 that morning I had

done my first live shot for the station. The juggling act that came with meeting three deadlines during the same 24-hour period meant that I had to establish a pecking order early and stick to it. Broadcast obligations were always my top priority, so Channel 8's deadlines came first and received my greatest attention. I focused first on my five and usually six o'clock live shots. My second priority was The Tampa Tribune. Calls to the newspaper editor began by mid-afternoon and usually by seven o'clock, just after I finished with the six p.m. news, I filed a story from my laptop computer. But it didn't end there. I worked with an editor/mentor for at least another hour making the Tribune article work for the paper. Finally, around nine o'clock at night, I finished my day with a quick call to the Channel 8 evening producer to file a quick story for the 11 p.m. news. At this point I bordered on brain meltdown!

Trained as a broadcast journalist, the greatest challenge for me was writing for print. Several times a day hundreds of thousands of people watched my reports on TV but I felt real fear when I thought about writing for Tribune readers. Federal courthouses don't allow cameras inside the courtroom so I could not rely on dramatic pictures to tell the story, which left me to do the descriptions.

I had to approach the story a little differently from the moment I took my seat in the courtroom. I wrote down every facial expression, described in detail who came in, who went out, what they wore, how the jurors reacted, how often the defendant scribbled notes to his attorneys, and when he smiled at his wife. The judge, who was prone to making jokes, became an element in my newspaper story. Details that often died under television time constraints, buried behind background information, came to

life in print. And these usually hidden pieces of color did eventually cross over into television and improved my broadcast stories, making them stand out in the way that a well-written sentence pulls a reader in. Other print journalists covering the trial patiently answered my nearly student-like questions. For example, I would ask some of them how often they went into detail explaining the legal maneuvers of the day as opposed to just focusing on the people involved in the story. Each morning I went online to compare their lead with mine.

In time, I came to appreciate this opportunity to explore this new territory called convergence.

When people hear about this assignment, a lot of them want to know how I got paid for this extra work that I did. My answer: I didn't. I didn't receive separate compensation from the paper or from the online work. My supervisors did give me some extra time off. But what is becoming increasingly clear is that as this new effort at convergence evolves, management must also evolve. Sharing resources may mean pooling budgets. The same goes for reporters. They need to prepare to do more and expect to start doing so tomorrow. But they should also remember to hold those higher up to the same standards. If management intends to rally its news staff to a new level of service, then there has to be more motivation than just a pat on the back.

The only way to provide this type of product is with hands-on support from management. My assistant news director, Deb Halpern, was ready with feedback and guidance on a moment's notice. Critical help came from Tampa Tribune Editor Martha Durrance, who gently walked me through the rules of a newspaper, occasionally making room for a little broadcast wisdom.

This experience made me a better


journalist. My TV stories on the murder-for-hire trial didn't receive Emmy award-winning attention. But solid, often entertaining information reached people across three forms of media, providing different stories on each. In time, as the different media become comfortable with one another, creativity won't have to make way for comprehensive coverage. Right now, I believe that reporting on a story for broadcast, print and online means less time to approach a story from different angles and still meet staggered deadlines.

Convergence might mean that the old rules governing television and newspaper reporting will need to be altered as journalists construct this new media. And editors, news directors, reporters and photojournalists—working together—can become parents of innovative forms of newsgathering and transmission.

Across the board, from top to bottom, multimedia convergence poses an inspiring challenge. The walls separating newsrooms of differing media have come crashing down, and we are

left staring at one another with questions that we can only find the answers to by working together. ■

*Jackie Barron is a reporter at Channel 8, WFLA-TV in Tampa, Florida. Her beat is Sarasota and Manatee counties with an emphasis on crime/courts and education. She worked at WWSB, the ABC affiliate in Sarasota, and prior to that at WHAG-TV in Hagerstown, Maryland.*

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## Protesters Develop Their Own Global Internet News Service

'The IMC was an end-run around the information gatekeepers....'

By John Tarleton

I was soaking wet and sitting near the back of a bright yellow school bus when another round of spirited singing broke out. Though I was not wearing my IMC press badge (nor any other ID), I had been filing daily stories for the Independent Media Center (IMC)—a Web publication in which coverage of news events emphasized issues and included voices not featured in mainstream reporting—during the week leading up to the April protests against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in Washington, D.C.

Now I couldn't reach the ballpoint pen and soggy notepad that were tucked in my inside jacket pocket. So I tried to memorize the scene around me—how it felt, what people were saying and doing, the uncertainty about what lay ahead. As the singing subsided, a discussion broke out about Monsanto's genetically engineered foods and the privatization of the world's water supplies. Police looked on indulgently as a scruffy young man calling himself "Dionysius Gonorrhoea" periodically filled the bus with his indignant rage. "24,000 children in this

world are going to die of hunger today!" he'd yell. "24,000 children in this world are going to die of hunger tomorrow! 24,000 children in this world are going to die of hunger on Wednesday...."

He was on his way to jail. And so were the rest of us.

### Launching a People's Newsroom

The IMC ([www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org)) emerged in the fall of 1999, midwived into existence by a core group of half a dozen media activists in the Seattle area. The rationale for its emergence was the globalization and centralization of media organizations. By then, six huge media conglomerates held control of the majority of the news and information outlets in this country, and the mergers of major companies made the advertisers who paid the publishing bills equally powerful entities. What concerned the IMC organizers was that the upcoming World Trade Organization protests in Seattle would be poorly covered (if at all) by the mainstream,

corporate media. Their goal was not to create one more alternative lefty publication but to lay the infrastructure for a multimedia peoples' newsroom that would enable activists to come together and disseminate their own stories to a global audience without having to go through the corporate filter.

With \$30,000 in donations (including a hefty amount from an ex-Microsoft employee) and lots of borrowed equipment, the Seattle IMC was able to occupy a small storefront office in downtown Seattle. Our news might not be televised, but now it was ready to be downloaded.

The IMC was an end-run around the information gatekeepers, made possible by the technology of the Internet. The IMC Web site uses open-source software that allows people to instantly upload stories and clips onto the site. And the news that was uploaded was evidently what a lot of people wanted to read. During its coverage of the weeklong "Battle of Seattle," [indymedia.org](http://indymedia.org) received 1.5 million hits, and its audio and video clips were rebroadcast on community radio stations and cable public access channels.

While tens of thousands of protesters disrupted the WTO meetings, hundreds of IMC volunteers braved the tear gas and rubber bullets to record history in the making with pens, notebooks, tape recorders, and video cameras. Images of police assaults (which began several hours before the sporadic window smashing that erupted on the fringe of the protest) and festive but determined protesters moved swiftly around the planet.

## Back on the Beat

Another IMC Web site opened up in early April. Based out of Washington, D.C., it was created to cover the A16 Mobilization for Global Justice. A16, which targeted the IMF and the World Bank, was the sequel to Seattle. Our work area was in a small art gallery in northwest Washington. Striking Pacifica Radio stringers and other seasoned

journalists such as Eric Galatas (program director of Free Speech TV), Michael Eisenmenger (of Paper Tiger TV) and Eddy Becker (formerly with the National Security Archive) worked side by side with those who had little or no experience.

It was my first time working in a newsroom since I'd left my job as a news reporter at the Ottumwa (Iowa) Courier a decade earlier. I ran all over town doing stories on "puppetistas" and Lesbian Avengers and high school kids who were banned from putting up A16 posters because school authorities thought "politics shouldn't be in the schools." I followed a squad of Pennsylvania Teamsters through the halls of Congress as they lobbied against the China Free Trade Bill, and I was in front of the protesters' headquarters when more than 100 police raided it and shut it down for alleged fire code violations. Later, I ended up on the bus with Dionysius Gonorrhea.

It has been a long time since young people have filled this country's jails in the name of justice. There were 1,353 arrests in Washington. The best way to cover the story, I felt, was to be right in the middle of it. I was in custody for 24 hours before I unexpectedly found myself released at arraignment with all charges dismissed. However, 155 of the protesters stayed in jail another four days—singing, hunger striking, refusing to give their names, stripping off their clothes en masse and going limp or tying themselves to their cots—until they were able to collectively bargain the terms of their release.

It was a helluva story. And I ended up telling it ("Adora's Story: 19-Year-Old Protester Arrested for First Time at IMF Demonstrations; Does 5 Days in Jail") through the eyes of a talkative young woman who was in for the full ride. The insights I gained while in custody were invaluable.

## An Expanding Network

The IMC continues growing as it both covers and helps to create the movement against corporate globalization. It is now, in the lingo of our times, "a diversified global media group." It has thousands of workers/participants, a catchy logo, and 37 sites scattered in cities across the United States and Canada and in countries including Mexico, France, Italy, Israel and India. Dozens more are in the queue. At this fall's IMF/World Bank demonstrations, 500 people from 32 countries participated in the Prague IMC. And discussions are well underway about everything from whether to adopt 501(c)(3) nonprofit status to how to best set up a global IMC "spokescouncil," with each local IMC represented by an empowered representative.

As a product of the anti-corporate globalization

movement, the IMC shares both its strengths and weaknesses. It is defiant, angry, hopeful, chaotic, creative, generous and, at times, painfully naive. It is a voluntocracy that operates mostly on youthful enthusiasm. And in true anarchist fashion, it is decentralized and highly participatory. All decisions are made by consensus.

The heart of each IMC site is the newswire that runs down the right-hand side of the screen. The best stories are culled from the newswire by editorial collectives and placed in the center column of the page. Links to other IMC sites appear in the left-hand column. Since anyone can upload a story onto the newswire, what arrives makes for an interesting brew. Here is a sampling of headlines from stories that appeared on the main newswire one day in late October:

- “Breaking News! Major Coal Sludge Spill Threatens Kentucky”
- “Nader LEADS in Time Poll...VOTE!”
- “Call to Action on N7—Everywhere in the U\$”
- “Ichetucknee Earth First! Road Blocks Removed by Police After 16+ Hours”
- “N16—Protest the Trans Atlantic Business Dialogue in Cincinnati, USA”
- “2,000 Protest in NYC Against Police Brutality”
- “U.S. Cannot Be Honest Broker in Israeli-Palestinian Peace Talks”
- “A Global Call for Freedom of Speech Everywhere—Everybody’s Box!”

Is this a bulletin board for the far left or a robust annex to the marketplace of ideas? Some will question whether IMC journalism is real journalism since it is not “objective,” in the traditional sense of that word, and it doesn’t pretend to be. After all, can those of us who are politically motivated have the objective distance to question our own assumptions? Time will tell. Yet we would argue that many corporate journalists have their own deeply ingrained bias toward retaining the status quo.

Relying heavily on official sources within government and business, corporate journalism sets the narrow parameters that actually are put forth for


public debate. Every notion that falls outside of those parameters, such as the possibility of having universal health care as every other Western industrial democracy does or the risks of genetic engineering or the buildup of a prison industrial complex or the deepening misery of the Palestinians, just to cite a few examples, is generally either derided or ignored by the mainstream press. It also appears that corporate journalists rise through the ranks not only because of their abilities and their work ethic but also because of their uncanny ability to always ask the wrong questions. To what extent this is done consciously (self-censorship) or unconsciously (internalization of institutional values) is impossible to say, and it really does not matter. The result is the same: journalism as the monologue of power.

I believe journalism is not about applauding the powerful but challeng-

ing how power is used and abused. It’s about asking hard-hitting questions that shed light in dark places. It’s about communicating information that not only gets the who, what, where and when correct but tries to put stories in a fuller context, often by asking and trying to answer the “why” questions, as well. And it is about seeking out the stories of those who live on the margins and lack power within the system, which includes most people in one way or another. If this is how journalism was practiced, it would be the beginning of an American glasnost.

The IMC is still a long way from fulfilling this ideal. But at least the will to do so is there. ■

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## Revealing What’s Happening in Schools

By using the Web, students can become frontline reporters.

*In October, John Gage, chief researcher for Sun Microsystems and currently a Shorenstein Fellow at Harvard, met with the Nieman Fellows at Lippmann House and talked about the convergence of technology and the press. During the question and answer period, he shared his vision of one way that newspapers could use these news tools of communication. They could have students report and write about what’s happening in schools. He began by using California as an example because of his experience in wiring schools for the Internet and developing a Web page for each school.*

There are about 13,000 schools in California, 1,050 school districts. If you try to read about schools in the Los Angeles Times, the paper might cover one school, they might cover the Los Angeles unified school district—that’s 700 and some odd schools—but they’ll never cover all of them. They can’t. So, they won’t. And they don’t have anybody on the ground [at all of these schools] anyway.

So, there is all this tension between, “Get the local news; news is local,” and you could try to do that and it could fail because people don’t want to pay for [the kind of reporting it would take to do] it. Now we have something brand new [in terms of technology], and somewhere there’s going to be a shift.

We have a way to make a free, universally readable newspaper for every



school in the world.

Four years ago I did a project. I just got fed up because I wanted to get my kid's school wired to the Internet. Well, gosh, you talk to the contractors, it's \$50,000. And you talk to people who run the school, and they're worried that they don't have the money or the expertise or the permission.

But the parents do. It struck me that the two million people in California that had downloaded Netscape by January 1996 had all the expertise needed. All it would take was finding a way, a cheap way, to allow them to organize to go wire their own kid's school. That way was the Internet.

So I said, "We have 13,000 schools in California. I'm going to order every engineer in California to go to their kid's school on Saturday and, eight o'clock in the morning, bring a ladder, bring the reel of wire, and go in and wire the school, and I give you permission."

I lied to everybody. I said, "Saturday morning, March 9th, everybody has permission to go to the school, bring a ladder, and wire the school." It took me two hours to make a Web site for every school in California, so the parents

could go to their kid's school and volunteer, so other people could see them.

A lot of parents said, "Really?" "Yes, absolutely." "No kidding?" And they called the school and said, "Guess what? We're going to come over on Saturday morning." The principal would say, "No you're not. It's my school." The parents say, "No, no, this guy said that we could do it, and we're going to come and we're going to bring the wire for free and it doesn't cost anything."

Well, in the 1,050 school districts, about 50 school districts said, "It's a communist plot," or "It's the devil coming." In other places they [school administrators] said, "We better get in front of the troops because they're our parents and they all work, and they have computers at their work and they're going to come and wire it." So it ended up that we did this project to get all the schools wired, and on that March day, 100,000 people got up in

California and wired 4,000 schools in the morning. They just brought the wire; it cost the schools nothing. People sold cakes. The Web page for every school, that cost nothing, had turned into the tool to organize the neighborhood, the parents. It became a mini-newspaper for the school, where you could write what you wanted about the school.

News emerged that otherwise none would see. At one school, I heard about girls developing bladder infections. A parent told me, "There was attempted rape in the bathroom, and the principal, who has no budget, locked all the bathrooms because they had no security to keep the bathrooms safe. There aren't any bathrooms. The girls don't have a bathroom."

You must be joking. "No, we're not

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**'Write it on the Web page for your school, because when it's written down there's a story there that can change people's lives. You're a little newspaper.'**

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joking, that's exactly the problem. We can't get the school board to listen. We get no money for police or security. There's no money in the school. Some of the parents try to volunteer to help make the place more secure, but that's our big problem."

I said, "You know what you ought to do? Write it on the Web page for your school, because when it's written down there's a story there that can change people's lives. You're a little newspaper."

"Oh my God," she said. And she wrote a long thing about it, big scandal, and stuff started to happen.

So that's the idea. What we need is to get every school in the world linked to the Net, and then get the kids to report on conditions in the school in their community. If I want to find out in rural Japan if the NTT project to get bandwidth into Honshu or someplace really worked, I could ask the head of

the school, and they're going to tell me one thing. Let's get the kid in school actually involved.

How can we cast this in a way that might work? I mean, this is something that we've got to do. I went to The New York Times and said, "You've got the foundation; let's do this for the Times." Kids in the service area of The New York Times have T-shirts that say, "New York Times Technology Reporter." At each elementary school, teachers pick one student, and we end up with 6,000 kids with T-shirts and they all file a story every week about what's in their school. "The dog did this. The roof leaks. It's boring. Of the 20 computers we have, 10 don't work, and the math teacher won't let anyone not in math touch the one that does work."

Of the kids who file, 52 kids a year, one each week, will appear in the real paper. At the end of the year, The New York Times, we've got 52 new journalists out there. They've been in the paper, so they've written something, and the other 6,000 kids file on The New York Times's Web site, which costs nothing. They're writing about local news in a community. Now we can use the

editorial function, which is to find interesting stories, and then figure out if any of them is true, and it generates some new kind of journalism that comes from the place up. And since we can see these things suddenly it's new, it's different, and the kids, by the way, are all going to have cameras. Figure that out. So now the kids are all running around taking pictures.

And then there will be great lawsuits, because the principal will try to shut down one of these things because he said that the principal is having an affair with a teacher, and then there will be all these freedom of the press lawsuits. It will be great. It will be chaos. ■

# Computers Help to Transform Statistics Into Stories

A Chicago Tribune reporter unearths patterns of fatal nursing errors.

By Mike Berens

**A** Chicago boy's tiny lips turned dark from a lack of oxygen as his mother's scream echoed through the hospital. A registered nurse dashed to the examination table, cradled the boy's limp body and ran down the corridor, panic gripping her voice, as she began to yell, "Blue baby! Blue baby!"

An elderly Kansas woman gasped for breath as she hoarsely called out for help, repeatedly pumping the call button for assistance that never came. As the minutes became hours she stopped breathing and her damaged brain began an irreversible shutdown.

A pregnant California mother struggling to give birth was given Pitocin, a common labor-inducing drug, but a miscalculation sent 35 times the ordered dose into her bloodstream, lethally coursing into the body of her unborn daughter.

Each of these cases—and thousands of other previously unacknowledged victims of nursing errors—were first uncovered as computerized statistics, anonymous clerical entries often obscured from public view by coded identities or confidentiality laws. Yet, after many months of additional reporting, these cases became the foundation of a three-day series published September 10-12, in which the Chicago Tribune reported that overwhelmed and inadequately trained nurses kill and injure thousands of patients every year as hospitals sacrifice patient safety for an improved bottom line.

Nurses provide first warning and rapid intervention for those too sick to help themselves. Analyzing more than three million computerized records, the Tribune embarked on a 10-month effort to quantify and document a national crisis of substandard nursing care. By themselves, the numbers proved stunning:



Mikey's mother and grandmother visit his grave on what would have been his sixth birthday. When he was two years old, Mikey's parents took him to the hospital as a precautionary measure after he bumped his head. He was accidentally given a sedative overdose by a nurse before a CAT scan at Rush Presbyterian Hospital in Chicago. *Photo by Stephanie Sinclair, Chicago Tribune.*

- Since 1995, at least 1,720 hospital patients have been accidentally killed and 9,584 others injured from the actions or inaction of registered nurses besieged by cuts in staff and other belt-tightening in U.S. hospitals.
- At least 418 patients have been killed and 1,356 others injured by registered nurses operating infusion pumps. All lacked training, or they claimed to be overwhelmed with too many patients. In many cases, harried nurses punched in the wrong dosage amounts on the pumps, turning an order for 9.10 milligrams to 91.0. Lethal calculation errors have become so prevalent that some nurses call them "death by decimal."
- To compensate for understaffing,

hospitals rely on machines with warning alarms to help monitor patients' vital signs. At least 216 patient deaths and 429 injuries have occurred in hospitals where nurses failed to hear alarms built into life-saving equipment, such as respirators.

- At least 119 patients have been killed and 564 others injured by unlicensed, unregulated nurse aides who are sometimes used to eliminate or supplant the role of registered nurses. Under a cost-savings program at some hospitals, housekeeping staff assigned to clean rooms have been pressed into duty as aides to dispense medicine.

In all, I relied on more than a dozen

state and federal databases, which were painstakingly culled for nursing-related cases, then compiled into a custom database. Computerized records were cross-matched to paper files, such as court cases and death certificates, and supplemented by information obtained through hundreds of interviews.

The computer—and the raw statistics—were just a beginning. Information yielded patients such as Miguel Fernandez, the two-year-old Chicago boy who received a fatal overdose of drugs from his nurse who would later dash down the hospital hallway yelling “blue baby.” Another entry identified the victim only as #56893. Research later revealed that the five-digit code was Mary Heidenreich, 78, who was accidentally killed in 1999 by a morphine injection incorrectly administered by a registered nurse in Denver.

Just 15 states currently require hospitals to report medical errors, no matter how egregious the circumstances. Of those, only two states make the information fully public.

Two databases proved most useful in tracking nursing errors. The first is the MAUDE database compiled by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which contains more than three million records detailing possible medical

device failures. Conversely, the data can also be used to track instances of human error. Each record detailed a date and generic place, such as hospital or nursing home, but did not include victims’ names, name of the facility, or even the state. Like most computer databases, MAUDE data was a beginning for my reporting, not an end, a signpost to major thematic issues, such as patients who died because there were not enough nurses to properly monitor their conditions.

A second notable database was a national list of nurses disciplined by a state licensing agencies. Data are compiled by the National Council for State Boards of Nursing and include the nurse’s identity and type of violation. The council will not allow public access. However, files are mailed to each state, which means the data become part of the public record. Even so, Illinois licensing officials balked at turning over the list, but acquiesced after a brief skirmish with Tribune attorneys.

Information from these two databases was cross-matched with dozens of other public records, from court records to divorce files to home ownership. In many cases, records were found only on paper. Two weeks were spent sitting in a musty room with

dozens of file cabinets as each Illinois disciplinary case was copied—I brought a portable copier that fits under the arm to facilitate the task. Then the information was entered into a spreadsheet program.

Files documented that drug-addicted nurses roamed from hospital to hospital without punishment. Nurses with serious felony convictions—from child molesting to aggravated drug trafficking—continued to work with impunity. Illinois officials, as well as other agencies nationally, agreed to withhold information that patients had died from public files if nurses agreed to quickly settle the cases. In one Chicago-area case, state officials erased references of a patient death from public files; the nurse had been found guilty of administering an overdose of chemotherapy. In a Utah case, a nurse who was found guilty of negligently killing a patient returned to work without suspension or additional training.

In all, 10 months were spent disassembling millions of computerized records, then combining and reassembling the information to create an unflinching, quantitative analysis that examined medical errors from a unique perspective. Associate managing editor Robert Blau, who oversees projects, and deputy project editor George Papajohn meticulously dissected my methodology of computer analysis—an essential component of the vetting process. Each case was built blank by blank—spreadsheet cell by cell—with the goal of assembling an incontrovertible story that detailed the issues to the number and to the person.

The computer provides reporters access to information that can’t be seen in any other way. Increasingly, public information is stored exclusively in computers. Those who don’t know how to enter these electronic vaults remain modern-day illiterates. Would anyone hire a reporter who refused to use the telephone? Yet, in the early days of this groundbreaking technology, there were undoubtedly those who argued that face to face information gathering was the only proper way to do the job.

Fundamental reporting skills are still essential. A computer will not make a bad reporter good. But the computer



Registered Nurse Janet Dotson reads the crib for a newborn at Rush-Copley Medical Center in Aurora, Illinois. The Department of Professional Regulation charged her with gross negligence resulting in the death of a patient, when Dodson worked for a temporary agency. *Photo by Stephanie Sinclair, Chicago Tribune.*

empowers journalists to go beyond the press release. Few interview techniques are more potent or fruitful than confronting officials with computer analysis of their data.

This proved true during the first weeks of my research. The project began with little more than a realization that the nation's 2.6 million registered nurses comprised the nation's largest healthcare profession. For my first interviews, nurses emphatically warned me that unprecedented staffing cutbacks were endangering hospital patients. However, the American Hospital Association (AHA) maintained that a record number of registered nurses were employed by hospitals, a position bolstered by a Bible-sized book of statistics.

Using the association's published data, I entered it into a spreadsheet program, then I cross-matched these totals with information about staffing levels that I gleaned from nurse union contracts and Medicaid cost reports.

Each year, hospitals file these cost reports with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. My analysis clearly showed that fewer nurses were assigned to patient care. My conclusion: The AHA data was misleading and flawed.


When presented with my findings, an AHA spokesman made a stunning admission: The statistics included registered nurses who didn't provide care to hospital patients. These nurses were either desk-bound or were assigned to remote nursing homes and home health agencies. In fact, the AHA didn't ask hospitals how many nurses were assigned to patient care. This meant that the AHA's staffing statistics created a public smokescreen.

Public response to the series was swift and overwhelming, flooding Tribune voice mail and e-mail systems. Thousands of nurses across the country continue to weigh in with compliments and criticisms. In response to many issues raised in the series, an

Illinois task force is investigating staffing trends and disciplinary issues. Also, following the series, Food and Drug Administration officials acknowledged that the Tribune analysis of its databases uncovered new cases linked to nursing errors and inadequate staffing or training, proving that more patients had died preventable deaths than had been publicly acknowledged. A FDA official said, "You found things we don't know about. We'd like to see your data."

With the aid of computer analysis—built on electronic data, paper records and interviews—the Tribune series took readers beyond the official explanation and into a disturbing, hidden part of the health care industry where patient care is all too often measured by dollars. ■

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## Training Journalists to Use Technological Tools in Reporting

The proof of how well this works is in the story.

By Brant Houston

It's all about "the story." It doesn't matter what element of Web resources, databases or computers is involved. When you are training a working journalist the focus must be on "the story." A working journalist doesn't have the time or encouragement to learn for learning's sake, so each new technique must be seen as useful for newsgathering, and its usefulness must be quickly proved.

These are just a few of the lessons I've learned as I've run more than 350 seminars and conferences with journalists during the past six years. Call it "reverse engineering" or "deconstruction," but the basic principle for training is to start with the story.

Here is an outline of the steps:

- Show dozens of stories, both print and broadcast, that resulted from using resources available on the Web or sorting and grouping electronic records with basic software.
- Do a walk-through demonstration of those resources and techniques—a how-to overview.
- Conduct hands-on training exercises of those techniques on information and data pertinent to journalism.
- Go from exercises to the real data, and discuss the perils and pitfalls in using the new techniques.
- Review how to find and obtain electronic data.

- Make the real resources and data easily available.
- Provide follow-up training and in-house adviser/mentors.

During the training, the application of these techniques to the story needs to be discussed and debated. Using a specific situation, an instructor can walk journalists through a mock assignment. In one instance, a reporter used the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) database ([www.sec.gov/edaux/searches.htm](http://www.sec.gov/edaux/searches.htm)) to report a story about how a company run by a former defense department official has extensive government business. With the SEC Web site on the computer screen, the

instructor navigates through the site's Web pages to the "10-K" report that predicts an increase in the amount of business from the U.S. military.

"The Engineering and Construction Group has continued to expand its services to the United States military. The group sees improving opportunities to provide similar support services to other United States agencies and to government agencies of other countries, including the United Kingdom. . . . In 1999 the group increased logistics support services to military peacekeeping efforts in the Balkans and increased activities at the Devonport Dockyard in the United Kingdom."

The report also shows the former defense official is the company's CEO. (The company is Halliburton Company. The former defense secretary is Richard Cheney. And this report was used extensively in a front-page story in *The New York Times*.)

The instructor asks the journalists, who each have a computer connected to the Web, to repeat the steps. Then each journalist applies these research steps to examining a local publicly held company. The class then discusses what other resources are available to dig into a company's background, what verification methods need to be used, and what kind of stories can be produced.

In another training session, an instructor shows a series of stories on campaign finance. The instructor then teaches the journalists how to download campaign finance data from the Web for the presidential election and place it in a database manager such as Microsoft Access. The next lesson involves ways of filtering and sorting the information. Once the basics are understood, the journalists download information from a local congressional race and repeat the steps. Discussion of possible stories follows.

While the structure of a successful computer-assisted training program emerged fairly quickly, many obstacles persist, and these make it difficult to make the kind of headway that journalism, as a practice, should. Among these obstacles are the insularity of the newsroom; the natural cautiousness and math phobia of journalists; the over-

selling of these techniques' immediate value and underestimating of the time investment needed to master them; the lack of follow-up, lack of adequate equipment and software, and a dearth of training and support for mid-level editors.

Today's newsrooms are often insulated environments. Staff cutbacks, the convenience of using the telephone (and now the Web), and increased time pressures exacerbate the problem of journalists not finding the time and flexibility to grapple with new ideas and techniques. In addition, fearful information technology departments have prevented many newsrooms from having direct and easy access to the Internet because of worries about hackers.

A 1998 survey of newsroom trainers by Scott Maier, a journalist then working on his doctorate at the University of North Carolina, found that half of the reporters at newspapers do not use the Internet routinely for research. And Maier found that trainers estimated only 10 percent use any kind of computer analysis. As recently as 1999, IRE (Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.) and NICAR (National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting) trained at several of the largest newspapers in the United States where only a few computers in the newsroom could reach the Web. Maier also observed that some of the most effective training involves examining the work of fellow journalists. "Peer leadership has been key in the spread of computer-assisted reporting," Maier said.

The slowness to connect to the Web for newsgathering has led to a situation where ignorance is not bliss but irrelevance. Reporters have been asked to write stories about the Internet and databases although they had never been on the Internet nor ever used a database. (The lack of familiarity with databases is currently most on display in stories being written about computer-based threats to privacy.) Because so much valuable daily information has moved from hard copy and faxes to availability on the Web, newsrooms are now becoming connected more widely. One of the noteworthy leaps for journalism and the Web was spurred by the

release by Congress (via the Internet) of the Starr Report on the Clinton-Lewinsky investigation.

The increase in Web connections, however, re-emphasizes the need for training. Without guidance, many reporters waste time trying to find information on the Web and then determine—wrongly—that it has no value for them. Training in basic research skills and free "lean and mean" Web indexes with information that every journalist can use are helping to rectify this problem. [Web indexes include *The Reporter's Desktop* at [www.reporter.org/desktop](http://www.reporter.org/desktop), by Duff Wilson of *The Seattle Times*, and the NICAR NetTour at [www.ire.org/training/nettour](http://www.ire.org/training/nettour).] These indexes provide essential starting points for using the Web.

Another hurdle has been the conservative nature of reporters—they prefer to stick with what has worked for them—and their phobia about math. Journalists are, as a rule, cautious about using new techniques because of the fear of corrections and the ensuing public embarrassment. If they aren't certain of how to apply these new techniques, they worry that mistakes will find their way into stories. Some also worry about appearing too "nerdy" and not enterprising enough. Even when Web resources or databases might provide critical information for a story, some journalists feel the need to emphasize old-fashioned "shoe leather" reporting. Journalists also have not received (or refused to receive) the most basic training in math, although they often cover stories involving budgets, salaries, population growth, tax rates, and crime statistics. "I didn't get into journalism to do math," is an oft-repeated refrain from reporters. However, training on spreadsheet software such as Microsoft Excel—the next step after calculators—works best when journalists are persuaded that official numbers are easier to scrutinize with this assistance and the accuracy of their stories can be improved.

For some journalists, the challenge of training revolves around their reluctance. But for others, just the opposite is true. They are too enthusiastic about what this kind of training can offer

them. Some trainers play into this eagerness by promising instant results. But new skills in research and data analysis require practice and time, as many journalists discover as they try to master even the basic skills of this kind of reporting. "Even if you have the data on the Web or on disk, if you've never used it before, you're bound to run into glitches," wrote Heather Newman of the Detroit Free Press in an article this year in the NICAR newsletter *Up-link*. And journalists need follow-up help after the initial training.

"I think one of the biggest psychological challenges is overcoming the mindset of 'I'm too busy now. I don't have time to do what I have to do, to do the reporting I do now, so why would I add more to the plate?'" observed Nora Paul, a long-time expert in computer-assisted reporting, now at the


University of Minnesota. "The other issue is giving training but then not giving the opportunity to really use it on a routine basis."

But even follow-up training won't be enough if the proper equipment isn't available for journalists to use. Until recently, some journalists received training and then returned to a newsroom that did not have the most basic computer equipment and software. Since these skills require practice, unless journalists are willing to make private investments in their home computers they will quickly forget how to use what they learned.

Belatedly, perhaps, newsrooms are recognizing that editors who are responsible for assigning reporting also need this training. At some papers, reporters are delivering stories developed using electronic sources and com-

puter skills that their editors have never seen or used. This has spurred some editors to raise questions about the accuracy and reliability of the reporters' information. "We don't know the questions to ask," some editors tell us. But what is becoming clear to them, and to us, is that they, too, have a need to learn. ■

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## Looking for Help in All the Right Places

In an online community of journalists, help can be just a click away.

By Patricia A. Coleman

**A**t 3:20 on a Monday afternoon in August, an e-mail arrived at the NICAR-L [National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting listserv], and the subject read "Gun Permit Question—Quick Reply Requested." James E. Wilkerson, a reporter at *The Morning Call* in Allentown, Pennsylvania, was looking for online resources to advance a crime story on deadline.

"My boss wants to know if we can get gun permit info in PA for an individual. We know only his name and present address. We want to know whether he had a permit for a gun he is accused of using in a crime," Wilkerson's e-mail said. "A State Police officer refused to give us any info, said it wasn't public record."

This reporter could have started from scratch. But wading through the legal language of a state's open-records legislation and assessing the legitimacy of a local official's interpretation of the law would be time consuming. Offer-

ing the question to a group of experienced journalists avoided reinventing the wheel.

Replies from the listserv were quick and concise and helped Wilkerson by stopping him from investing more valuable time into chasing a dead-end lead. Although initial responders suggested potential information sources, within 30 minutes two reporters with Pennsylvania experience confirmed that not only were the gun permit records confidential, state legislators had at one time made it a crime even to request them.

"Thanks for those who responded," Wilkerson wrote. "You confirmed my vague understanding of the situation."

Members of IRE-L [Investigative Reporters and Editors listserv] and NICAR-L have been offering immediate feedback, guidance and resources since IRE launched this service in July 1994. Help comes in a variety of forms, such as phone numbers to contact helpful

human sources, directions to information-packed Web sites, and techniques to solve data analysis problems. As a member of these self-moderated listservs, I am able to offer suggestions to reporters based on the resources available at IRE. On various occasions, I've referenced morgue stories we have on file or offered tip sheets on this kind of reporting. At times, I've suggested books that IRE sells that might be related to the question posed by a journalist. Generally speaking, what I can do to help reporters is most apparent during "big" stories—such as the bombing of the USS Cole—when journalists who might not be knowledgeable about topic-specific issues of a breaking story need resources to cover the news quickly and effectively.

But usually reporters who contact us know their subject matter well. Often it's a new beat assignment, an unexpected story development or the need to quickly find solutions to tech-

nical problems during the computer analysis of data that draw journalists to our site. Jon Leiberan, an investigative reporter at Fox 45 News in Baltimore, wrote to say that he faced data-analysis challenges when working on a computer-assisted story about registered sex offenders living near elementary schools. "I have a database of schools and sex offenders. I'm trying to run a query that matches the sex offenders in each zip code," said Leiberan in an e-mail that he posted to the NICAR-L listserv at 5:28 p.m. October 10. "For some reason it's not


working. Any ideas?"

By 10 o'clock the next morning, members of the listserv had diagnosed Leiberan's data problem. He also had received cautionary advice about the possibly poor accuracy of sex offender registration data and the need for more precise mapping information than simply matched zip codes. When he did complete the analysis, Leiberan did a two-part story, one part focusing on the sex offenders' locations and the other focusing on Maryland's incomplete and incorrect registration information. Leiberan said advice from

the listserv saved him from spending more time digging through software manuals to learn how to solve data problems.

"I came here three and a half months ago. We basically started from the ground up," Leiberan said. The listserv "was really helpful. I got so much feedback." ■

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## The Internet as a Reporter's Tool

'I'd be lost without it.'

By Jim Morrill

**A**s I left for my Nieman year in August 1999, we were just getting desktop PC's to replace an old system. The Internet was still the new guy in the newsroom. We said hello and tried to be friendly. Occasionally we picked his brain and let him entertain us.

Since my return this summer, he's become a valuable pal.

The Internet may yet cost us our jobs, ruin our lives, and wreck our democracy. But I've been constantly amazed at how much it's helped me do stories and even find them since I got back. This may be old news for a lot of journalists, but it's been new to me.

I cover politics in North Carolina. When finance reports came out just before the election, I saw that executives from one company had accounted for a third of the money raised by one candidate for state labor commissioner. I checked with the labor department to see if they had a file on the company and was directed to an OSHA Web site. There I found the company had a series of outstanding fines. They happened to add up to about the same amount the executives had given the rival party candidate.

Before the election, I did some stories about our new early voting pro-

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**The Internet may yet cost us our jobs, ruin our lives, and wreck our democracy. But I've been constantly amazed at how much it's helped me do stories....**

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gram that let people cast ballots up to three weeks before November 7. When I needed statewide registration figures, I found them on the state board of elections' Web site. So were the phone numbers of election directors in all 100 counties. A couple of years ago, the search would have involved at least a long phone call and some faxes. Then, when I needed somebody in Texas to talk about how early voting had worked in that state, I e-mailed a friend at the Austin American-Statesman. I had my contact a couple of minutes later.


Four years ago it was hard to tell how much money Carolinians were contributing to the presidential candidates. This year it took a few clicks. I went to FECInfo, a site that tracks campaign spending, and called up a state-by-state sort of Bush and Gore contributors. It turned out Bush was sweeping up money as well as votes in the Carolinas.

When I left Charlotte in 1999, ac-

cessing our own archives was still a slow, tedious process. Accessing others wasn't much easier. Nexis, for example, was available on just a few machines in a corner. Now we have Nexis on our PC's, and our archives are an easy click on the paper's Intranet. Researching stories has never been easier.

A couple months before leaving for Cambridge, I'd written a piece about how the Internet is changing the way people interact with government. I still wasn't aware of how much it was changing the way we did business, too. Of course, there's a lot of the Internet not to trust. But there's an increasing amount of information that's accurate and accessible. I'd be lost without it. ■

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# Gathering Context and Contacts

A listserv is an invaluable resource for education reporters.

By Bill Graves

Reporters can hardly cover the education beat today without computer and online technology. They must know how to use spreadsheets if they are to have any hope of making sense of the heaps of information that states and districts are amassing under the nation's relentless push for more accountability in our schools. They need to know key Web sites on the Internet to keep up with the research reports that are pumped out nearly every day by the nation's enormous education industry.

But no technological change has made a bigger impact on the day-to-day work of education reporters than the Education Writers Association's listserv, an invaluable communications tool used by most of the daily education reporters in the country.

This listserv, which became active about four years ago, provides a convenient way for reporters to exchange sources, tips, opinions and insights by e-mail. Occasionally, reporters even discuss ethical concerns, such as how to handle reporting about children. When a reporter sends an e-mail to the list, everyone sees the message. Each recipient then has the option of replying personally to that reporter or to everyone on the list.

The list is particularly useful for reporters who need good sources on a tight deadline. For example, what if I had just learned the Portland School District decided to approach The Edison Project about running one of its schools, and I don't know a thing about this organization? I can find key sources (and resources) by asking my colleagues on the listserv. Within minutes, I'll get replies. Some will tell me how to contact the executives at Edison, a private business that operates public schools for profit. Others will put me in touch with researchers who have studied Edison schools. Information about relevant Web sites that include studies of

and other stories about Edison will also be forwarded to me.

Here is an example of a recent exchange on the list:

Julie Poppen, higher education reporter for Denver Rocky Mountain News, sends an e-mail to the list to ask, "I wonder if any of you are aware of school districts that require students to attend mandatory summer school if they fail to get adequate scores on standardized tests."

"Greenville, S.C. does it," replies one reporter.

"Illinois does," writes another. "Contact Lee M. at the state DOE. Also, Davenport, Iowa, schools required all second graders to go to summer school or receive special help if they didn't make the grade."

"Richmond Public Schools had its first mandatory summer program this year," writes Robin Farmer, a Richmond Times-Dispatch reporter, who then provides a contact.

"Yes, Chicago does—at 3rd, 6th and 8th," writes Linda Lenz, editor of Catalyst, a magazine on school reform. "It has for the past three summers."

Within minutes, the reporter gets plenty of context and potential contacts for her story.

Almost any reporter on the list can give examples of how it immeasurably helped him or her on filing a deadline story. Even off deadline, the list can offer ways for every reporter to draw on the collective knowledge of the nation's education press to pursue research and background information about an idea that hasn't yet formed into a story. One of my favorite examples of this happened about two years ago when a reporter at the Des Moines Register was covering her local school board's secret search for a new superintendent. The board was interviewing a job candidate, whom it wanted to keep secret. But the newspaper's reporter and photogra-

pher staked out the board and got a photograph of the candidate going to the interview. The reporter didn't know who the candidate was, so she put his photo on the list and asked if any of the other reporters could identify him. Another reporter identified the photo, and the reporter was then able to write her story about the "secret" candidate.

Having the ability to connect and immediately tap the expertise of the nation's education press online would have been hard to imagine a decade ago. Technology allows us not only to move faster on stories, but also to probe deeper. Our education team at The Oregonian now almost routinely takes a new batch of test data released by the state Department of Education in the morning and, with the help of computer spreadsheets, sorts it by school on charts for each of our six zoned editions by deadline. We give readers a quick analysis that identifies weak and strong schools, compares scores to those in the previous year, and shows how each school stacks up to others with similar demographics.

Technology helps us connect and organize, but we still need to rely on good journalism to produce thoughtful stories. We still need good sources to uncover fresh information and ideas. We still need good editors to help us organize our work and tell our stories. And I know the listserv wouldn't be so useful without so many good reporters on the other end of the line. ■

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# Training Tomorrow's Journalists in a Global Medium

This digital era demands new imagination in education.

By Jerome Aumente

Journalism education and the continued training of news media professionals are affected profoundly by the massive growth of the Internet and the various digital technologies mushrooming around it. It is a rolling thunderstorm of change that both the universities and the mass media practitioners are riding, sometimes uneasily.

In the United States, many journalism schools have broadened their offerings to include course work involving the latest technologies. A good number of multidisciplinary schools of communication and information appeared a decade or more ago, often comprised of traditional journalism departments affiliating with or creating other units.

Overseas, universities in Poland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Russia, Spain and Latin America are determined to use the Internet and the digital technology as a centerpiece in modernizing their

curriculum and training. In many instances, they see the Internet as a way of accessing the books, training materials, and latest advances in journalism and mass media that they cannot otherwise afford. At the University of Sarajevo, where Rutgers has a joint program, many of their library resources were destroyed in the war, so a computerized linkage to the world is even more essential. With more than 5,000 newspapers worldwide now offering online editions, the Internet is an essential link for scholars and students studying journalism. The Web sites of MSNBC, CNN, CBS and ABC provide a living laboratory of converging multimedia. During my recent lecture tour at Russian universities in St. Petersburg, Novgorod and Yekaterinburg, the journalism schools were determined to put new media and the Internet at the forefront of our meetings with students and faculties.


There is a constructive role that

universities can and ought to play in determining the future direction of journalism on the Internet. Faculty and students can research what works and what fails in this new era of communications and do applied projects with the news media. By joining forces, scholars and practitioners can explore some of the vital questions that are raised by the emergence of this new media. How do members of the public decide where they will get their news, for example, in choosing among Internet news sites and newspapers? How are they reallocating the time they spend consuming news? How can newspapers combine their print activities with digital technology to enhance the news experience for consumers? How is television using the Internet? Can this younger, digital generation find reasons to read newspapers or watch news on TV?

Such research, conducted by students, would be a valuable learning tool for them and a critical source of information for those already in the business. By using this approach of collaborative investigation, even the smallest daily or weekly could engage in this essential exploration.

The agenda for journalism education in this digital era demands imagination, not just a linear adjustment to new technology. The digital age of the Internet is still in its infancy and both professional journalism and the academy must work hard together to see that the new technology reaches a mature and productive adulthood. ■

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## Needed: Help From Journalism Schools

*Anders Gyllenhaal, Executive Editor of The News & Observer in Raleigh, North Carolina, made the keynote presentation at the Pew Center for Civic Journalism luncheon on August 10 at The Association for Education in Journalism and Media Communications' annual convention in Phoenix, Arizona. His topic: "What's Coming. Will We Be Ready for It? Equipping Journalists for the New Communications Era." Excerpts from his remarks follow.*

...Another question I started to wonder about is whether the role technology plays in newspapers doesn't give journalism schools a new opportunity that hasn't existed before. In the same way that medical schools, science departments and business schools lead their industries with applied research, there's more need than ever before for

true research and development in journalism. How do we take these concepts and make them work in the newsroom? How do we turn some of these commercial technologies into journalistic tools? Almost every university research project that comes through my newsroom is on more theoretical topics, like measuring credibility or studying the history of diversity. What newsrooms are thirsting for right now are solutions for how to deal with this whole e-mail question, or a better approach to public records, or how about an online weather package that will help newspapers compete with TV? With so much need for training, why aren't more journalism schools providing continuing education in technology for newspaper staff?... ■

# It's the Old West in the New East

In India, dot-coms create a gold rush for journalists but so far not much gold.

By Rakesh Kalshian

When an affair turns sour or bland, most of us tend to philander afresh in our quest for the romantic ideal. In the early 1990's, when familiarity with the print media was turning into boredom, if not contempt, the Indian journalist found currency, celebrity and, of course, a new canvas to paint old themes on, in the arms of television. Today, a decade later, a new pied piper is in town, luring journalists, this time with beguiling overtures of greater clout, a grander canvas, and bigger bucks.

If you live at the cutting edge of modernity, surely you must have heard of this international charmer. Dot-com is his name. His mission: to redefine and refashion the way news is gathered and disseminated. His hope: that one day the entire world will be transformed into an electronic village. His premise: In an increasingly global world, the World Wide Web would be a quicker, more efficient, and more democratic engine of news.

And in this game of mass seduction, journalists have become the coveted handmaidens. It would be a hyperbole to call it an exodus, but reporters are being poached all the time. Sudeep Mukhia, 28, a history graduate of New Delhi-based Jawaharlal Nehru University, a hotbed of leftist politics, made his journalistic debut six years ago as rural reporter with an environment journal. His salary was \$150 per month. Today, he edits news for a dot-com called go4I. His emoluments: \$1400 each month plus a company car. That's a phenomenal jump by any standard. Had he remained with print, Mukhia would have been earning a little more than \$400 a month.

For most dot-com converts, big money might have been the deciding factor. But given the precarious nature of dot-com ventures, disillusionment with print media also helped push many

dithering reporters to this new media. Saibal Chatterjee, 40, a writer and commentator on culture and sports for more than 15 years, recently left Outlook, an up-and-coming Delhi-based weekly newsmagazine, partly because of what he describes as "an editorial impatience with serious, thoughtful reporting." It is certainly true that competition from television has forced newspapers to react more to market forces, and this can mean that they

authenticity of the news reporting. Indian consumers aren't necessarily going online to get their news. Many are there to use e-mail and chat. As a result, some of what might have seemed promising Web sites are now disappearing: A portal called indiainfo.com, which hired about 200 journalists, appears to be on the verge of shutting down.

Indians have established themselves as leading computer software professionals in the world. Now they are

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**One irony is that, at least for now, journalists who rush to take a job at Web sites find that very little original news reporting is used and few bylines appear.**

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pander to obsessions of the urban elite. Saibal is now the sports editor for go4I and is handsomely compensated.

Lucre and disillusionment on the part of journalists aside, some dot-com converts also find the medium refreshingly different and challenging. Says Tarun Tejpal, former managing editor of Outlook and now chief editor of India's only e-zine called tehelka.com (Hindi for furor): "There are these in-built constraints of print journalism. I was tired and weary of doing the same old thing. On the Net, you can innovate endlessly. You can write a 5,000 word article and compress it into 500 words if you like. You can never do such a thing in print."

One irony is that, at least for now, journalists who rush to take a job at Web sites find that very little original news reporting is used and few bylines appear. On most news sites, the "content" is essentially a cut-and-paste job using material from other sources. At a few of the leading Web sites, such as tehelka.com, bylines are accorded importance and, by inference, so is the

clambering onto the dot-com bandwagon with the frenzy of an El Dorado mercenary. It's impossible not to notice the relentless, in-your-face dot-com propaganda carried in Indian newspapers, displayed at conferences and on billboards, in cyber cafés, on radio and television and, of course, the Web. Everybody, it seems, wants to start a dot-com. Offering a smorgasbord of services, including e-mail, e-commerce, chat, entertainment and, of course, news, dot-coms are enticing India's galloping middle class.

Sanjay Baru of the Economic Times, an Indian financial paper, calls this dot-com boom the "third wave" of market expansion in the Indian media. The "first wave," he says, came in the late 1970's and early 1980's, soon after the emergency crackdown imposed by Indira Gandhi's Congress Party. Renewed media freedom and the revival of economic growth resulted in the print media boom. New economic policies and the post-Gulf War boom in satellite television unleashed the "second wave" during the early 1990's.

This wave involved a mass migration of talent from newspapers to the electronic media. "But while the first two waves were driven, for the most part, by domestic demand," Baru observes, "the dot-com tsunami is fueled by the increasing global demand for Indian infotainment software, on the one hand, and global business interest in the Indian infotainment market."

Tehelka.com announced its arrival with an exclusive on the match-fixing scandal in cricket, India's most popular game. With its original investigative stories and experimental sections, such as Indian erotic writing or Indian poetry, it has managed to attract a relatively good following. However, Tejpal's Web experiment, comparable to Salon.com in the United States, remains an exception as a freestanding news e-zine. All other dot-coms in India are horizontal portals; along with news, they offer other features such as e-mail, chats and entertainment.

Rediff.com, India's only dot-com listed on the Nasdaq, is Indian surfers' favorite stomping ground. With its neatly packaged news section, divided into themes such as sports, foreign and health, it registers about 30 million page views per month. Compared to other online news vendors, rediff.com, oldest in the business, invests a lot of its resources in newsgathering and offers a fair amount of original stories in addition to regular opinion columns.

Indeed, it is opinion writers, more than reporters, who are profiting most by this change. Never before did they have, so to speak, such an embarrassment of columns. Aside from the words they write for dot-coms, columnists pontificate on the Web sites of newspapers and television news channels, too. And with newspapers now recognizing the need to put more original content on their Web sites, reporters, too, can hope to expand both the number and reach of their bylines. In Outlook, for instance, reporters can post their opinion pieces on the Web site.

Nevertheless, dot-com journalism has serious limitations. Like other

emerging entities, its promise is promoted with a lot of hype. By 2005, estimates of Internet users in India vary between five million and 50 million (out of a population of more than one billion). Indeed, even figures of the number of current users, between 1.5 and two million, are probably exaggerated. After all, there are about three million personal computers in India, of which about two million can be connected to the Web. Even so, a

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**For some reason, dot-com editors have come to believe that snippety and sassily written copy goes over well with the Web reader, whereas long reflective essays arouse boredom.**

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McKinsey-NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) survey predicts that India will have an estimated 23 million online by 2005 and possibly 100 million Internet users by 2008.

Also, a large slice of venture capital for Indian dot-coms is drawn from abroad. This makes their long-term survival uncertain, at best. Recently, the global dot-com shakeout resulted in the closure of many Indian ventures and mergers with larger companies of others. Internet analysts predict that over the long run only one out of 10 dot-coms will survive.

Since Web sites' long-term survival hinges on revenues from advertising, it is imperative that they amass a large following. But with insecure futures, companies are likely to be wary of investing in online advertising. Besides, e-commerce, once considered the great hope of the Internet economy, is still a distant dream in India. Given this landscape, even interesting experiments such as tehelka.com might not survive. Indeed, after the recent shakeout, dot-coms are hiring fewer reporters and at much reduced salaries.

In India, as in other developing nations, technological obstacles such as slow and erratic connectivity, high

phone bills, and narrow bandwidth make online reading not a very reliable or pleasurable experience. And the Pavlovian ritual of reading newspapers is too entrenched to expect a committed following to materialize for dot-com news. The required cultural transformation necessary for such a switch is likely years away.

In play, too, is the question of credibility. Even though dot-coms might claim that they strive to uphold journalistic values of fairness, honesty and accuracy, the intelligent consumer still scrutinizes information received through Web sites. The dot-com journalist, too, faces a similar problem of credibility when it comes to getting information from the government or the industry. Only reporters from the most well-known sites—such as Rediff and Tehelka—receive the same recognition as print reporters from officials in the government.

Perhaps because of the peculiar format in which it appears, online writing tends to be short on analysis. For some reason, dot-com editors have come to believe that snippety and sassily written copy goes over well with the Web reader, whereas long reflective essays arouse boredom. Indeed, the changing character of market-driven newspapers and television demonstrates that there is nothing novel in this formula. It is clear that the media, in all its various forms, are pandering to the impulses of India's rising affluent middle class by including a heavy dose of Bombay (rechristened as Mumbai by revivalists) films, fashion and gossip about the glitterati. Even tehelka.com couldn't resist including a section of erotica on its site that is presented with style and sophistication.

Because most Web readers reside in urban areas, news on dot-coms tends to focus mainly on city and national issues. For that reason, people who live in rural areas and the issues they care about are pushed further to the fringe of national consciousness as Web sites define the parameters of what constitutes news. Of similar concern are the ways in which the technology is

defining the space within which reporters now operate. Dot-com journalists hardly move out of their cyber holes. The result is that their copy tends to be highly imaginative and stylishly written but low on the substance and gritty detail that is the hallmark of field reporting. As long as their patron readers remain metropolitan it appears, unfortunately, that the journalistic ambit of dot-coms will stay narrow.

Language also remains a great barrier in reaching large masses of the Indian population. To serve the cause of good journalism, dot-coms will need to overcome their linguistic prejudices. But here lies a Catch-22. Those with access to modern communication technologies are, in large part, the English-

speaking middle class who number a little more than 100 million. Given marketplace realities, dot-coms have little choice but to appeal initially to this ready-made audience.

It would have been good for India if this new medium would have provided a fresh counterfoil to the pulp and deadwood of the nation's print and TV journalism. While it is probably still too early for a final verdict on the outcome, it is important to remember that dot-coms exist to make a profit, not for the sake of doing social good. Even so, dot-coms can no doubt enrich and empower journalists in exciting and powerful ways, provided journalists are able to keep in mind that service to the public good ought not to

succumb to market pressures.

This might still occur, but it is unlikely to happen soon. Right now, Indian journalists are busy reaping the benefits of this new market. Yet, if they don't plant the roots of solid journalism in these fields of news and entertainment, the harvest in future years might not treat so kindly the fruits of their labor. ■

*Rakesh Kalsbhan, a 1999 Nieman Fellow, is a journalist with a New Delhi-based weekly newsmagazine called Outlook. He writes about science, the environment, and development issues.*

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## Digital Dividends for Journalism in Africa

While obstacles abound, the potential Internet payoff could be huge.

By Tanya Accone

“See that building across the square?” the content manager of one of Zimbabwe's leading news-driven Web sites asked me on a recent visit. “That is where we keep the getaway car in case of emergencies, like an unscheduled visit from the security police.”

That may sound like something straight out of a Bond movie, but it is a reality in many countries throughout Africa where the media—in all its old and new incarnations—still have to play a careful game of cat and mouse with governments.

Someone from outside of Africa might imagine that training, access to the technology, and the required infrastructure themselves are the most significant stumbling blocks that African journalists must surmount in order to take advantage of the emerging forms of communication. But high on the list of hurdles are wary and restrictive governments. Tunisia, for example, arguably has the most extensive legislation governing the Internet in the world. Laws that specifically limit freedom of

expression have been applied to the Internet, and users practice stringent self-censorship in the firm belief that their electronic communications are being closely monitored. All Internet traffic passes through the single state telecommunications network, and Internet Service Providers (ISP's) are required to pass on lists of users and their details to the government on a monthly basis.

That is not to say that low rates of literacy or erratic supplies of electricity are not big obstacles, too. Or that cost factors typically associated with state-controlled telecommunications monopolies are not limiting factors. In fact, just the mere act of connecting to the Web is significantly compromised by problems such as diesel shortages in countries such as Nigeria, where diesel-powered generators often satisfy a greater proportion of power usage than does the national provider.

Until these issues are adequately addressed, being able to label oneself an “African online” will remain the preserve of the academic and business

elite. Even in the most populous and developed Web nations in southern Africa, journalists' access to the Internet remains a privilege rather than an accepted norm, both in gathering the news and getting it out to consumers.

Africa constitutes less than one percent of the global Internet population, but every country on the continent has access to the Internet. However, in most nations it is only used in the major metropolitan areas. Even though its use is still scarce, the Web, rather than other emerging technologies, including cellular phones and satellites, is driving fundamental changes in the production and consumption of news.

New media is changing and challenging the face of journalism on the continent. It gives Africans new ways to deal with old problems and provides new opportunities for expression, debate and debunking, while simultaneously giving old problems new ways of manifesting. The Web enables African journalists to utilize three important resources: free access to information, the ability to tap into experts

anywhere on the globe, and the capacity to monitor alternate reporting and perspectives on a variety of issues.

Many African governments have been confounded by the impossibility of being able to police the Internet, both in terms of what information is accessible and what news can be published. State sanctions have been imposed on journalists in some countries because of their use of pieces of Web-sourced information in which facts contradicted the official line. In Tunisia last year, online journalist Taufik Ben Brick was beaten up for his criticisms, and authorities continue to block Web sites critical of the state, including Amnesty International, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and Reporters sans Frontières. Two journalists from Sierra Leone's The Independent Observer were arrested for "illegal online activity," and earlier this year, Senegal-based journalist Daniel Bekoutou was forced to flee to France after his life was threatened because of his support to have the former Chad president, Hissene Habré, prosecuted for torture. His story, "Hunting the Dictator," was finally published on the Internet.

Even access to data such as population statistics can be contentious depending on the country concerned, not to mention the red flags that get raised when journalists are able to access freely available satellite images via the Internet, which often tell a tale of unreported events or denied circumstances. Attendees at a recent African new media conference saw satellite images taken over southern Angola that showed a large area of the country ablaze with numerous fires. It is possible these fires are linked to political conflicts in the area; however, nothing about the fires had been reported in any media.

Ironically, one of the major needs of African journalists and media consumers is regional and Pan-African information, as people often know less about neighboring countries than those much

further afield. Being able to access this kind of content, often presented from an alternate point of view, has proved to be empowering for both journalists and ordinary users.

Pan-African organizations such as the Senegal-based African Women's Media Center and Namibian-based social action information provider, WomensNet, were established to meet

Computer-Aided Research and Reporting (CARR) is recognized as an essential tool for journalists across the different media, and therefore this subject has become a third-level course taught in universities.

While a laptop, digital camera, and a satellite phone are enormously helpful in getting stories out of hot zones like the Democratic Republic of the Congo,

it is the humble e-mail service that is proving to be the most powerful modern tool for journalists. This fast and effective communication tool, with its low bandwidth and basic hardware requirements, makes it an ideal solution for infrastructure-poor environments like Africa. Add to that the benefits that free Web-based e-mail services can offer—accessibility and the security of being relatively untraceable with no incriminating copies harbored on your hard drive—and these offer journalists here a winning option. Journalists have used e-mail to issue alerts on crises, to mobilize support for colleagues suffering unjustly as a result of their pursuit for the truth, to share and distribute

information and, of course, to file their stories and make them available to the world beyond their borders.

In Nigeria, e-mail has proved to be "mightier than many swords." Journalist Omololu Falobi, from that country's Sunday Punch publication, was recently recognized for his initiative, a monthly e-mail compendium of news and information about HIV/AIDS in Nigeria, which provides the most comprehensive coverage of the issue available. Most importantly, e-mail has enabled journalists to network among each other across the continent. The informal and spontaneous information exchanges formed via e-mail are often more effective in disseminating information and alerts and amassing support than any of the traditional wire services could be. Through the act of being able to share experiences, offer advice and pool knowledge, powerful alliances have been formed.

Some of the success stories include



A Web page from M-Web Africa.

these needs with specific focus on social issues affecting women. Both organizations have a very strong current focus on HIV/AIDS and design their training programs and support services to put female journalists in touch with accurate, useful and otherwise unavailable information about this disease. These organizations focus specifically on female journalists because, as women reporters, they have been previously disadvantaged and tend to report on the disease, which claims, as its primary victims, women and children.

Numerous media training initiatives throughout the continent are aimed at equipping journalists with Web skills. Workshops are designed to enhance their ability to find sources of data that are relevant to the stories they are reporting. Journalists also learn how to manage, manipulate and interpret information and also to hook up to networks of experts whom they can tap for regional comment and analy-

the Southern African Broadcasters Association and the Media Institute of Southern Africa, both of whom have launched e-mail-based news services covering the affairs of 14 countries. These reports are reliable and viable sources of regional information. In many instances, e-mail is the distribution mechanism of choice.

The impact of the Internet has been as significant on media consumption as it has on production. Traditional print and broadcast houses in East Africa, for example, have established a strong online presence during the past four years and have discovered that their online audience is completely different, with unique needs and demands. Media that were previously recognized only in their region have transformed into news providers to the world, and such sites have become some of the virtual meeting places for expatriate communities worldwide. One of the most radical transformations of a media outlet is that of South Africa's Sunday Times. In three short years, it went from re-publishing its weekly business section online to launching a separate Internet team who publish content throughout the day via the Web and mobile platforms. Some 20 percent of those who view these pages are from outside South Africa. Other media throughout the continent have also made Internet-specific investments, including Kenya's Nation Group, Senegal's Le Soleil, Nigeria's Financial Standard, and many media houses in southern Africa.

There is still, unfortunately, a dearth of African-created content on the Web. The majority of Web sites containing local content and which are also hosted locally are in South Africa, followed by Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. Full-scale Web operations are costly to build and maintain, and even in South Africa's advanced Internet market, where money spent on online advertising is in the millions of dollars, the human, technical and financial resources for most initiatives is minimal.

When I worked at The Washington Post, there were more than 100 people employed to run their daily Web site, with a significant amount of automation. In contrast, until recently I di-

rected the daily Internet operations of South Africa's largest newspaper across both Web and mobile platforms, and I had a team of three that burgeoned into five.

Skills, infrastructure and advertising support are critical success factors, along with the encouragement of enterprising initiatives such as the site built by a Tanzanian, Majaliwa Nyenzi. Nyenzi, a self-taught Web journalist, won an award for innovative use of new media for his Web site. Using his portal, journalists and Web surfers alike can get a firsthand look at all aspects of life in Tanzania, ranging from news, shipping data, tourism information and city guides to business directories and chat rooms. His site attracts a huge amount of attention and has become the country's virtual de facto port of call, since no other Web site currently provides this kind of aggregated information on Tanzania.

The anonymous nature of this new medium also encourages debate. The kind of discourse that would never grace the pages of local newspapers flourishes online, because users are comfortable expressing themselves freely under the guise of non-traceable *nom de plumes*. On M-Web Zimbabwe, for example, the simple act of having multiple stories of the same news event equally presented and carefully juxtaposed has generated elevated levels of debate about how a single issue could be so differently represented. In fact, discussion forums, bulletin boards, online polls, and listservs are becoming an effective means of checking the true pulse of society, or at least that of the e-fluential elite. Discussion forums in Zimbabwe have been abuzz with very critical commentary on the state's leadership, fiscal policy, land reform issues, and police brutality. These are precisely the critical issues that concern Zimbabweans, but which are not easily accommodated in the traditional media because of government censorship and harsh reactions to negative or critical publicity.


But just as new media is fostering a culture of debate and criticism, so too it is fostering a culture of new censorship. ISP's are the hardest hit, targeted by governments for hosting, providing

access to or facilitating the transmission of unflattering information. In Zambia, ISP's have been threatened with the revocation of their licenses if they host sites which carry information which is too critical of the government, while in other nations in northern Africa the Internet can only be accessed using government facilities. In addition, many governments order ISP's to block specific Web addresses for a variety of reasons.

Many of the most important challenges lie ahead as access becomes more widely available and liberalized economies lead to improvement in infrastructure and the costs of using it. Governments are becoming smarter about using the Internet for their own information dissemination purposes but also in their attempts to police the medium. It is also yet to be seen whether mobile phones, with their incredible penetration and growth rates, will become the next platform of choice, which itself could spawn a new kind of new journalism. As news organizations in South Africa are discovering, journalism for cellular technology rides on the art of the precise—the concise and precise conveying of information in 160 characters.

Despite these challenges, African journalists should hardly be viewed as second class Netizens. They have molded Internet tools to suit their specific needs, devised ingenious technical solutions to overcome the idiosyncrasies of their situations, and continue to apply the medium as an effective means to foster a culture of freedom of expression. If journalists' use of the Internet in Africa pays its digital dividends in democratic values, then we will have truly achieved the key objective of our profession. ■

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# A Glimpse at Digital Resistance

‘...new technology is not just a tool but is freedom itself.’

By András Vágvolgyi

It was 1993. I was in Sarajevo. Sporadic shellings could be heard all around me as I walked the stairs up to my room on the eighth floor of the Holiday Inn. Since the unrest had begun, this hotel had been burned out 17 times. I was returning from a live talk show on Radio Zid (Radio Wall), the city’s independent radio station. On my way upstairs, I decided to drop by the BBC’s office on a lower floor. This stop offered me a good excuse to make a break in my climbing, since there was no functioning elevator in the hotel. But I also had a reason. Before I’d left my office in Budapest, I had agreed to send dispatches for the Hungarian Service of BBC. So this gave me a justification to use some of BBC’s facilities and information.

When I walked in I sensed immediately restlessness in the air. News had just come in from London that some 35 Croatian peasants had been slaughtered—their throats cut—in a village 30 miles away from Sarajevo. At this point, nobody knew who could be blamed for these dreadful crimes. The lead BBC correspondent and his local assistant were working the phones, squeezing information out of militia members who might know something about the massacre. All they were hearing back was denial that such a thing had happened. The story wasn’t believed.

That evening I told a colleague about this story. The next morning he pounded on my door. He was shouting “Turn on CNN! Your story from last night is the top news.” I did, and as I gazed at the dead bodies of the villagers with their throats cut and at their dead dogs, I listened to the shelling outside and I thought about how bizarre everything seemed. Here things became real when they were seen on a screen, a strange mirror indeed. It is odd, but sometimes looking into a

mirror is necessary if one is to accept as true such cruel things, even in a city in which on certain corners there are signs saying “Beware of snipers.”

As I think back on this moment, I think about how all of this happened during what turns out to be the last sigh of the age of television.

In our brave new digital world, almost everything is different. Digital communication provides us with more of an arena than a mirror. In Serbia, the last Balkan republic to have remained in the grip of a dictator, media in general, and the Internet especially, presented immense challenges for the authorities. When students and opposition parties marched in 1996-97, the Internet was the most effective communication tool in the hands of those who were defying President Slobodan Milosevic’s power. It was easy for Milosevic to command what appeared on television and in much of the print press. With radio, in particular the independent B92, Radio Index and Radio O21, which insisted on reporting what was actually happening, Milosevic relied on jamming their broadcasts.

But Milosevic was never able to control the Internet. Both in the hands of his opposition and members of the independent media, the Internet played an important role in what has happened in Serbia. After radio station B-92’s reports were banned, the programs could still be heard through the Internet. And independent journalists in Serbia could find information on Internet sites that was prohibited from appearing in the local press, as well as communicate with one another.

The new opposition of Serbia was born out of the long demonstration that followed the local elections in 1996. They were protesting the fact that Milosevic’s party had annulled the results of municipal elections in most of the 15 cities where Zajedno (To-

gether), the alliance of anti-Milosevic parties, had won. At the time, Oxford scholar and Balkan expert Timothy Garton Ash, writing in *The New York Review of Books*, quoted a 23-year-old student demonstrator as saying, “I just want to live in a normal country. I want to get up in the morning, go to a normal shop, read my books, and have the rule of law and democracy. And travel. I’m not a child of the Internet but I’d like to be.”

Maybe this particular demonstrator wasn’t “a child of the Internet” in 1997. But this year, after several years of being away, I traveled to Serbia again, revisiting Belgrade and Novi Sad. I was very surprised at the changes I found there. My old friend, ethnic Hungarian writer Laszlo Végel, chairman of the Novi Sad chapter of the Open Society Foundation, is now treated like a hero in a William Gibson novel. He spends most of his time working at his computer, using a lot of cell phones with different digital chips. Power from his computer comes from a generator. When I asked why, he told me with a smile, “If they disconnect electricity in the city, I still have six hours to go!”

For free media to exist in Serbia means that the new technology is not just a tool but is freedom itself. This is why the pressures aligned against them were so far-reaching. The alternative media have integrated Serbian society in new ways, and this powerful new force was unacceptable to the powers that be. The Internet strengthens the country’s civil organizations since, by geography, members are spread out and otherwise isolated. The Internet helped to connect these little cells. According to my friend Végel, the result of all of this is that, during the recent federal presidential election, neither the annulment of results nor cheating could be achieved.

In September I sat on the terrace of

a café with 20-year-old Jelena Kleut, who is an Otpor (Resistance) activist and in charge of foreign relations for the Vojvodina region. The presidential election's first round would happen the next day. She was anxious and nervous. Her mobile phone was constantly ringing: Anything could happen, the callers were telling her, including the possibility of shootouts. Frequently she looked around to see whether police were watching.

Her boyfriend, Nebojsa, arrived, well equipped with *Gotov je!* (He's finished!) leaflets, banners, badges and bumper stickers. He is one of the most frequently arrested Otpor activists; it happened 17 times between March and September. He is also 20 years old, never been abroad, never seen the sea. He was seven when this madness began in his country. They ask my patience while they settle something in Serbian, and I take a look at Otpor's

booklet on how to behave against the police. It suggests, if cops are about to approach a group of young people—which means arrest is almost sure to take place—to put one hand in your pocket and have the mobile phone on, staying on last call. That way it's enough to push only one button and someone trustworthy will hear that friends are in trouble and possibly pick up some other details as well. Demonstrators, students, activists and parents then surround the police station and shout until the arrested, but nonviolent, resisters are released.


This struck me as the first step in digital resistance. Hopefully, such instructions won't be needed in Serbia anymore.

I remember well a situation that happened in Budapest 12 years ago. The most important Hungarian samizdat (a self-published political underground magazine) ceased to exist

in its clandestine form. Frequent author and world famous writer George Konrad said, "Okay, it seems there's gonna be freedom of speech and media liberty from now on, but I advise you to keep some of the stencil print machines in a safe place!"

The opposition won in Serbia, and some changes are starting to occur there now. But the advice is still sound: Don't throw away those cell phones. ■

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## Technology Replaces Legs and Ropes at The Bangkok Post

But fortunately, publishing the news still relies on human interaction.

By Songpol Kaopatuntip

I still remember *the* scream. In fact, everyone at the weekly feature section still remembers hearing it.

It happened early in 1999. A team of foreign computer experts was in the editorial department training reporters, rewriters, sub-editors and editors to use a new computer system—pagination—that would enable us to write and edit copy and lay out pages on the screen. Odd words like “dongle” and “Dr. Watson” were unknown to us at this time, since these are technical terms familiar only to computer experts. Nor were any of us yet aware of the hidden hazards that we'd soon learn were associated with these seemingly harmless sounding words.

On that hot Thursday afternoon, we

became all too aware.

One of my reporters was putting finishing touches to her 2,000-word article when a “dongle” flashed across the screen. Wham! Her hard day's work instantaneously disappeared into thin air. Her scream bounced off the walls and reverberated around the newsroom.

Now, nearly two years later, we have learned to *live* with the strange computer coding, workflow charts, and a terrifying string of unexplained events that, fortunately, has now become less frequent. Today, when reporters “lose” their copy, our production team knows how to trace and retrieve it.

Indeed, we have come a long way from the days when the sub-editors

would hover around the paste-up section of the newsroom, waiting for the typesetter—a formidable-looking machine that churned out glossy paper—to give the paste-up artists the bits of paper needed to finish the job at midnight. Sometimes they had to wait 15 to 30 minutes to correct one spelling mistake.

The old editing and page-making system also required a lot of running around. In the pre-pagination days, The Bangkok Post editorial area spread out over three floors in the atrium-like main office. The news section was located on the top floor. After the copy was edited, the layout sub-editor would gather the stories and pictures, sketch out the page on a sheet of paper called



a “dummy,” and put it in a basket. The copy boy would pick up the dummy and walk down three flights of stairs to the paste-up section on the other side of the building. The proofed pages would then be brought upstairs for the chief sub-editor to sign. All this required an awful amount of stair climbing. One day somebody finally dropped a pair of strings down from the third to the first floor. Stories, pictures, press



The author at a Bangkok Post computer.

releases—and sometimes a box of pizza—would be hoisted up and carried down by rope instead of legs.

Now these amusing routines are gone, as machines have replaced rope and shoes. And, not surprisingly, the pagination system has instilled a new work pattern. Stories are assigned and edited on the same screen. Simple page-making can be done with a few clicks of the mouse. The ubiquitous typesetter is gone, and we no longer have to wait 30 minutes to change “oo” into “o” in “loosing my way.” And, yes, we have learned to use the Internet—the ultimate information superhighway that many of us had started to travel even before the “dongle” came along.

At first, we were ignorant of the Internet’s potential, and we were also afraid. But within three years, the Internet has proven to be very popular in the newsroom—even for older journalists who may not have felt they’d be especially comfortable with doing computer research. At the Perspective section, where I’ve worked for six years, we practiced investigative journalism long before the Net and computer-assisted reporting became easily acces-

sible. We hounded politicians, interviewed people on the streets, and obtained crucial information by nurturing personal connections with inside sources. In short, we did all the things good reporters are trained to do, and the personal touch of our reporting was crucial because government agencies tended to withhold state information, and we were often led to believe that statistics were not systematically kept or simply did not exist.

Imagine my delight when I found out that such information is available online from state agencies. The Budget Bureau now has a database of information derived from government expenditures. The Royal Thai Police Special Crime and Transnational Crime Center has its own Web site where I can

read profiles of transnational criminals, and I can e-mail the Office of National Education Commission for information about home schooling, learning reform, and the licensing of teachers. All this information can be obtained with a few clicks of the mouse.

When a former Thai deputy finance minister was arrested in California in March, we had to rely on foreign wire services to keep abreast of the news. Then someone gave me the e-mail address of a Thai journalist living in California, and I assigned him to interview the ex-minister. The story was mailed to me along with photos as attached files. There were no diskettes that could be damaged in the mail. No waiting for the mail at all. Nor was there any need to travel thousands of miles across the globe to do this interview. And I was able to get this story into print within one week.

The speed of the Internet is truly amazing, and it is what makes it such a powerful tool for communication. The most difficult part of using the Internet is in finding the best and most credible information. Most Thai government agencies have Web sites, though infor-

mation from before 1995 often must be located elsewhere. And all the leading newspapers also have Web sites, though it is unclear how many people here actually rely on the Internet for their news. A lot of the more popular sites offer entertainment, gossip, horoscopes, contests, chat rooms and dating services, and though news is offered, it isn’t what drives traffic on the site.

At Perspective, even in this age of the Internet, we still adhere to the old tried and tested ways that journalists have always gathered information—through personal contacts with sources. I still take time on a regular basis to meet with news sources for lunch. After all, you cannot e-mail all your potential news sources in a country where fewer than five percent of households have access to personal computers.

And it is still a great joy for me to preside over the weekly news meeting, where we confront issues without being confrontational. There were times when a reporter and a sub-editor nearly came to blows over a few missing lines, but eventually someone would buckle down to listen to others. It is fortunate that this human proactive exercise is alive and well despite the onset of the Net-mania. I can’t imagine what life would be like if we had to conduct our news meeting online. You simply cannot talk to the computer as you can a human being. Besides, if we carried on our conversations by computer, somebody would just need to push the wrong key and “dongles” would steal our words away. ■

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# Coffee and Copy at Asian Internet Cafés

Keeping the keys to the electronic office out of government hands.

By Philip J. Cunningham

I started writing in Beijing cafés not so much inspired by Hemingway and the Paris literary crowd as by the harsh realities of information control in the Chinese capital.

When I tried to get my home computer online I went to China Telecom, where I was told to come back with my passport and a mountain of forms telling the authorities everything they needed to know to monitor my communications more efficiently. As a freelance writer without press credentials or a press visa in Beijing, handing them the keys to my electronic office didn't seem like a good idea, so I shopped around for other services.

Journalists with official press credentials are generally required to live and work in designated buildings barred to ordinary citizens. Life in the "fishbowl" means putting up with agents of the state in the form of government interpreters, drivers, workers and cleaning ladies. Telephones, faxes and locally based e-mail accounts are easily monitored, and offices and rooms are sometimes bugged. The passive gaze of Big Brother is not necessarily obtrusive, but it can have a chilling effect on Chinese friends and contacts.

I soon discovered one could get online in Beijing by dialing a three-digit number advertised by some cheaply priced Internet Service Providers (ISP's) without offering any identification at all. I could send and receive e-mail almost anonymously using my U.S.-based accounts, but service was spotty. Worse yet, logging on someone's home phone leaves an electronic record, putting the entire onus on the owner of the phone.

The Internet café at the local university turned out to be a good place to work. A cheerful former lifeguard at the local swimming pool ran the café and, true to form, not much happened in the café that escaped his eagle eyes.

He lived with his wife and son in the two-room aluminum shack—a safety measure to protect the 10 valuable computers and printer—nestled on the edge of a quiet tree-lined lane adjacent to the "Experimental Dining Hall." He ran a clean ship and served a decent cup of coffee in a smoke-free environment, which made the sunny café nicer than a hotel business office at a fraction of the price, about a buck an hour.

Police questioned the café manager from time to time, and on two occasions some fugitive dissidents looking for a safe house on campus were politely asked to leave. As comfortable as the university café was, I knew that some of my work, reporting on Falun Gong in particular, would have to be done elsewhere. Luckily for the freelance journalist, Beijing has hundreds of Internet cafés that compete with sleazy bars for dimness of lighting, thickness of cigarette smoke, and decibel blast of Chinese pop. In the more grungy down-market cafés, customers playing video games and boy-girl chat room users outnumber Web surfers and those using e-mail by about 20 to one, so most of the activity is below the radar screen of the politically minded authorities.

Beijing bans some English news sites such as The New York Times and CNN, but I could find most of the research information I needed from the wire services and other online publications. Chinese language sites, including Yahoo! China and other big-time portals,

are heavily censored for political content but useful to study as a barometer of how far American companies are willing to kowtow in order to compete in the China market. Small Beijing-based e-zines such as "Beijing Scene" and "ChinaNow" shy away from touchy political material in order to survive, perchance to thrive, but they are basically lifestyle Web sites run by and for expatriates. It is far more disappointing to observe that a big American gun such as Yahoo!, known for competent news coverage and hotlinks to The Associated Press, Reuters and other wire services, self-censors the Chinese language version of its popular portal.

The advantage of sending e-mail from a randomly chosen Internet café with a free Internet e-mail service registered under a pseudonym is that one's



The author at an Internet café in Phuket town, southern Thailand.

name and the name of one's correspondents are not easily revealed during governmental investigations, electronic spot checks, and e-mail records. Articles intended for publication are less of a problem, just a zap of the e-mail button will do, since they are for public consumption and will sooner or later be recorded by press monitors in Chinese embassies abroad.

China's October 2000 crackdown on the Internet means it will be tougher to report from Internet cafés without someone facing the consequences. It has been ruled that content providers must stick to the party line in posting content and, more ominously, ISP's will have to police the content transmitted and viewed by customers or face fines and possible closure.

Despite the stringent new rules, the sheer volume of traffic on the Internet makes it a good conduit for news information, but individuals can be singled out. Selective monitoring puts at risk the freelancer or local informant who piques the attention of the public and state security services. Hotel business offices are usually monitored and probably best avoided. Sending encrypted e-mail and/or using anonymous free e-mail accounts at randomly chosen commercial cafés offers some protection to both sender and receiver.

The advantages of reporting from a café go beyond the virtue of anonymity. There is no laptop to lug around and no fear of its confiscation or abusive customs fees. I had to leave a deposit of \$100 with customs officials

at Beijing airport when my computer was discovered and examined during a spot check. Scott Savitt, editor of "Beijing Scene," had all of his office computers confiscated during a crackdown on entertainment weeklies. Laptops are more secure than desktops, but it's hard to beat having no computer at all when it comes to traveling light and unobtrusively. It's handy to travel with a floppy disk for backup, though in a pinch sending an e-mail to yourself will do the job of saving and filing text.


Working in an Internet café can be cheaper than logging on with one's own computer in places like Beijing and Bangkok, where the hourly rate (outside of big hotels) is less than a dollar an hour. The café strategy also works fine in Seoul, where Internet café culture has taken firm root, but it doesn't work as well in Hong Kong despite free Internet kiosks in some cafés. Japan is by far the most expensive; logging on is costly and Internet cafés are few and far between.

This year I have filed dozens of stories by e-mail from cafés around Asia. Sometimes it's bytes in, bytes out, such

as when I post stories on The Freedom Forum's International Web site, the Pacific News Service newswire, or zap an e-mail to a mass e-mail publication called Z-net. Other times it's digital in, analog out, such as e-mailing pictures and stories to paper publications such as The Japan Times and The South China Morning Post.

None of this should lead one to conclude that hanging out in cafés makes a journalist's life any easier. As I tap keys to compose this e-mail from a busy Internet café on Sukhumvit Road in Bangkok, a live band starts belting out pop tunes next door, and I'm starting to lose my concentration. ■

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## Journalists' Use of the Internet Bubbled Up From Underground

It helped to topple a corrupt president, but now poverty prevents its spread.

By Andreas Harsono

Every other day Akhmad Nasir goes to an Internet café in the northern part of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He is there for an hour or two, sending stories, checking e-mail, browsing Web sites, doing his research, and making appointments. "In busier days I work there every day," Nasir says. For renting an Internet-connected PC in one of three cafés he frequents, Nasir pays 3,500 Indonesian rupiah per hour (around 40 cents).

This might sound cheap to an American, but most young Indonesian journalists, like the 25-year-old Nasir, earn

less than \$100 per month. This means that Nasir spends between 10 and 20 percent of his meager earnings just for the Internet. "It's cheaper than buying a computer and having a telephone connection at home," said Nasir. "Anyway, no telephone line is available in my village yet."

Across Indonesia, lots of journalists—from writers in the head offices of hundreds of news organizations located in the capital, Jakarta, to stringers in medium-size cities in remote areas of Kalimantan or Sumatra—follow work patterns similar to Nasir.

Internet specialist Wisnuhardana of the Jakarta-based "Info Komputer" magazine told me in October that this year he helped the Manila-based Philippines Center for Investigative Journalism organize journalist training in Indonesia. "I remember not more than 15 of the average 40 participants use the Internet and are familiar with e-mail," said Wisnuhardana.

Gradually more and more Indonesian journalists are using the Internet. Stringers of Jakarta papers, which usually have no bureau offices, spend hours at Internet cafés to send reports or to

receive instructions from their Jakarta editors. Only journalists of rich news organizations can access the Internet 24 hours a day from their office desks.

The arrival of the Internet among Indonesia's journalists happened in a way that is a bit different than the American experience. It did not arrive with the formation of dot-com firms. Nor did it have an Amazon.com-styled stock explosion. Rather it emerged from the underground media during the late 1990's, not through the emergence of commercial Web sites. Indonesian journalists were most probably among the first group of people in this country who extensively used the Internet. In fact, the name "Internet" was initially associated with the alternative media.

The Internet's emergence occurred after President Suharto closed down three of Indonesia's most important newsweeklies in 1994. Suharto not only closed down these magazines but also put pressure on editors not to hire journalists who were protesting the closure. In an authoritarian country such as Suharto's Indonesia, it was not difficult to ask executives of the government-sanctioned Association of Indonesian Journalists to ask editors to fire their "recalcitrant journalists."

Journalists who used to work for the banned weeklies, as well as colleagues who formed a journalist union to protest the banning, soon went to work underground. Some of them published print magazines, but others chose to write on mailing lists, channeling their work to the Internet rather than the usual print or broadcast media. I joined these groups of journalists. I helped set up the union, lost my job, and joined the Internet publication. I remember one night in a safe house a colleague and I had an informal talk after work. "Who will read our stories?" he wondered aloud. "How many list subscribers do we have? It's only the elite, isn't it?"

The answer was yes. With their news, ranging from the corruption of the Suhartos to breaking news from East Timor, and the method of transmission, they were reaching primarily the elite. In the mid-1990's, there were not more than 200,000 Internet users registered in Indonesia. (The comparable

figure now is around 800,000 but multiplies to four million or so when the use of Internet cafés is factored in.) Even so, these numbers are relatively small when compared with the Indonesian population of 210 million.

Two arguments were made. Goenawan Mohamad, the editor of *Tempo*, one of the three banned weeklies, believed that the most important facet of what we were doing was to create an understanding that "someone is watching" over the unbridled corruption in Suharto's Indonesia. Since there was no law regulating this new media, Goenawan went ahead and published an Internet version called *Tempo Interactive* ([www.tempo.co.id](http://www.tempo.co.id)). The second argument is well reflected by a slogan that journalists often quote, "Let's not just curse the darkness; let's light the candle."

Both perspectives proved to be right. Some of these alternative news Web sites recorded an amazing number of hits. Many journalists were puzzled and amused when people gave them photocopies of their downloaded stories. Street protesters distributed photocopied stories to the public and put the stories at bus stops and train stations. These Internet journalists used no bylines.

Many East Timorese students, who were studying on the Indonesian main island of Java, where Jakarta is located, also set up an Internet-based news network. Several joined hands with their Indonesian colleagues and learned how to make a laptop into a powerful and mobile Internet server and how to automatically encrypt their stories. Others joined the Indonesian underground network from the once occupied island of East Timor, feeding daily reports about human rights abuses and other political developments. One of them is now a founding editor of an East Timor-based newspaper.

The climax of the anti-Suharto movement came in May 1998, when hundreds of thousands of student protesters dramatically occupied the parliament building, forcing President Suharto, who had ruled the country since 1965, to step down from power. A new freedom was in the air. *Tempo* and another banned weekly began to

be published again later that year. More than 1,000 new publications immediately entered the market. However, most of them are sex-and-crime-driven newspapers or yellow political tabloids. Private radio stations were also allowed, for the first time in Indonesia's history, to produce their own news reports. Alas, their news reporting quality is extremely poor, but it could be understood. Five new television stations are going to enter the market. Locally developed dot-com news providers, owned by both Indonesians and foreigners, are also appearing to offer Indonesians minute-by-minute news developments.

But the fall of Suharto came with a very high price. His departure occurred during the Asian economic crisis. During that time, the Indonesian rupiah lost about 70 percent of its value to the American dollar. At the height of the crisis, 15 million people lost their jobs in a single month. Prices of basic foodstuffs, such as rice, cooking oil and sugar, skyrocketed. Prices of imported goods, like computers, catapulted sky high. As the economy sank, 58 million people slipped below the poverty line.

"In Indonesia, we have no government welfare system. On average every employed person has three dependents—a spouse, children and parents. So if 40 million are unemployed, it affects more than 100 million people, at least half of the population. That creates a big potential for social unrest. It can heat up any time," said economist Laksamana Sukardi of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle.

Journalists are not immune from this economic crisis. Friends of mine stopped their Internet connections to cut their expenses. Worse than that, more and more journalists are receiving "envelopes," or bribes. Some surveys revealed that between 70 and 80 percent of Indonesian journalists take the "envelopes" from government offices or corporations.

Journalists such as Nasir, Wisnuhardana and me are a part of a violent and poor culture. Every day we read reports about people being killed in ethnic, religious or political violence in this vast archipelago. Aceh in northern Sumatra is now fighting for inde-


pendence just as people are in West Papua on the easternmost part of Indonesia. The Maluku Islands are notorious because of their Muslim versus Christian conflict. These are shameful facts and yet, to the extent that they indicate lives lived on the very edge of precipices, I have no doubt that they are also part of what makes our archipelago compelling.

I met Nasir in late 1998 when he asked me to give a talk on journalism.

He was editing a student tabloid in Yogyakarta. I found him to be a polite person and an idealist. As soon as he finished his undergraduate degree, he went to work at a Jakarta newspaper. After some months he decided to quit, going back to his village outside Yogyakarta to publish a very small community paper that recently won an award for its pioneering effort. Nasir is among a generation of journalists that keep hope alive in Indonesia's world

of journalism. He chooses to light a candle instead of curse the darkness that is so much a part of this nation's poverty. ■

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## Le Monde Moves a Big Story to Its Web Site

A national uproar leads to criticism and concerns.

By Françoise Lazare

For decades, Le Monde has maintained its reputation of being an accurate newspaper, the kind people count on as a reference for facts and stories. It is a newspaper that has retained its old-fashioned style almost as a guarantee of its independent news voice and ownership.

In 1990, when so many technology changes had come to other papers, there were no computers in Le Monde's newsrooms or the printing offices. The newspaper would not publish photographs, only cartoons. The journalists, mostly men, would gather information through private conversations and investigations. They would dictate their stories to secretaries or maybe use their own typewriters. Even in 1995, when a new management team led by former political journalist Jean-Marie Colombani launched a revamped, more dynamic version of Le Monde, it managed to increase sales while keeping its reputation and values intact.

But during the later years of that decade, computers, electronic equipment, and the Internet began to surface in the newsroom. By 1997, Le Monde had opened an interactive Web site ([www.tout.lemonde.fr](http://www.tout.lemonde.fr)) though no one seemed quite sure of how it would be used. Very few people used the Internet at the time and, at first, the site simply was another way of reading the

main stories of the printed version. Now the Web site has some autonomy, publishing some of its own reporting and offering interactive services to the 15 percent of the French population who have access to Internet, as well as to foreigners.

In September 2000, when Le Monde's investigative reporters got access to a videotape containing accusations that President Jacques Chirac had supervised a corruption scheme generating big funding for his political party, the Rassemblement pour la République (RPR), the Web site itself became national news. Hard copy readers of Le Monde could learn this news in the Friday edition dated September 22 that was available for sale in Paris starting at one in the afternoon on September 21. Subscribers and readers from the provinces, or from abroad, would, in theory, not discover the story until the next morning's mail distribution and kiosk openings.

Editors at Le Monde knew its published accusations were so serious that other media organizations (radio and TV) would refer to the scandal before the next day. So, for the first time, Le Monde's editors decided to publish its story online first. The story went up on the Web site on Thursday morning, a few hours before the printed version of the same story would begin to reach

readers. Because the reporters had the videotape, the editors decided to also put the unedited tape on the site so viewers could hear and see the accusations that were being reported.

The videotape was an autobiographical text of Jean-Claude Mery, edited by an independent journalist, Arnaud Hamelin, now under judicial scrutiny for "concealing a violation of professional secret." However, with prosecutors harassing Hamelin about meetings he had and information he received, the Société des rédacteurs du Monde (journalists are the majority stockholders of the newspaper) issued a statement expressing its concern. The statement called these judicial efforts "an impediment against the freedom of information and the protection of sources as guaranteed by European legislation."

Mery was a real estate promoter and party fundraiser, who died of cancer in 1999. On the videotape, back in 1996, he explained how Chirac had supervised several corruption schemes when he was the mayor of Paris. Back in October 1986, Mery claimed he had, as an adviser to Chirac, conveyed millions of French francs in kickbacks as political contributions from big firms.

Just as Kenneth Starr's impeachment report on President Clinton was put on the Web in the United States in 1998

and created a national uproar, our “tape scandal” did the same. Internet publishing, used in this way for the first time, pushed sales of printed copies of the newspaper 30 percent higher on September 22, and 39 percent higher on the 23rd, the two days on which revelations were published. The Web site and the newspaper carried the same information about Mery. But the fact that people could directly listen to the tape gave the story instant credibility and seemed to increase their desire to know more through access to the printed editorials.

At first, legal specialists questioned the legal status of a videotape, compared to a written document. But since everybody could freely listen to the Web, this accusation soon went away. Then several politicians and firm representatives claimed that the operations being denounced were too old. Back in

1986, they said, there was no legislation defining the financing procedures of French political parties. (Several laws were passed starting in the late 1980’s.)

Observers also questioned the timing of the tape’s release: It came right before an important poll, organized by Jacques Chirac, asking French people if they agreed to shorten the presidential mandate from seven to five years. Obviously, the hot corruption story was more appealing than the dry constitutional law question. In the most massive case of absenteeism ever, only one-third of French citizens showed up at the polls, and 70 percent approved the shortening of the mandate. That outcome was not surprising, but what shocked people was that so many French citizens seemed so indifferent to democracy that they wouldn’t even vote anymore. Had the “tape” story had such an impact that this amount of voter absenteeism was becoming a sign

of disgust towards the political world?

In the midst of this, *Le Monde* was accused of wanting to weaken Chirac, a conservative. But on the very evening

dence, nor has it weakened its journalistic role of filtering news to the public. On the contrary, using the Web site seems to have increased the newspaper’s audience and opened new arenas of investigative reporting. Government offices sometimes make some long-term trends and statistics available online which, when analyzed correctly, can be very revealing. “Conversing” on the Web about specific issues can also bring the journalist a lot of new information that can then be worked with and verified.

In the videotape story, the interactive Web site helped to move the revelations more rapidly to the general public, and hearing the voice and seeing the images increased their credibility. However, these actions were closely monitored by all the editors in chief, which hopefully will always be the case at *Le Monde* and other publications as this type of publishing increases. In the years

ahead, *Le Monde*, like other newspapers, will need to find ways to ensure that the news delivered through either print or the Web are equally sound and accurate. ■

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The translation: Tapes, lies and video—“Yes, okay, I will talk to you, but give me those tapes.”

of the referendum, the French weekly magazine *L’Express* revealed on its Web site that Dominique Strauss Kahn (a socialist and former minister of finance) was the owner of the original tape by Mery (*Le Monde* had a copy), a fact he never mentioned.

The story also raised some questions about *Le Monde*’s traditional position within the French press as the news organization that could be counted on to retain a focus on sound and important international issues. With France governing as president of the European Union until December 2000, with Serbian unrest and tensions developing in the Middle East, *Le Monde*’s decision to dramatically highlight this scandal by releasing the videotape on its Web site made some wonder about the newspaper’s “Parisian bias.”

The use of this new technology has not threatened *Le Monde*’s indepen-

**Richard Wexler**, a former reporter and journalism professor, now executive director of the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform, contends that journalists' usual coverage of child welfare revolves around a "master narrative." This familiar story line, he argues, is wrong in its portrayal of the problem and results in dire consequences for the well-being of children as more children are placed in foster care. "The master narrative holds that when children 'known to the system' die, it must be because that system bends over backwards to keep children in, or return them to, dangerous homes in the name of 'family preservation,'" Wexler writes. He cites evidence to support his claim that journalists highlight stories when children die in parental care, but barely acknowledge deaths in foster care. Wexler offers journalists an alternative narrative.

**Nina Bernstein**, a metropolitan reporter for The New York Times who has reported on child welfare for more than a quarter of a century, describes her attempts to escape the master narrative and replace it with more balanced coverage of the child welfare system and its impact on children's lives. She says her ability to do this was best realized in her soon-to-be-published book, "The Lost Children of Wilder: The Epic Struggle to Change Foster Care," in which she uses narrative journalism to explore through one family's experience the actual impact of both public perception and policies.

**Patricia Callahan**, a Wall Street Journal reporter, writes about an investigative series of stories about abuse and death of children in foster care that she worked on while at The Denver Post. She and her Post colleagues battled agencies to get "confidential" records and crunched computer records of various databases. They then published stories that exposed the selection of foster parents who had criminal records and the shoddy and illegal practices by private companies contracted by the state to oversee children in foster care. Their reporting demonstrated how confidentiality rules can harm children and led to suggested changes in the system by a special committee of the state legislature.

**Jane Hansen**, a reporter with The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, describes the consequences of her newspaper's efforts to get state agencies to release to journalists the records of children's deaths in foster care. Stories about these deaths—and the difficulty of getting records—have resulted in the passage of Georgia's Open Records Act. Journalists can now receive the records of individual children who died while in the custody of the state.

**Blair Tindall**, a reporter for the Contra Costa (Calif.) Times, shows what happens to small ethnic newspapers when a large newspaper chain—in this case Knight Ridder—wants to gain a sizeable market share. Vietnamese owned and operated newspapers are losing readership and advertising and some are ceasing publication. And the Vietnamese community is losing its independent media voices.

**Don Aucoin**, a television critic for The Boston Globe and current Nieman Fellow, lets us know why the TV drama about journalism, "Deadline," came and went so quickly in this fall season. Turns out the show's portrayal of a newspaper columnist was more sleuth than truth.



# Caught in a Master Narrative

It's Why Many Stories About Child Welfare Get It Wrong.

By Richard Wexler

Death did not come quickly for four-year-old Caprice Reid. She was tied to a chair. She was denied food and water. She was beaten with sticks. It took four days for her to die.

She died in Brooklyn. But New York City's newspapers paid remarkably little attention. It made the front page of The New York Times only once and then only as a news peg for a broader story. Among the tabloids only Newsday gave it much play, and only briefly.

A recent search of the Nexis database finds 36 stories that even mention Caprice Reid. For another New York City child who died a horrible death, Elisa Izquierdo, there are 1,006.

Ask some of the same journalists who vividly remember the death of Elisa Izquierdo about Caprice Reid, as I have done, and what you'll get back are mostly blank stares.

In Florida, I ask reporters who can cite chapter and verse about the death of a child named Bradley McGee if they've ever heard of Corey Greer, who died a horrible death of dehydration as an infant. I get the same result.

Why are Elisa and Bradley remembered while Corey and Caprice are forgotten? Because the deaths of Elisa Izquierdo and Bradley McGee fit the "master narrative" of much of what journalists report and write about child welfare: Each of these children was killed by a birth parent. Corey Greer and Caprice Reid don't fit the master narrative: They died, inconveniently, in foster homes.

In a recent issue of the Columbia Journalism Review, Trudy Lieberman wrote that "Much self-censorship springs from what former St. Louis Post Dispatch editor William Woo calls the 'master narrative,' which he defines as the template reporters bring to an event or issue.... Editors and reporters absorb the conventional wisdom and often don't stray from its accept-

able borders." The master narrative is not the result of conscious decisions or edicts from above. (One of the few times I ever agreed with my former managing editor at the Albany Times-Union was when he wrote that "there are no media conspiracies—we're not that well organized.")

In child welfare, the master narrative springs from several factors. It seems to make sense intuitively. If a child is left in danger, there must be some policy that calls for it. Then there is "the Nexis effect," in which the same people are quoted saying the same thing in story after story. Combine that with the outrage and revulsion that the abuse of a child produces in all of us, and you have all the ingredients for a narrative that is unlikely to be questioned before it gets into print or is broadcast.

But the master narrative that underpins this coverage of child welfare is wrong. And journalists' tenacity in clinging to it has had tragic consequences for children. It has led to the creation of policies that have torn thousands of children needlessly from safe and loving—but poor—homes. And it has set off "foster care panics," in which huge numbers of additional children are needlessly removed, decisions that endanger children's lives. My point in raising these issues is not to persuade journalists of an alternative narrative, only to provide one and suggest that it deserves to be a part of the public child welfare debate.

The master narrative holds that when children "known to the system" die, it must be because that system bends over backwards to keep children in, or return them to, dangerous homes in the name of "family preservation." Furthermore, the master narrative tells us that children are forced to languish in foster care for years because family preservation fanatics insist on lavish services on the children's ne'er-do-

well parents in a futile effort to reunite parents and children.

By the mid-1990's, the status of these statements in news stories had evolved from claims attributed to named sources to statements of "fact," appearing without attribution in a kind of boilerplate synopsis in story after story. It is now the case that when reporters call me about child welfare stories, they often start off by asking me about "the conflict between child protection and family preservation." But before I respond to that question, I need to challenge its premise and explain (and yes, sometimes argue) that, in fact, child protection is impossible *without* family preservation.

The term "family preservation" was invented in the 1970's to describe one specific type of intervention, a program called Intensive Family Preservation Services (IFPS). This approach to improving child welfare challenges more than a century of orthodoxy and thus provoked a lot of hostility within the mainstream child welfare establishment. Yet those within the establishment who were hostile to it essentially hijacked this very narrowly defined term and slapped it onto any decision that was made to leave any child in any home under any circumstances, even if that family had been nowhere near a real IFPS program. In fact, there is plenty of evidence that, for most children most of the time, genuine IFPS programs are safer than foster care, both because the programs have so many safeguards built in and because study after study has found that foster care is very dangerous. (Space prohibits listing the studies here, but they are discussed on our Web site, [www.nccpr.org](http://www.nccpr.org).)

The real reason children "known to the system" sometimes die is almost always because an under-prepared, under-trained, underpaid caseworker with an overwhelming caseload made



a life-and-death-decision, and blew it. Scapegoating family preservation actually worsens this problem, since it sets off "foster care panics," bringing many more children needlessly into an already overburdened system. Workers become so busy with these children that they have even less time to assist children in real danger. After such "panics" in Illinois, Connecticut and New York City, child abuse deaths actually increased.

The master narrative goes on to place blame for children languishing in foster care on a 1980 federal law that required "reasonable efforts" to keep families together. But in the late 1970's, there were as many children stuck in foster care, relative to the total child population, as there are today. So the first question an informed reporter might want to ask is: "If the problem is with a 1980 law, why were all those children in foster care years earlier?" In fact, the 1980 law was the first legislation intended to *prevent* children from languishing in foster care by emphasizing both keeping children in their own homes and increasing the likelihood of

adoption once a child was removed. Indeed, it was the first federal law to set time limits on children's stays in foster care.

For a very brief period, it worked well. But the law was one of the last initiatives of the Carter administration. The Reagan administration refused to enforce it, sending a signal to the states that they could go back to business as usual. They did. Since 1985, the foster care population has doubled. So the second paradox journalists might want to clarify is: "If family preservation has so dominated the system, how did all those children get into foster care?"

The real answer is that children got there because family preservation has never dominated the child welfare system. Often, children are removed not because their parents were brutally abusive or hopelessly addicted but because their family's poverty led to conditions such as a lack of adequate food, clothing and shelter, and those conditions were confused with "neglect." Other cases fall on a broad continuum, the parents neither all victim nor all villain. Once taken, children are filed

away and forgotten as overwhelmed caseworkers rush on to the next crisis. Children don't languish in foster care because the system does everything for families. They languish because the system does almost nothing for families.

But the myths about the system became powerful enough to prompt Congress to pass a new law in 1997, the so-called Adoption and Safe Families Act, which effectively makes "reasonable efforts" optional, and pushes adoption-as-panacea. There already is ample evidence that this new approach is failing.

When I offer this information to journalists, what I often hear in response is, "But *everybody* says the system emphasized family preservation." But a close look at three recent in-depth stories and series suggests a constricted definition of just who "everybody" includes.

No reporter would do a large-scale overview story or series about criminal justice without talking to a single defendant or defense attorney. Yet when the Traverse City (Michigan) Record-

## Child Welfare Reporting: Things Sources Say That Almost Always Aren't True

1. The Child Protective Services (CPS) agency administrator says: "We can't take away children on our own. A judge must approve everything we do. Families are protected by due process."

The truth is that untrained, inexperienced, overwhelmed CPS workers *can* take away children on their own, and they often do. In all 50 states, caseworkers have the authority to remove a child from the home on the spot. In about half the states they can do it themselves, in the rest they must call law enforcement, but the decision rests with the worker alone.

In theory, this is supposed to be done only in emergencies. In fact, in New York City, to cite one example, the child welfare agency has admitted that this is their typical procedure, whether there is an "emergency" or not. A judge

doesn't get involved until a few days later. At that point she is faced with a lawyer for CPS who does this for a living and has had days to review the file, versus an overwhelmed, impoverished parent who, if she has a lawyer at all, just met him five minutes ago. As a report from the New York City Public Advocate's office points out, it's impossible for that lawyer to mount a defense without seeking a postponement. The child stays in foster care. That report and others have found that representation for parents typically ranges from shoddy to nonexistent.

In New York City parents win their cases just 1.6 percent of the time. A second report, from an independent advisory panel of national experts, found that the city's family court judges admit they routinely remove children even when they don't think CPS has

made a case because they're terrified of the publicity if they send a child home and something goes wrong.

The administrators who tell journalists about due process know all this, of course. Why not ask the lawyers who represent parents in your family court if judges wield gavels or press rubber stamps?

2. A spokesman for child welfare agencies says there is hardly any abuse in foster care, based on "official" statistics.

Even the official numbers show at least as much abuse in foster care as in the general population. But for abuse in foster care to become "official," a child has to confide in a worker, often the very worker who put him in the home. The worker, who often works

Eagle published a five-part series on foster care in May, the reporter included the views of not one birth parent. Nor was there any comment from any lawyer who represents a birth parent, nor from a lawyer or advocate who regularly deals with the problems of poor people (one of the better sources for reporting on the widespread problem of the confusion of poverty with neglect). Instead, the journalist declared that “some parents and others disagree with the shift away from family preservation at all costs....” (I’ve seen that “at all costs” line in at least a dozen stories, falsely presented by reporters as incontrovertible fact.)

This problem is not confined to small newspapers.

The (Raleigh) News & Observer ran two lengthy stories about foster care in May. Displaying no evidence of having talked to anyone who would question the master narrative, the reporter flatly declared that “some people believe that children and parents belong together *no matter what*” [emphasis added]. I have never met such a person, nor does the reporter produce

one. The reporter goes on to portray the 1980 law precisely backwards, declaring that “federal law [formerly] favored placing children in long-term foster care as long as it took for parents to take control of their own lives, then their children.”

Similarly, a front-page child welfare story in *The Boston Globe* declared that “family reunification” has been “the concrete goal” for generations. It quoted only foster parents, an adoption attorney, and a spokeswoman for the state Department of Social Services.

Reporters also sometimes object to my claims of a dichotomy in coverage of deaths depending on where a child dies, noting that they have “covered” abuse in foster care. Certainly, the story is not ignored entirely. Indeed, within the past year the *Dayton Daily News* and *The Denver Post* [See story on page 84.] did excellent series on the topic. But there is a huge difference in stories about abuse in foster care and abuse by birth parents in the category best called “lessons learned.” In *The Denver Post*’s series, solutions pro-

posed revolved solely around toughening licensing requirements, adding inspectors, and adding a few more categories of felons to the list of people who can’t be foster parents. Foster care as an institution remained unquestioned. Nobody was quoted as advocating the abolition of foster care or even that there be less of it. In contrast, the near uniform response when a child dies in the home of birth parents is to condemn the whole idea of family preservation and call for its elimination or drastic curtailment.

No editorial writer or op-ed author would opine that “Caprice Reid is dead. She was a foster child. We’d better abolish foster care.” (Nor should they—for some children, foster care is essential.) But no cycle of coverage of the death of a child in his own home is complete without the mandatory “See, it’s all the fault of family preservation” op-ed, newspaper editorial or column.

Much child welfare coverage also is characterized by a double standard of skepticism. Often I have pointed out that after foster care panics, child abuse deaths actually increase, and reporters

for a private agency that oversees the home, has to report to her bosses her own failure in putting the child in an abusive home. The agency has to turn itself in to the government that gave it the contract, and the government has to “substantiate” a charge against an agency that it hired. So it should come as no surprise that whenever researchers seriously study abuse in foster care, the rate of abuse vastly exceeds the “official” numbers.

Furthermore the official data don’t even count foster children abusing each other. Thus, a lawyer representing children in Broward County, Florida could become personally aware of 50 cases of child-on-child sexual abuse involving more than 100 foster children in just 18 months, even though the “official” number was seven.

The people who fall back on the

official numbers know this, of course. But they represent agencies, not children. Accepting such data from them without question is like accepting data on abuse of the elderly from a trade association for nursing homes.

3. The CPS worker says, “We’re damned if we do and damned if we don’t.”

In 24 years of looking at child welfare as a reporter and then as an advocate, I have never read a news story in which a CPS worker is criminally charged, fired, suspended, demoted, or even slapped on the wrist for taking away too many children. Yet all these things have happened to workers who leave children in their own homes when something goes wrong.

The very first words out of the mouth

of Washington State Governor Gary Locke after a child “known to the system” died in Tacoma in May was a threat of “full disciplinary action” against any worker involved who may have erred. The caseworker who left a two-year-old Iowa girl in a home where she died was quickly named and vilified in quotes given to *The Des Moines Register*. And after Elisa Izquierdo was killed by her mother, the (New York) *Daily News* editorialized that the worker who handled the case should be “flogged, then fired.”

The CPS workers who give you the “damned if we do, damned if we don’t” line know this, of course. But the truth is, when it comes to taking away children from their parents, they’re *not* damned if they do and damned if they don’t. They’re *only* damned if they don’t. ■—Richard Wexler


have asked pointed, skeptical questions about cause and effect, as they should. But where is this skepticism when the panic begins? Where is it when officials promise that drastically curbing family preservation will reduce child abuse deaths? To be fair, The New York Times reminded readers of these promises when child abuse deaths increased in that city. But to the best of my knowledge, no newspaper in Illinois or Connecticut reported that in those states the “panics” were followed by more child abuse deaths.

There is excellent work being done on child welfare issues all over the country, sometimes by reporters who have to fight not only a system shrouded in secrecy but lack of interest and support from higher-ups at their newspapers. But excellence in child welfare reporting is like excellence in journalism in general: It requires questioning the master narrative.

Journalists in Chicago might want to begin by considering two questions:

- Who was Joseph Wallace?
- Who was Antonio Moseley? ■

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## Press Coverage and Public Perception

In child welfare reporting, even good daily coverage can be distorting.

By Nina Bernstein

**E**arly in 1990, researching an article for *Newsday* on New York City foster care, I spent a morning with a stack of documents in a longstanding class action lawsuit known as *Wilder*. In 1973, the lawsuit, citing the First Amendment’s separation of church and state and the Fourteenth Amendment’s guarantee of equal protection, challenged New York City’s 150-year-old foster care system for giving private, mostly religious agencies control of publicly financed foster care beds. The dominant Catholic and Jewish charities were by law allowed to give preference to their own kind. Black, Protestant children—like the named plaintiff, Shirley Wilder—had to wait or do without. The system did poorly by all children, the suit charged, because it placed them according to creed and convenience, not according to their needs.

In the marble and mahogany splendor of Manhattan’s federal courthouse in the 1990’s, lawyers often likened the *Wilder* case to *Jarndyce and Jarndyce*, the suit in Dickens’ “*Bleak House*,” that dragged on so long people forgot what it meant. *Wilder*’s course paralleled a national trajectory from great optimism to great skepticism about the

possibility of righting social wrongs through the courts. The *Wilder* case engaged the passions of three generations of social reformers even as it fell short of helping three generations of children in foster care.

Halfway through the legal papers, I found a fact that haunted me: In 1974 Shirley Wilder, then 14, had given birth to a son and placed him in foster care. I wanted to know what had happened to that baby.

As a reporter for newspapers in Des Moines, Milwaukee and New York City, I had written about foster care for about as long as Wilder had been litigated, with increasing frustration. The problems seemed to be redefined by reform movements and newspaper exposés, not remedied. Cases we highlighted were by definition aberrations, like child abuse deaths, or court battles between two sets of parents for one child. Larger debates were typically framed in false dichotomies—say, child protection versus family preservation. Regardless of shifts of philosophy, I knew the same systems erred in all directions, leaving children in abusive situations—in their own homes, in foster homes, or institutions—while snatching children from loving fami-

lies that needed help.

I wanted to dig deeper, and I was convinced that the way to do it was through the story of Shirley Wilder’s son, Lamont—a story unfolding in secret while the lawsuit, settled in the 1980’s through unfulfilled promises of change, was waged in court and at city hall. When I found Lamont, he was aging out of the system he had entered as a newborn. Partly because reformers had been pushing adoptions in the late 1970’s—as they are again today—this bright, outgoing black child had been abruptly removed at age five from his first foster mother and had been sent to Minnesota to be adopted by a white couple. They had changed their minds within a year, as did a second white family. Not yet seven, he had been labeled unadoptable and shipped back to New York to spend the balance of his childhood in institutions.

My two-part series on the case, which ran in *New York Newsday* in July 1993, won the Mike Berger Award from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. But I felt I had only peeled back a few layers in a story rich in continuing human drama and history that revealed the racial, religious and political fault lines of America’s

child welfare system. A 1994 Alicia Patterson Foundation Fellowship and then a book contract allowed me to continue my research until 1995, when New York Newsday was shut down.

Within weeks of joining The New York Times, I was drafted to lead an investigation into the case of six-year-old Elisa Izquierdo, a child beaten to death by her mother while under the system's protection. Like most reporters trying to gather the facts about such a case, we were faced with state confidentiality laws that had been designed to shield troubled children and families, but were used by child welfare officials instead to hide the system from public accountability. Police and prosecutors typically became primary sources in these situations, which reinforces a tendency to recount the events in terms of individual blame and child martyrdom.

In Elisa's case, child welfare sources old and new helped provide a deeper understanding of how the system had failed her. New York has among the strongest child welfare laws in the country, including an around-the-clock system for receiving reports of abuse or neglect, investigations required to begin within 24 hours, and detailed procedures for taking children into protective custody. But suspicions reported by school officials, a doctor, and a private social service agency—some suggesting Elisa was a disturbed child in need of mental health services—were lost or poorly investigated by overburdened caseworkers feeling new pressures to close cases.

Colleagues and I won a George Polk award for the coverage. And confidentiality laws were significantly modified as a result of the case's coverage, and the mayor appointed a new commissioner to overhaul the child welfare agency. But I felt no matter how nuanced we tried to be in our front-page articles, we had reinforced a "master narrative" that once again distorted public perception. This powerful story line suggests that the only real danger to a child is an abusive parent, and the key systemic mistake is leaving children in parental custody. So in reaction to the Izquierdo scandal, in the name of safety, more children would

be taken from their parents into a foster care system in disarray, often with damaging, even fatal, consequences. Furthermore, the case played into the demonization of poor mothers, then reaching a crescendo with the federal welfare overhaul. By this point I was acutely aware of the contradictions between policies that punished "the undeserving poor" and pledges to help all needy children.

The history of American child welfare is littered with programs once hailed as reforms and later decried as harmful or ineffective, only to re-emerge in the guise of new solutions to past failures. Why do these problems seem so intractable?

Historical amnesia has shielded us from a full understanding of our child welfare dilemma. For three generations, "child welfare" has been a category that covered child abuse, child neglect, foster care and adoption, but not "welfare," or Aid to Families with Dependent Children. In the media and public policy presentations, deviant parents and unlucky children from families of all income groups comprise the universe of child welfare, while "welfare" was a program for poor folks. This division tends to downplay the reality that children in foster care and at risk of foster care are overwhelmingly the children of the poor.

During long periods of American history, the relationship between poverty and family break-up was unambiguous; with no public relief, parents too poor to support their children had to put them into orphanages or up for indenture or adoption. The old and familiar conviction underlying such policies, that parents who cannot rear their children without public aid are almost by definition unfit to bring up the next generation, still holds sway in this age of welfare reform.

But the effort to sever the destiny of needy children from the fate of their

unworthy parents repeatedly slams against unyielding truths of child development: the need for intensive human attachment, the traumatic effect of childhood separations, the rapid transformation of yesterday's children into today's child-bearers. It defies hard economic realities, too, like the fact that even mediocre substitute care for children (foster home or institution) costs much more than family subsidies, and that adoption, ideally both cost-effective and humane, is also governed by unforgiving laws of supply and demand.

There has long been an iron rule in American social welfare policy: Conditions must be worse for the dependent poor than they are for anyone who works. The less acknowledged corollary is that the subsidized care of other people's children must be undesirable enough, or scarce enough, to play a role in this system of deterrence. In

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**But I felt no matter how nuanced we tried to be in our front-page articles, we had reinforced a 'master narrative' that once again distorted public perception.**

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periods of widening inequality, the result of this invisible law becomes so harsh for children that it is difficult to reconcile with the rhetoric of benevolence.

Whatever the successes of the welfare overhaul of 1996, it has only been tested in a good economy. For the first time since the New Deal of the 1930's, federal law no longer guarantees basic economic support to children living in their own families. It does still guarantee financial support for poor children placed outside their homes because of inadequate care. That means the next real economic downturn could bring a flood tide of children into the foster care system, in which well over half a million children already live today.

That is what happened in New York City after 1875, the year relief to poor families was drastically cut to end "pau-

perism." At first the change was declared a success. But as recessions hit during the next two decades, more and more children went into orphanages run by private religious charities, where public money would still flow to support their care. By 1909, everyone agreed that the orphanage boom was a disaster for children and taxpayers alike. Foster home care was championed as an alternative, and so were mothers' pensions, the state stipends that became the precursors to the Aid to Dependent Children provisions of the Social Security Act. Only with its passage in 1935 did the number of children in care decline dramatically and stay down during 25 years of narrowing income gaps.

By the 1990's, new welfare rhetoric demanded personal responsibility for adults and modern orphanages for unadoptable children whose parents failed the test. In 1998, when the mother of Lamont's three-year-old son, unemployed and facing eviction, applied for emergency food stamps, she and the

child were turned away in the name of welfare reform. More recently, Lamont himself spent a night in jail for failing to pay \$1,500 in child support arrears—an impossible sum on his meager wages. "My mommy put my daddy in jail," his five-year-old son cried in class the next day, so disruptive that school officials threatened to call in child protection services.

My forthcoming book, "The Lost Children of Wilder: The Epic Struggle to Change Foster Care," is a quest to understand what went wrong—in one family's entanglement in the foster care system and in recurrent crusades to make American child welfare fulfill its promise of benevolence. Because of the book's sustained focus on one family's experience during some 26 years, I had an opportunity to make readers care about a child, who then becomes a young parent, and to show the real life impact of interlocking social and legal policies in the ways that time and space constraints of newspaper reporting do not allow. Perhaps

even more important, writing the book freed me as a journalist from the tyranny of today, to recognize and explore the deeper patterns at work in the events we are bound, as reporters, to showcase as departures from the past. I hope, too, that it informs the understanding of reporters and reformers in ways that serve the welfare—that is, the well-being—of children like Shirley Wilder's grandson. ■

*Nina Bernstein, a 1984 Nieman Fellow, is a metropolitan reporter for The New York Times covering poverty and social services. Her book, "The Lost Children of Wilder: The Epic Struggle to Change Foster Care," will be published by Pantheon in February 2001. Previously she worked for New York Newsday, the Milwaukee Journal (before it became the Journal Sentinel), and the Des Moines Register & Tribune (on the Tribune side, when there was still a Tribune).*

## Confidentiality Acts to Shield Abuse in Foster Care

At The Denver Post, reporters reveal what is happening to foster children.

By Patricia Callahan

On Super Bowl Sunday 1999, two-year-old Miguel Arias-Baca lay dying on the bathroom floor of his suburban Denver foster home. Miguel's foster father, who had been drinking at a Broncos victory party, was upset that Miguel had soiled his diaper. He smeared the toddler's face in his own feces and threw him to the ground. As Miguel's brain swelled with blood, his foster parents waited more than four hours before they took him to the hospital. The child, whose body was covered in bruises, never regained consciousness. He died in the hospital before his biological family could be located.

When I looked into the case for The Denver Post, records revealed even

more disturbing details about Miguel's foster parents, Ricky and E'von Haney: They both had criminal arrest records. Foster care was their sole source of income. They hopped from one private foster care business to another, once after Ricky Haney's stepdaughter accused him of abuse.

Reporter Kirk Mitchell and I decided to find out if the problems were systemic. We were shocked by what we found during our seven months of investigative reporting. Foster children, who are wards of the state taken from abusive or neglectful relatives, often suffered again in homes that meant to keep them from harm. Each abuse case seemed worse than the next. One foster child was forced to have sex with a



Sharon Cramer, who admitted dealing drugs in the past, became a foster parent.

dog. One foster father promised his 13-year-old foster daughter he'd leave his wife for her, then had sex with her in the basement. One foster mom forced her kids to use a bucket for a toilet.

Still, private, for-profit and nonprofit foster care companies were making millions as they were paid with taxpayer subsidies as compensation for placing these children and overseeing their care. Once some of these stories were confirmed, it didn't take much for us to convince our editors that this mistreatment of children was a topic worthy of an in-depth investigation. Projects Editor Dan Meyers and Assistant Projects Editor Jeff Roberts made sure we had the time to report and space to publish the five-day series, which ran in late May.

As we tried to learn more about the private foster care businesses—a \$37 million-per-year industry in Colorado—Kirk and I ran into one confidentiality roadblock after another. Colorado laws, like those in many other states, keep confidential the names of foster children and the circumstances surrounding their care as government wards. While the state contended that confidentiality rules protect foster children, we found the laws often shielded the various agencies and the state from outside scrutiny. This absence of oversight meant that foster children who were maltreated often went unnoticed. Added to this were reporting problems associated with trying to unearth information from private companies; it was difficult enough to get the public agencies to release public records (with the claims of confidentiality) but the involvement of private companies made our job that much more difficult. With some of the for-profit agencies, for example, we were never able to learn how they spent the money they received from the state. (At least nonprofit agencies need to file a Form 990 that gives financial disclosure.)

In our work to connect what scarce information there was on this largely unregulated industry, we crunched 1.8 million computer records from five state databases. We created computer tables to track inspection reports, abuse complaints, related companies, and the assets of company directors and execu-

tives. The computer analysis, in turn, pointed us to court records, police reports, and nonprofit tax returns, which filled in many details either omitted or redacted from state foster care records.

Even news got in the way of our series. The day I was supposed to meet with Assistant Managing Editor Frank Scandale to plan the investigation was the same day that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold opened fire on their classmates at Columbine High School. That meeting didn't happen. The project was put on hold for six months while we all focused on Columbine.

While the business of foster care has boomed in Colorado, our investigation—which was the first of its kind in our state—showed that the state has made it easier for the industry to skirt

abused and neglected children.

At the same time, changes in both foster care policies and laws made it easier for the emerging businesses to evade state rules. In 1994, the Colorado Legislature passed an industry-backed law that made it more difficult to crack down on problem foster care businesses. Faced with high caseloads, state foster care officials asked businesses to evaluate themselves by filling out a "self-assessment" form. What business was going to turn itself in for breaking state rules? And it got more absurd. One inspector told us that her department was so strapped for cash that the state didn't send the businesses assessment forms every year. Instead, the inspector asked business executives to reuse the old forms with a different color pen. Even when state



Jeremy sits with his mother. At eight years old, Jeremy (not his real name) was sexually assaulted by a foster brother. *Photo by Craig F. Walker, The Denver Post.*

rules that were created to protect children. Foster care businesses have become "cash cows" in Colorado, one state official admitted. During the last 14 years, the number of foster homes recruited and supervised by private businesses increased by more than 800 percent. Colorado businesses have recruited foster parents who they sometimes knew had criminal records—including violent records—to care for

officials discovered problems, they rarely used the laws available to discipline companies that put children in harm's way.

Colorado officials poured more than three-quarters of the state's 47.2 million foster care dollars into private businesses, even though our investigation showed that they didn't know how the money was being spent. We found that much of that money was not spent

on children. Through our tracking of financial records of both the foster care companies and their officers, we discovered that the director of one foster care business used state subsidies to pay the mortgage of his newly constructed "home office" in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains complete with a three-car garage, slate entryway, a sunny living room with a cathedral ceiling, and arched windows. At the same time, he sent foster children to a home with broken windows, only one toy and insufficient food, clothes or furniture. Other non-profit agencies created for-profit arms. One non-profit diverted more than \$600,000 of state foster care subsidies into their for-profit arm, which was controlled by the same executives. The leaders of another foster care business made six-figure incomes off of taxpayer subsidies while children in their foster homes were molested and assaulted.

To get around confidentiality walls, we turned to computer databases. Colorado's Department of Human Services kept extensive computer records on each foster child. Initially, we were told that those records were closed. We persisted: If the intent of the confidentiality laws was to protect the identity of abused and neglected children, why shouldn't those records be publicly available if the children's names were removed? With some basic programming, we knew the state could assign each child a unique number, allowing us to track kids through the system while keeping their identities secret. While it wasn't easy, we eventu-

ally convinced the state to do exactly that. We used similar arguments to get data on state payments to foster care businesses and entrance to a databank of foster parents.

The first goal of our reporting was to confirm a hunch. The foster parents who cared for Miguel—the child who was killed—both had criminal arrest records. We suspected that many foster parents had rap sheets, so we took a database of foster parents and merged



Anita Baca poses with a portrait of her grandson, Miguel Arias-Baca, at his christening. Miguel was killed by his foster father, Ricky Haney, who pleaded guilty to child abuse caused by negligence resulting in death. *Photo by Craig F. Walker, The Denver Post.*

it with a database of Colorado criminals. Jeff Roberts, the paper's computer-assisted reporting guru, also used a third commercial databank of motor vehicle, voter and property records to find other criminals living at the addresses of foster homes, such as live-in boyfriends or adult children of foster parents. With that list, we pulled court files and police records to make sure the foster parents and the criminals were the same people.

What we discovered is that just about anybody could become a foster parent. One foster mom got her job even though she had pleaded guilty to solicitation for prostitution. Another woman charged with selling drugs out of her daycare home was later recruited

by two different foster care businesses. And a man who spent more than half of his adult life in prison for robbery and assault convictions became a foster dad. One foster care business executive even argued that having a criminal background might make someone a better foster parent.

When we researched the businesses that hired criminals, we found that shoddy background checks were just the beginning of the industry's woes in

Colorado. Licensing files showed that the state routinely allowed these businesses to break rules designed to protect children. Some companies had no records to show they had ever visited their foster homes to check on the children's welfare. Some companies amassed hundreds of violations, and the state did nothing to stop them. The state's fractured system al-

lowed troubled foster parents to hop from one agency to another—even if another agency pushed them out because of abuse allegations. And children were getting molested and assaulted in their foster homes either by foster parents or other foster kids.

But the search for detailed records was frustrating. The state files were woefully incomplete. Often we'd find a cover sheet to a county abuse investigation that listed only the date of the investigation. We complained that the rest of the reports were missing but were told that the details were kept confidential to protect the victims. One goal of our story became to prove these bureaucrats wrong.

It wasn't that tough to do. An inter-

nal company memo we uncovered showed how confidentiality rules can harm children. One foster child molested the eight-year-old biological son of his foster mother. The foster mother had not been told of the child's record of molesting younger children at previous foster homes. Had the case records been open, she never would have taken the boy into her home. Her son never would have become a victim.


Before our series was published, Marva Livingston Hammons, Colorado's Human Services chief, wrote a memo to certain state legislators outlining the major points of our investigation. "That's for our survival," her spokeswoman told us. "Jesus, do you want us to have it hit the front steps

of the legislature without them knowing about it in advance? My God, we'd kill ourselves." Once the series appeared, Hammons wrote defensive and sometimes misleading letters to the editor claiming her department had taken steps to fix the problems. And Governor Bill Owens refused to grant us an interview. His spokesman said the governor was confident that Hammons was fixing the flaws.

But the Colorado legislature didn't buy it. Legislators convened a special committee to scrutinize the state's role in what has become the foster care "scandal." They crafted nine new laws that would overhaul the private foster-care system, subjecting both the businesses and their foster parents to

greater scrutiny. One senator scolded the state for allowing foster care businesses to "line their pockets on the backs of children." Lawmakers will vote on these proposed bills when the formal session begins in January. ■

*Patricia Callahan, who was part of The Denver Post's Pulitzer Prize-winning Columbine team, now writes about the newspaper and biotechnology industries for The Wall Street Journal. Kirk Mitchell continues to cover the foster care fallout for The Denver Post.*

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## Fighting to Break the Barrier of Confidentiality

When children in the child welfare system die, reporters work to find out why.

By Jane Hansen

In 1989, my newspaper, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, and I went to court to gain access to the records of children who had died after coming to the attention of our child welfare department, the Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS) in Georgia. We did this only after being told federal confidentiality laws and regulations forbid the release of the files. We argued in court that they did not. We furthermore argued that the public's need to know what happened to children who had died after coming under the state's protection outweighed any privacy interests of a deceased child. The court agreed and ordered the state to give me the complete files.

In 1990, in response to a series of stories I wrote based on the records, the governor and legislature passed seven laws to reform the child welfare system, including one that was to loosen confidentiality laws when a child had died. Specifically, it set in law a process by which a reporter could go to court and argue for the records as part of "bona fide research." The language

tracked federal confidentiality regulations.

Ten years later, we decided to look at how well these decade-old laws were working.

Again, I asked DFACS for the records of all children in Georgia who had died after someone had reported them for abuse or neglect. I assumed that based on the 1990 law, and the previous court decision, we would have no problem. I was wrong. DFACS fought harder than ever to keep the records closed. So again we sued, and after a protracted legal battle we won a second time. In the end, the state turned over to me the unredacted records of 844 children who had died during a six-year period.

This time I wrote another series of articles that were published last year. And again, the governor and legislature passed new laws, this time four of them. One law created the position of an ombudsman to oversee the Department of Family and Children Services. But most significantly, in my view, the governor pushed through a law that

for the first time puts the records of these deceased children under the state's Open Records Act. Since the law went into effect, reporters from my newspaper and others in Georgia have requested the records of individual children and received them. Perhaps, this time, the law will work.

I was very fortunate to have the luxury of time and a newspaper that backed my efforts to get these records. But over the years we have also received a lot of support from the public, legislators and two governors who believed that confidentiality did more to protect the department from public scrutiny than protect children from abuse or neglect. I personally believe that confidentiality and the lack of accountability it breeds contribute directly to the deaths of children. ■

*Jane Hansen is a reporter for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Her series on child welfare can be found at [www.accessatlanta.com/partners/ajc/read/children/index.html](http://www.accessatlanta.com/partners/ajc/read/children/index.html).*



# Goliath Arrives and a Few Davids Depart

In a Vietnamese enclave, community publications feel pressure from Knight Ridder.

By Blair Tindall

A sign in the desolate parking lot identifies Calitoday. It is a three-year-old daily San Jose Vietnamese newspaper with seven staff members and an average circulation of 6,000. Editor Nam Nguyen answers the door in slippers, while columnist Hoa Pham types at one of three computers in the \$500-a-month rented office. Inside, a Buddha statue, a bowl of pears, and an incense burner under a banner of Tibetan calligraphy comprise a shrine. Another Buddha, this one a lithograph, hangs over the drafting table where Nam Nguyen will finish his regular 16-hour work day by pasting up the paper at nine in the evening.

Across town the next day, Viet Mercury Editor De Tran relaxes over a cup of French roast after putting his paper to bed. Outside, sunlight dapples the San Jose Mercury News grounds. Since its inception nearly two years ago, his free weekly's circulation has grown from 18,500 to 25,000. Tran's 20 full-time Vietnamese-speaking staff members are employees of Knight Ridder, this country's second-largest newspaper group, with 52 daily newspapers in 28 markets and a gross income of \$3.2 billion last year.

In San Jose, some in the United States's second-largest Vietnamese enclave regard the arrival of the Viet Mercury as a sign of its community's prosperity. Others say the paper's presence is killing its independent ethnic press by undercutting ad rates while its editorial content misrepresents the community's culture and politics.

Until now, the few newspaper chains launching foreign-language papers set their sights on this country's large Hispanic audience. Now, Knight Ridder's San Jose Mercury News is courting another large ethnic group, in what Tran believes is a chain's first foray into a non-Spanish-language ethnic paper. The Mercury News is taking advantage

of a growing market that now makes up 10 percent of San Jose's population: Vietnamese residents in this city have doubled since 1990 to 120,000.

The Mercury News is uniquely positioned to serve the Vietnamese. Since the U.S. trade embargo was lifted in 1994, the newspaper has had a Hanoi bureau. Also, by discounting ad rates for all three Mercury News publications (it also publishes a five-year-old Latino paper, *Nuevo Mundo*) the Viet Mercury is bolstered by its parent corporation while it develops a loyal advertising base.

San Jose's Vietnamese are a marketer's dream. Nearly a third of their households earn more than \$65,000 per year and, as a community, they spend \$1.5 billion each year. According to market research, San Jose's Vietnamese read three or four newspapers per day and can choose among four local Vietnamese dailies and 10 weeklies. "At one time newspapers tended to write off immigrant populations as too small and poor to be of interest to advertisers," said media analyst John Morton. "But the populations no longer are small, and many immigrants move up rapidly into the middle class and become attractive to advertisers."

Reaching out to specific ethnic groups is not an entirely new publishing phenomenon. Newspapers such as *The Washington Bee* and *The New York Age* that were targeted at various black audiences were available during the 19th century. Indeed, the Ridder Group began in 1892 with Herman Ridder's purchase of the German-language *Staats-Zeitung*. In 1976, Knight Ridder's *Miami Herald* broke ground in the ethnic press with its *El Herald*, a few pages of material translated from and distributed with *The Miami Herald*. Today, *El Herald* has evolved into *El Nuevo Herald*, with a circulation of

100,000. The newspaper is operated and distributed separately from its parent newspaper; last year, its operating profit beat that of *The Miami Herald*. It is also the most rapidly growing of Knight Ridder's 31 daily papers, according to its editor and publisher, Carlos Castañeda, and the fourth fastest growing of all U.S. dailies.

Comparing the Viet Mercury with *El Nuevo Herald* is only natural, says Tran. Both papers serve communist exiles who want their opinion represented in a dateline from home. Since the Vietnamese and Cubans are, as a group, wealthier and more politically powerful than many other immigrant communities, developing such markets might represent the latest niche strategy for newspaper chains to maintain their local markets.

But for these two immigrant populations, it's become more than a David and Goliath war over attracting advertising dollars. Like many journalists who write for Cuban audiences, the Vietnamese writers brought adversarial traditions of news reporting with them, says *Miami Herald* publisher Alberto Ibarguen. They consider that the lack of presumed bias—the kind of objective journalism embraced by the Viet Mercury—actually presents a different kind of bias.

A vocal segment of San Jose's South Vietnamese who, as a whole, constitute 65 percent of the city's Vietnamese population, are upset with what they call the Viet Mercury's glamorization of the North Vietnamese regime. "I used to respect [Mercury News publisher] Jay Harris, but now I am angry that he doesn't respect our community," said Tran Chi, former editor of *Vietnam Family*, a weekly that failed three months after the Viet Mercury's inception. In a prepared statement, Harris asserts that the Mercury News set out to capture the Vietnamese market by

creating an American-style newspaper, an approach that differs from Times Mirror's 50 percent purchase in 1990 of the nation's oldest Hispanic newspaper, Los Angeles's *La Opinion*.

But American style hasn't been universally accepted in San Jose. "It was friendly cooperation in L.A. They opened their hearts and doors to the community and invited them in," said Tam Nguyen, editor of *SaigonUSA*. "But with Publisher Jay Harris and the *Mercury*, it's slash and burn journalism."

The *Mercury News*'s reporting by its Hanoi bureau chief, Mark McDonald, seems to anger just about everybody, whether they are American or native Vietnamese. "I try to keep my head down and the stories straight, and then I listen to everyone scream," he said in an e-mail interview. Some Vietnamese, like Tran Chi, even accuse the *Mercury News* of editorially placating the North Vietnamese government to keep its bureau open.

Though its coverage is slanted by the ideology of its publishers, the independent Vietnamese press might have an edge in its newsgathering abilities. *Calitoday's* Editor, Nam Nguyen, gets news and photos sent to him instantaneously via e-mail from correspondents all over Vietnam, whereas McDonald must request permission five days before he wants to make a trip outside Hanoi. Regions in Vietnam that are populated by ethnic minorities are completely off-limits to him.

Because of concerns such as these, a lot of Vietnamese set out to create their own news venues. And it is this voice, Tam Nguyen says, that the *Viet Mercury* is silencing. He blames the failure of two of San Jose's 14 Vietnamese papers that were operating in 1998 on the emergence of the *Viet Mercury*. And he accuses that paper of unfairly undercutting ad prices to gain market share by selling full pages of ad space for \$90 when he contends the market rate should be \$400.

In a written statement, Harris defends his paper's ad rates as competitive, saying they were not the lowest-priced Vietnamese newspaper ads available at the time. And De Tran points out that independent ethnic newspapers come and go frequently, so it is

difficult to determine a direct correlation with the *Viet Mercury's* success. Yet Tran Chi's 6,000-circulation *Vietnam Family* shut down in the spring of 1998 after half of its advertisers defected to the *Viet Mercury*.

*SaigonUSA* still operates, but Tam Nguyen says that his publication lost 50 percent of its advertisers as its circulation dropped from 8,000 to 5,000. Total pages in *SaigonUSA* fell from 24 to 12, while in March of 2000 the *Viet Mercury* contained nearly 200 pages, 75 percent of which were advertisements. "We are bleeding," says Tam Nguyen. "Newspapers are the single most important instrument to build a community," he says. "We must do our job. When people in the community don't read English, we must come to them."

Media experts predict publishing

pers as cable TV once did."

Koreans, Filipinos, Malaysians and other Asian nationalities will likely bear individual scrutiny by chains. Together, Asian-Americans have a collective purchasing power of \$101 billion and a rate of new business ownership nearly three times the national average, according to Kang and Lee Advertising, an Asian marketing firm. But they are not a monolithic ethnic category, and nationalities are fiercely committed to retaining their language and culture in the new world, unlike immigrants of 100 years ago, who encouraged their children to speak English exclusively. Kang and Lee find that Asian-Americans prefer to read in their native language at rates that range from 42 percent for Japanese to 93 percent for Vietnamese.

What is next? Probably not the Chi-



Vietnamese reading in San Jose, California's Quang Da Café, a central distribution point for all Vietnamese papers. *Photo by Blair Tindall.*

chains will become savvier in the subtleties of connecting with ethnic markets. "I think the *Viet Mercury* signals a trend," said Sandy Close, founder and director of New California Media, a San Francisco association of 140 ethnic news organizations. "Ethnic newspapers are caught between the 'old media' dailies looking rapaciously for niche markets and the dot-coms which increasingly threaten to replace newspa-

nese, since Chinese-owned global media chains operating U.S.-circulated newspapers are formidable adversaries. But other Vietnamese communities in Houston, Dallas, San Diego, Oakland and Seattle, and Korean populations in Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles are likely targets, says John Morton. In addition, California Filipinos and New York Asian Indians constitute substantial markets.

This language-based approach to reaching ethnic populations doesn't always conform to the geography dailies have pursued. For example, Knight Ridder recently abandoned its Miami headquarters and headed for San Jose's Silicon Valley, citing the necessity of staying current in the Internet economy. Now that Knight Ridder maintains 45 Web sites in various cities (each under the umbrella of its Real Cities outreach), the chain is positioned to reach ethnic communities, whether regionally concentrated or far-flung.

The ethnic press is watching closely. As director of a San Francisco-based ethnic press association, Close is not optimistic about the future. She has

observed that dot-coms have not advertised in the ethnic press, and the San Francisco Chronicle's recent list of 133 "best" Web sites didn't mention a single ethnic Web page. But the Viet Mercury gets print subscription requests from Sydney, Australia to Biloxi, Mississippi as well as substantial hits on its Web site. Nam Pham, publisher of the failed Vietnam Family, recently spent \$500,000 to develop his Web presence [vietnameselink.com], claiming this is one way to compete on equal footing with Knight Ridder.

California is now the Ellis Island for many ethnic groups. By next year, its white population is projected to become a minority, according to Mary

Heim, the state's assistant chief of demographic research. Finding ways to tap into an ethnic community's spending power by reaching them through distribution of news is likely to be a trend among newspaper chains. But how well their coverage serves that readership, and what important voices might be silenced in the process, is an issue that ought to be moved onto the radar screens of journalists as this country's ethnic profile changes. ■

*Blair Tindall, a former business reporter with the San Francisco Examiner, is now an arts reporter for the Contra Costa Times in Walnut Creek, California.*

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## Journalists Won't Miss This 'Deadline'

TV drama's portrayal of a newspaper columnist was more sleuth than truth.

By Don Aucoin

Television is the medium that invented the rerun (or, in the risible coinage favored by the networks, the "encore presentation"). So perhaps it's not surprising that TV usually goes looking for drama in all the old places: hospitals, police stations, courtrooms, law offices.

What is surprising, though, is how deeply the best dramas delve into their milieus. Week after week, "ER" takes us literally into the guts of the medical profession: cracking open chests, ramming tubes down patients' throats, and describing it all in polysyllabic jargon that virtually dares the viewer to keep up. Courtroom dramas like "The Practice" often immerse their plots in arcane legal strategy, while cop shows like "NYPD Blue" don't hesitate to show what a painstaking, step-by-step process a police investigation can be.

By contrast, the newsroom has historically gotten short shrift as a setting for TV drama. That changed this season with the debut of "Deadline." Or did it? Canceled after just five episodes because of weak ratings, this NBC drama nonetheless lasted long enough to pro-

vide a revealing glimpse of television's attitude toward its longtime rival, print journalism. "Deadline" suggested that when it comes to depicting the world of the ink-stained wretch, these days TV doesn't bother to sweat the details.

It's not that "Deadline" was a complete dud. It boasted a topnotch cast, and it might eventually have developed into, if not must-see-TV, at least might-see-TV. Some analysts believe "Deadline" failed because it immersed viewers too deeply in the unloved realm of newspapers. But I think it possible that the reverse is true and that "Deadline" was undone by the fatal paradox at its heart: This was a show about a journalist that had little interest in journalism.

Ever since "Hill Street Blues" inaugurated the era of the "quality drama" in the early 1980's, discerning viewers expect TV dramas to be grounded in a recognizable—albeit exaggerated—professional reality. The implicit promise was that if they tune in each week TV will repay them by shining some light on the arenas inhabited by its protagonists. "Deadline" shortchanged

viewers on that score by loading up its plots with eye-rolling incongruities that undercut any claims it might have made to verisimilitude.

Initially, there was reason to be fairly optimistic about "Deadline" if you were a journalist eager to see a televised treatment of your trade. It was produced by Dick Wolf, the redoubtable force behind "Law & Order" and its spinoff, "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit." Veteran film actor Oliver Platt headlined as Wallace Benton, the star columnist at the New York Ledger, a tabloid newspaper modeled on the New York Post. Benton was portrayed as a jaundiced crusader for justice, a contradiction that is one of the things "Deadline" got right about newspaper life. The corpulent Platt, with his helmet of jet-black hair and cocksure manner, cut a suitably Breslinesque figure.

But it's difficult to picture Jimmy Breslin (or any of the other big city columnists who inspired the character of Wallace Benton) gathering blockbuster information through interviews with cops, district attorneys, medical examiners, witnesses, suspects—while

almost never taking notes! Was Benton afraid of getting writer's cramp? Worried about a subpoena down the road? Benton was seldom seen without a cup of coffee while conducting interviews, but he couldn't exert himself to jot something down in a notebook. This seemingly minor flaw suggested a big disconnect with the world "Deadline" purported to represent. Heaven knows "ER" takes liberties with hospital reality, but it wouldn't fill the TV screen with doctors who never wear stethoscopes. Even the most mundane cop show alludes to the necessity of obtaining a search warrant or informing suspects of their right to remain silent.

Nonetheless, "Deadline's" indifference to such basic, nuts-and-bolts journalistic details was probably no accident. In an appearance before TV critics last summer in Pasadena, California, Wolf said he made the character of Benton a columnist instead of a reporter because, in his view, the latter is a "passive protagonist because he is reporting on events that have already taken place. A columnist is somebody who is not bound to be objective, doesn't have Miranda warnings, can unearth whatever he can unearth, and can write about it from a personal slant, which makes him an incredibly active protagonist."

What Wolf didn't say, but what became apparent as the show debuted, was that Benton's notebook-free ways allow him to be depicted as a Colombo-style sleuth. Further distancing the columnist from workaday journalism, Benton moonlighted as a college professor; each week, the columnist enlisted his students as junior gumshoes who helped him crack a case. In fact, if it weren't for the fleeting newsroom scenes, it would have been possible to forget that Benton was a newspaperman at all as he lumbered from clue to clue. Whereas medical or legal dramas use their settings as backdrops for life-and-death scenarios, character development, or romantic intrigue, "Deadline" used its setting as a kind of camouflage. This was a detective show masquerading as a newspaper show, and viewers have plenty of detective shows to choose from.

Though perhaps only journalists

would care about them, other credibility-straining moments cropped up throughout "Deadline." For example, the tabloid's Murdochian publisher (played by Tom Conti) sat in on morning news meetings, where he not only made Page One calls but even dictated headlines. Didn't he have a business to run? Equally implausible was the presence at those meetings of a gossip columnist (played by Lili Taylor). What, no obit writer in the room?

During one episode, the managing editor (portrayed by Bebe Neuwirth of "Cheers" fame) delivered a lecture on conflicts of interest that journalists must beware of; in the next, she plunged into a whirlwind affair with a political candidate. Then, the gossip columnist printed an item about the dalliance. Displaying a remarkable insouciance in the face of her boss's fury, the columnist breezily informed the managing editor that "You play the hokey-pokey with a public figure, and it's going to end up in the paper." The editor shouted: "Not *my* paper!"

It turned out that her paramour, the candidate, had a secret in his past: He was a fugitive from justice who'd been living under an assumed name since he struck a policeman with a rock during an antiwar rally in the 1960's. The Ledger published Benton's story disclosing that past, but the columnist, the managing editor, and the oddly influential gossip maven insisted that it run under this howler of a headline: "Good Man Does Wrong Thing for Right Reason." Puh-leez. Tabloids may stoop, but never to piety.

In the final episode to air, "Deadline" made clear how far it was willing to go so that its journalist/protagonist would *be* the story rather than just cover it, as Benton became a suspect in the murder of a mobster's girlfriend with whom the columnist had a one-night stand.

All of this was a far cry from "Lou Grant," which ran from 1977 to 1982 and was the last significant TV show about print journalists. ("New York News" and "Ink," two misbegotten efforts to portray the newspaper world, expired almost as quickly as they arrived in the mid-1990's.) "Lou Grant" had origins in "The Mary Tyler Moore

Show," a classic 1970's sitcom set in a local TV news operation that somehow functioned with about five employees. It starred Ed Asner as a gruff city editor of a Los Angeles daily, Mason Adams as the managing editor, Robert Walden as a hotheaded reporter, Linda Kelsey as his newsroom rival, and the late Nancy Marchand as Mrs. Pynchon, a Katherine Graham-like publisher.

Perhaps because it debuted in the heady afterglow of Watergate, when journalists were lionized rather than reviled as they often are today, "Lou Grant" seemed to believe that the inherent drama of journalism was enough to hook viewers. The show actually seemed interested in how newspapers work: Its reporters cultivated sources, clashed with editors over story play, followed paper trails, raced to meet deadlines, and even took notes. Ethical issues were explored through story lines that illustrated the tension between the newsgathering and business sides of the paper. And "Lou Grant" took the time to get the atmospherics right: That newsroom pulsed with reporters pounding the phones or agonizing over their ledes. Even "Murphy Brown," at least in its early years, was a more faithful mirror of contemporary journalism than "Deadline" was—and that was a sitcom about a superstar anchor/reporter of a TV newsmagazine.

Who knows, it could be that "Deadline" accurately read the public mood. With survey after survey ranking the media just below amoebic dysentery on the public's list of their favorite things, maybe a realistic show about journalists wouldn't fly. Or maybe "Deadline" is a symptom of the continuing rivalry between television and print, TV's way of saying: We will dramatize you, but only on our terms, by fitting you into the prefabricated formulas of our medium. Either way, watching "Deadline" made me wish Lou Grant had been Benton's boss. I'd like to have seen the old curmudgeon tell the fancy-pants columnist to put down that damn cup of coffee and open up his notebook. ■

*Don Aucoin is a television critic for The Boston Globe and a 2001 Nieman Fellow.*

# International Journalism

**John Maxwell Hamilton**, a veteran correspondent and now dean of theanship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University, recently traveled to the former Soviet republic of Georgia to train journalists. He writes about how difficult it is for independent media to survive financially and describes a proposal for government financing, a heretical notion to Americans but an idea not rejected out of hand by those in this new democracy. Hamilton urges journalists to be patient instead of agreeing to be subsidized by government funds.

**Michael Elkin**, a writer living in Spain, uses the issue of whether all classes in Catalonia will be taught in the region's native language to highlight the ways in which political leanings of newspapers shape their news coverage. "This can make it difficult to tell where the op-eds end and more objective reporting begins," Elkin writes. ■

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## Moving From Soviet Domination to Press Freedom

Creating an independent and financially viable press is hard.

By John Maxwell Hamilton

**R**oman Gotsiridze, head of the Georgian Parliament's Budget Office, has a brainstorm for saving the independent news media in this fledgling democracy: government financing. To Americans this is heresy. By definition, a strong press is not dependent on government. But after several years of training journalists in former Soviet-controlled nations, it is easy to see why reformers like Gotsiridze embrace such chimera.

The easy part, it is now clear, was toppling communism. The hard part is creating a functioning democracy on top of the rubble. Georgians must build virtually every institution from scratch—and that includes news me-

dia that provide reliable social, political and economic information.

The best place to start looking for problems is in the economy. The early transition to a market-driven system eliminated government-guaranteed jobs, health care, and housing. Nearly two-thirds of Georgians now live below subsistence levels. Few can afford 20 or 25 cents for a newspaper, let alone the products sold in them. Advertisers have little incentive to buy advertising space. Four or five years ago, the newspaper *Droni* appeared six times a week with three or four pages of ads in each issue. Now it appears four times a week with a page or less of ads each time. Compounding

the problem is the media's lack of experience selling ads or providing fair, balanced reporting. Journalists often see newly won press freedom as an opportunity to express their own opinions, not facts.

Several newspapers in the capital city of Tbilisi had a circulation of 300,000 or more during the first heady days of freedom. Today, none of this city's eight newspapers has a regular readership of more than 5,000; a dozen or so have even smaller audiences. "We were very independent four or five years ago," a worried newspaper editor says. "But now we are hardly surviving." Reporters' salaries typically amount to less than \$150 a month,

hardly a wage to inspire dedicated service. It is less surprising that some journalists take bribes than that some do not.

While media are not profitable, business and political leaders are eager to invest in them. These “dark forces,” as Gotsiridze calls these owners, finance news organizations in order to promote their own agenda. When bosses want access to the press, he says, they buy one. This summer a government official raised a furor by suggesting that a television journalist leave the country to avoid assassination. Heavy-handed press treatment by the government, however, is rarer in Georgia than in some nearby countries.

Belarus’s President Aleksandr Lukashenko pines for the good old days when he ran a collective farm. The head of his state Committee on the Press, whom I interviewed in 1998, reprimanded newspapers that accurately reported unpleasant statements by the weak political opposition. After three warnings, he said, the courts could close the paper. Meanwhile, Russian journalists critical of the government have been beaten or killed.

Georgia, however, epitomizes the dysfunctional, uncivil society that emerges when journalists cannot do their jobs adequately. Without accurate and timely news, rumor and suspicion rule. The euphoria over freedom gives way to cynicism. When foreign organizations make grants to local good-government associations, the common Georgian reaction is that someone had a special in. Jockeying for a place at the foreign aid trough is intense—and creative. One of the most novel new organizations is the Association of Young Grandmothers. Outright corruption is rampant. Police officers shake down motorists in front of the Parliament. President Eduard Shevardnadze is widely seen as tolerating corruption and helping his family get its share.

Taxation, as new to Georgia as a free press, is haphazard and dishonest. Tax



Trainer Robert Tonsing leads a workshop for Georgian journalists in Tbilisi in May. Tonsing presented his workshops as part of the ProMediaII-Georgia program, sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development and administered by the International Center for Journalists. *Photo by Irina Abjandadze.*

collectors often pocket revenues. Fear of becoming visible to the taxman discourages businesses from advertising.

Because he believes that an independent press is crucial to curbing corruption, Gotsiridze concocted his media-financing scheme. Parliament, however, cannot possibly sustain every worthy news operation. And who is to say who is worthy? Members of Parliament will do the sensible thing and support newspapers that support them.

The World Bank, which is promoting economic reform, tried its own version of Gotsiridze’s idea through a loan to the Georgia government to create an English-language newspaper, EcoDigest. Ken Jacques, a former reporter for Congressional Quarterly and CNN who became a bank-paid consultant to the central government, is the author of the idea. EcoDigest provides better than average salaries, aggressively advertises itself on bus billboards, and concentrates on sound economic reporting. Even so, circulation is only 2,000. Many Georgians are suspicious of ties to the government.

Both Georgian and foreign critics say the bank’s venture sets a bad example. The best outcome, Jaques admits, is for a private investor to buy EcoDigest and build on its solid approach to news.

Meanwhile, Gotsiridze remains in his cramped but tidy office thinking of ways to bolster a free press. Parliament could vote to exempt media from taxes, although he worries that might encourage media companies to do what the tax-free Writers’ Union does. It imports beer, cigarettes, mushrooms and gas, which it then sells at a handsome profit. His plans to curb the Writers’ Union include stopping direct funding for that body and giving the money to individual writers.

The only true road to a free press is not government financing but patience. In the early United States republic, the press was wild and irresponsible. The turning point did not come until the mid-19th century, when media owners realized that the best way to sell newspapers to the burgeoning middle class was through fact-based reporting. Even

then, sensational journalism continued in many newspapers for decades.


Young Georgian journalists, especially, are hungry to learn the skills of factual reporting and eager to find ways to sustain it financially. On my last day in the regional city of Telavi, three enthusiastic young women showed me a plan for creating a local news report that could be inserted into a newspaper. They hoped that a Tbilisi pub-

lisher would give them financing in exchange for better entree to Telavi.

Enterprise like this was the engine of our own press system. With a little luck, Georgia's will mature faster than our own did.

"What I have learned," the World Bank's Jacques says, is that "if you chip away at it, you have done a damn good job." ■

*John Maxwell Hamilton, a veteran foreign correspondent who has trained journalists throughout Europe, is dean of theanship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University.*

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## Political Leanings Shape Newspaper Coverage

In Spain, the language used in schools is a journalistic hot potato.

By Michael Elkin

**B**asque terrorism is the most visible example of regional nationalism in Spain, but another discordant battle is being waged here, too. This one is being fought over linguistic choices and the significance they hold. As I observe how the press in Spain reports on this struggle about which language teachers should use in the schools (Castellano, say those in Madrid; Catalan, argue those in Barcelona), outlandish headlines, stories based on one source, and political overtones are fogging over any attempt there might be to practice objective journalism. Depending on a particular newspaper's political agenda, the conflict ranges from catastrophic to non-existent.

In Europe, media outlets and political parties often work together, blurring the line between spreading propaganda and reporting from a distance. In fact, many European newspapers print their editorial sections on the first inside pages; this can make it difficult to tell where the op-eds end and more objective reporting begins. Spain is no different. Its major socialist party (PSOE) always has been the favorite of the *El Pais* newspaper. On the other hand, another daily newspaper, *El Mundo*, despises the socialists and backs the governing conservative party,

Partido Popular (PP). ABC, Spain's third national newspaper, favors strong right-wing views. So readers here can't count on their newspapers to provide a clear picture of Spain's language "polemica," or controversy, as the Spaniards call it.

The problem is this: In both 1993 and 1998, *Convergencia i Unio* (CiU), the governing coalition of Catalonia (an autonomous region of Spain), proposed reforms in the public education system. All classes will be taught in the

to the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, when speaking or teaching Catalan was illegal. In response to this ethnic oppression, the new Franco-free government in Catalonia chose to revive its native language in the classroom. Other regions in Spain, such as the Basque country and Galicia, are reestablishing their regional tongues as well. Catalonia, however, is the only region in which teachers exclusively use the native language in classrooms.

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**What happens on Page One? It depends on who is in power and which newspaper a Spaniard is reading.**

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Catalan language (except Castellano classes) until the end of high school. CiU believed that Catalan culture needed protection from extinction. Madrid felt that the Catalans were trying to eradicate the national language and impose their nationalistic views on the regional population.

CiU's leader, Jordi Pujol, has enjoyed almost 20 years in office on a strong nationalistic platform, all to the sneers of his counterparts in Madrid. Pujol's rationale emerged as a reaction

What creates controversy is that the population of Catalonia is only half Catalan; the rest of the population belongs to other ethnic groups. And every family who moves to Catalonia, whether from Madrid, Chicago or Botswana, is going to have to send their children to a Catalan-language school. Rumors circulate of teachers being threatened to teach only in Catalan and even of teaching Castellano in Catalan. The children, it is said, are not learning proper Castellano. Catalan

supporters, however, believe that the omnipresent Castellano (used in the press, on television, in movies and music) is strangling Catalan, and that only through these measures will their language survive.

What happens on Page One? It depends on who is in power and which newspaper a Spaniard is reading. Add to the major three national dailies the numerous regional papers and the difficulties multiply, even more so when the CiU aligns with a national political party to form a working government. It becomes a maze of “who is friends with whom,” and these combinations change with each election.

In 1993, the CiU (the governing coalition of Catalonia) aligned with the socialists to form a working government. According to Miquel Strubell, a Barcelona university professor and formerly head of various linguistic ministries for the Catalanian government, the PP (the conservative party) wanted to drive a wedge between the CiU and PSOE (the socialists). The language issue suited this desire nicely. PP “began a ‘Let’s get hysterical about *this* issue’ campaign,” Strubell said.

For the next three years, newspapers such as ABC and El Mundo blasted the socialists and highlighted the language issue. In 1993, Strubell noted, ABC ran a full front-page photograph of King Juan Carlos I in full military garb, with a headline declaring that Catalonia was erasing Castellano. “From reading ABC, it seems as if it’s prohibited to speak in Castellano,” said Vicent Partal, an editor of Vilaweb, a 24-hour Catalan news Web site. “Its vision is deformed.”

In 1996, PP barely won the general elections and reluctantly aligned with CiU to form a working government. ABC nonetheless continued its assault. In a 1997 article on national politics, an ABC journalist wrote: “We are facing a change that intends to strengthen the Catalan language and culture and condemn Castellano as something illegitimate.” ABC even publishes intolerant letters to the editor. “The world knows very well the racism that we Castellano speakers suffer in Catalonia,” writes one Barcelona man.

But, Strubell said, after the conservatives won the 1996 elections, El Mundo abruptly stopped the Catalan-bashing. El Pais, now backing the losing socialists, picked up the slack, giving a lot of press to Foro Babel, a Barcelona-based intellectual group that believes the immersion system violates civil rights. Full-page spreads outlined the exploits of Foro Babel and its co-founder, Francesc de Carreras. He believes there are children who learn perfect Catalan through the immersion system, but that there are also some who don’t. Catalan should be protected, he said, but nationalism cannot be imposed by law. “Languages do not have rights, people do,” Carreras said.

Carreras also writes a regular editorial column in El Pais. Whether a newspaper should use news sources as columnists is a serious question raised by El Pais’s coverage. But that issue shrinks in comparison to the paper’s overall coverage during Pujol’s winning 1999 electoral campaign. In October 1999, El Pais reporters went after Pujol for never speaking in Castellano before the elections (a charge that is not true) and linked him to the state-sponsored terrorism scandal during PSOE’s governing years. “The message is clear,” the article said. “More money and power in the hands of the Catalans.” In an El Pais article from last April, a reporter interviewed one of the Catalanian government’s university ministers. Each of the questions concerned “polemica” (and received the usual vague political responses) until the minister gave the reporters the answer they were looking for: “All this is driven by the extreme right inside the PP, with whom you people are playing.” After getting this perfect quote, implicating the newspaper’s enemy, the reporter switched subjects and never returned to the topic. To use as the headline on the story, the editors chopped off the last part of the quote about the paper’s political motives. “El Pais doesn’t correspond to reality,” Vincent Partal said. “It’s pure fantasy.” Partal’s views are the same as the opinions of many Barcelona journalists, who say that Madrid’s politicians and news-


papers inflate this issue.

“Of course there’s no problem,” said Frederic Porta, spokesman for El Periodico, a Barcelona daily that publishes both Catalan and Castellano editions. “The truth is here; the lies come from Madrid.” Porta has reason to believe this. One of Madrid’s newest newspapers, the conservative La Razon (The Truth), published headlines about this issue using words such as “discrimination” and “racism.” In one article, La Razon grouped this language situation with Basque terrorism and neo-Nazi violence, as though they are equivalents. On the other hand, local Catalanian newspapers such as Diari de Tarragona and Avui attack opponents of the immersion with the same ferocity, often repeating in their headlines the word “suppression.”

La Vanguardia, Barcelona’s major daily, has some of the best and most extensive coverage of the debate. The paper’s reporters convey what is said and done and usually leave opinions about this issue to the editorial pages. In a 1996 article, a reporter went to the schools, interviewed students, and learned what the law actually says. Although seemingly routine for an education story, this journalist is one of few to actually visit a school instead of simply parroting the party line.

Catalan should be taught in schools, said Josep Playa, another education reporter at La Vanguardia, but he acknowledged that the current system is ripe with trouble. But when he boils down the problem, it appears still far less severe than the newspaper coverage would indicate. “The press in Barcelona have accepted the immersion system in the schools,” Playa said. “The Madrid politics behind the newspapers exaggerate the conflict.” ■

*Michael Elkin reported this story during a Fulbright Grant in Barcelona. Recently he worked for Bloomberg News in Madrid and currently is a freelance writer in Spain.*

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# Nieman Notes

Compiled by Lois Fiore

## A Photojournalist Portrays a Changing Community

*These photos by Nuri Vallbona appeared in The Miami Herald in 1999 and were finalists in the Pulitzer Prize competition.*

The Liberty City area in Miami is a neighborhood that was plagued with drug violence and abandoned crackhouses. However, through a combination of strict police enforcement and community involvement by officers and residents, drug dealers were run out of the neighborhood.

After a long day of arresting criminals, many officers would trade their uniforms for street clothes and coach children, preach in the streets, or help with other community needs. Many of the officers had grown up in the area they were serving and had a special interest in its improvement.

They also had to make sure that they kept pressure on the drug dealers by targeting drug holes over and over. If they relaxed in one area, gangs from outside the neighborhood were poised

to move in to start the trade all over again. Because many of the officers knew the residents, the tough tactics they used in dealing with the drug dealers were accepted and even welcomed by residents.

Eventually statistics showed an improvement in the area as homicides and shootings dropped significantly.

■ *Nuri Vallbona is a 2001 Nieman Fellow and a photojournalist for The Miami Herald.*



As residents begin to trust officers, the fight against drugs picks up momentum. Lebonah Israel ponders her future after she asked Sgt. Frank Dean to drive her to drug rehabilitation, telling him she is “ready” to fight her addiction.



Fueled by outrage that innocent children were getting caught in the crossfire of drug turf wars, residents and activists began to fight back. The MAD DADS of the NAACP began patrolling the area on Friday nights hoping to become role models to children who previously idolized drug dealers. As they enter one housing community, a youngster enthusiastically greets their arrival.



Officer Gregory Pelham barks out orders as he gets children in the neighborhood to warm up prior to baseball practice. He and other officers started a baseball team as part of their strategy to get children involved in positive activities.

—1961—

**John Herbers** is one of the two winners of the 2000 John Chancellor Award for Excellence in Journalism. Herbers and Claude F. Sitton won for their groundbreaking coverage of the civil rights movement in the South during the late 1950's and early 1960's.

Herbers, who began his career as a reporter for the Mississippi Morning Star in 1949, went on to lead United Press's civil rights coverage. After his Nieman year and a short stint working for United Press in Washington, D.C., Herbers returned to the South as a New York Times reporter. In 1965, he went to Washington to write about enforcement of the new civil rights laws. Herbers covered Robert F. Kennedy's presidential campaign and Watergate for the Times, and eventually became that paper's national correspondent. He retired from the Times in 1987.

—1974—

**Paul Bichara** brings us up-to-date on his activities: "I am writing, teaching political science and fiction writing at universities, and also painting. I shall be exhibited in a theatre-gallery in the center of Paris from the beginning of March until mid-April, 2001. This time I will be showing 50 new paintings. Also, my travel stories are published in several languages (French, English, Spanish and soon Brazilian) by the daily *Le Monde* and by a French Institution comparable to the British Council called *L'alliance Française*."

**Ron Gollobin** retired after 24 years with WCVB-TV (Boston) and eight years on four newspapers and is writing a novel about terrorism. "Terrorism's reach into the continental United States in the not-too-distant future will transform this country, and not for the better," he predicts. Gollobin is a media consultant specializing in crisis situations and lives in Brookline, Mass., with his wife, **Helen**, a librarian. E-mail him at [ron@gollobin.com](mailto:ron@gollobin.com).

—1979—

**Michael McDowell** is co-director of the Overseas Development Council's major project on bipartisanship in American foreign policy and joint author of the project's report, "America's National Interests in Multilateral Engagement," which is available on the Web at [www.odc.org](http://www.odc.org). The project sponsored private conferences at Harvard University and the Baker Institute involving key foreign policy advisors to the Bush and Gore campaigns, Clinton Administration officials, and international affairs specialists. McDowell's partner in the project is Princeton Lyman, who has been Assistant Secretary of State and Ambassador to South Africa and Nigeria.

McDowell went to the Carnegie Endowment after his Nieman year and then returned to journalism with the BBC, *Globe and Mail* in Toronto, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He made the transition from journalism to the think-tank world once again three years ago. McDowell remains deeply involved in the American side of the Northern Ireland peace process from his Washington base and can be reached by e-mail at [mhcmcdowell@aol.com](mailto:mhcmcdowell@aol.com).

—1986—

**Yvonne van der Heijden** left China in March of 2000 after working for eight years as a freelance correspondent in Beijing. She returned to the Netherlands, purchased a house in *Loon op Zand*, and has been writing articles on economics and finance for newspapers, magazines and Internet sites.

Van der Heijden writes that she's eager to begin covering cultural and historical topics, as well as economics, for English-language media in Europe and Asia. She plans to return to Southeast Asia as a reporter and analyst at some point in the next couple of years, and she particularly wants to be in Hong Kong in 2002. Van der Heijden can be reached by e-mail at [heijd785@wxs.nl](mailto:heijd785@wxs.nl).

—1988—

**Eileen McNamara**, a columnist for *The Boston Globe*, is the first recipient of Massachusetts Citizens for Children's Eli Newberger Media Award. The award, which will be given annually, is named for the pediatrician and author who teaches at Harvard Medical School. At the awards ceremony on October 26, Massachusetts Citizens for Children praised McNamara for her "passionate advocacy for disadvantaged children."

—1989—

**Cecilia Alvear**, a producer for NBC News in Los Angeles, was elected president of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists at their annual convention in Texas last June. Alvear received 75 percent of the vote of the 1600 member group. The two-year post is keeping her very busy and, Alvear says, "she needs all her Nieman brothers and sisters to help."

Alvear also was named to Hispanic Business magazine's list of "100 Most Influential Hispanics—2000." In the announcement, published in the October issue of the magazine, Alvear says that "it is an exciting time to be a Latino and a journalist. Just as we are changing the demographics of the United States we will change the demographics of the U.S. newsrooms."

**Bill Kovach** is Colby College's 48th Elijah Parish Lovejoy Fellow. Lovejoy, a Colby graduate, wrote against slavery in Missouri and Illinois. He was killed in Alton, Illinois in 1837 while defending his press from a pro-slavery mob. Kovach received the award at the Waterville, Maine school on November 9, 2000. A Colby College press release described him as "a staunch defender of press freedom and a crusader for high standards of integrity in journalism." In his convocation address, Kovach discussed what he called the unprecedented "rise of a market-based journalism divorced from the idea of civic responsibility," and urged that the new technology of the Internet be used to combat this tendency.

However, Kovach also argued that technology is ultimately neutral and cautioned against investing excessive hope in any technological advance. He closed his address as follows:

“Civilization has produced one idea more powerful than any other, the notion that people can govern themselves. And it has created a largely unarticulated theory of information to sustain that idea called journalism. The two rise and fall together.

“Our freedom in a digital century depends upon not forgetting the past, or the theory of news it produced, in a surge of faith in technological and corporate rebirth.

“For, in the end, if the life and death of Elijah Parish Lovejoy teaches us anything, it teaches us that freedom and democracy do not depend on technology or organization so much as they depend upon individuals who invest themselves in a belief in freedom and human dignity.”

—1991—

**Tim Giago**, the former owner and publisher of Indian Country Today, launched a new weekly newspaper last January. The Lakota Nation Journal made its debut in February. Giago also was recently inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame along with former South Dakota Senator George McGovern. Giago’s weekly column, “Notes from Indian Country,” is syndicated by Knight Ridder Tribune News Service.

—1996—

**Patricia Guthrie** writes: “On Sunday, October 29, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution published one of my RBS’s (Really Big Stories) that has been two years in the works. I document the struggle of a kid going through an experimental procedure to cure sickle cell disease. It’s three pages in the newspaper version that leaves you with ink marks, and additional photos and story are on the Web at ajc.com. Also on the Web they created an audiovisual segment with the boy’s own voice describing (in sound bite fashion) what

he’s gone through with float-by photos, called a “Flash Movie.” Then, they took additional photos and made a “Slide Show” with the transcript of his words underneath five or six photos. It’s the first time the techno staff had attempted this and, of course, my first attempt using a digital audio recorder. (I was the one recording him so that’s why it is definitely not A-1 quality.) Anyway, it’s a good example of how a newspaper story can now be launched in many media outlets. (And how much more work is created for the lowly reporter still overseeing quality control of her precious project.) The site should stay up on this URL: <http://www.accessatlanta.com/partners/ajc/reports/keonepenn/index.html>.”

**Ann Woolner** recently left her job as an Atlanta-based senior correspondent at Brill’s Content. “I’m returning to writing law-related columns and features, this time for Bloomberg News,” Woolner writes. She adds that Bloomberg is much more than a wire

service for financial news, as some believe. Woolner is still based in Atlanta, but will be writing on national and perhaps international legal matters. Before going to Brill’s Content, Woolner wrote a column for American Lawyer Media. Her e-mail address is [awoolner@bloomberg.net](mailto:awoolner@bloomberg.net).

—1997—

On October 25, **Maria Cristina Caballero** and **John Lengler** celebrated their recent marriage at a reception held in Cambridge, Mass. Caballero is a Mason Fellow at the Kennedy School of Government and Lengler is director of publications at Harvard’s Office of Communications and Public Affairs.

—1999—

**Masaru Soma** has a new book out: “I would like to inform you that my book on my experience at Harvard has just been published by one of the biggest publishing companies in Japan,

## The Murrey and Frances Marder Fund

The Murrey and Frances Marder Fund, established in November 1996, has provided the Nieman Foundation with support for three Watchdog Journalism Conferences (May 1998, May 1999 and October 1999). It also has paid for the costs related to publishing excerpts of the conferences and articles on watchdog journalism in five issues of Nieman Reports and on the Nieman Web site. An accounting as of 4/15/00 appeared in the Summer 2000 issue of Nieman Reports. An accounting as of 10/15/00 follows:

<b>Income:</b>	<b><u>\$151,299.46</u></b>
	\$73,911.63 —Balance at 4/15/00
	3,982.05 —Interest on balance at end of FY’99-00 (6/30/00)
	73,405.78 —Income from endowment for FY’00-’01 (7/1/00-6/30/01)
<b>Expense:</b>	<b><u>\$ 13,102.33</u></b>
	\$ 6,225.33 —Nieman Reports/Summer 2000*
	1,030.00 —Nieman Web site*
	5,847.00 —Misc. related activities
<b>Fund</b>	
<b>Balance:</b>	<b><u>\$138,197.13</u></b>

(\*The amounts listed represent the portion of the costs that were devoted to watchdog journalism.)

Shincho-sha, on October 10th, titled 'Japan Is Taught So at Harvard University.' The account of my experience at Harvard includes lectures, seminars, of course, Nieman seminars, and personal exchanges among Nieman Fellows and staff. Another theme in my

book focuses on the United States's viewpoints on Japan, China and the Korean peninsula, based on my Nieman year research. The book is written in Japanese, not English—so sorry I am not fluent enough in English to write a book in that language."

## Nieman Seminar on the Mount



In the icy bowl of Tuckerman Ravine on Mount Washington. From left: Nieman affiliate Sebastian Fixson, Nieman Fellows Stefanie Friedhoff, Ken Armstrong, Mark Pothier, and Ignacio Gomez.

A group of 18 Nieman Fellows and affiliates from the class of 2001 left Cambridge for New Hampshire's White Mountains on an unusually balmy October 26th. Twenty-four hours later, we found ourselves on 6,288-foot high Mount Washington, buffeted by hurricane-force winds, horizontal snow, and temperatures dipping below 20 degrees. And most of us would do it again.

We stayed at the Appalachian Mountain Club's Pinkham Notch headquarters, at the base of Mount Washington, the highest peak in the Northeastern United States, and a place where drastic weather changes are an everyday occurrence.

The night before the rugged climb into Tuckerman Ravine (an impressive glacial cirque on the eastern face of Washington), AMC officials, led by information director Rob Burbank, conducted a seminar on the preservation of open land in northern New England.

After a hearty family-style breakfast and safety briefing the next morning, the Nieman group was joined by AMC trail guides for the trek through thick forest to scrub pine and into the wintry conditions above tree line. Along the way, the guides pointed out conservation and trail maintenance measures employed by the AMC to allow access to the mountains without disturbing the natural environment.

By Saturday evening, we were back on the flat landscape of Cambridge, with sore knees, soaring spirits, and a greater appreciation for the power of nature. ■  
—*Mark Pothier, 2001 Nieman Fellow.*

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# End Note

## From Carbon Copies to E-Mail

In 45 years, the way journalists send words has changed.

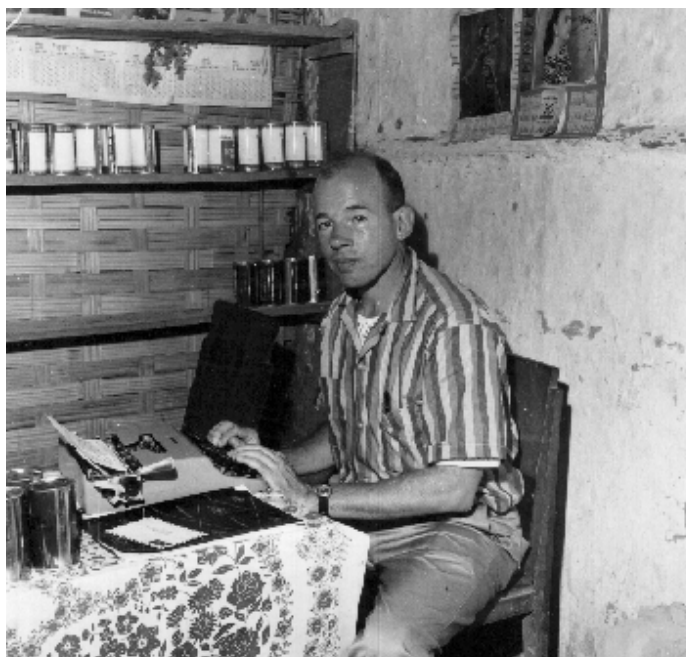
By Richard Dudman

**T**echnology has changed my life as a journalist. How to get a story, of course, has changed a lot. But how to get the story to the paper is what I want to discuss.

Forty-five years ago, when I was a young Washington correspondent for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, then a p.m. paper, I would type my story at night at my upstairs desk on my old Underwood upright. I would keep a carbon copy, tape the original to the front door, and telephone Western Union. Early the next morning, I would telephone the wire desk in St. Louis to be sure the story had gotten there.

On my first foreign assignment for the paper, the Guatemalan revolution in 1954, I would type my stories on my portable Olivetti and hand them to some kid who for a few bucks would promise to carry them on horseback to the RCA office in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, where I had shown my credit card to a clerk. Most of the stories got through, including my account of the decisive battle of Chicamunga.

On an assignment to Northern Ireland, I dictated my story over a poor phone connection in a Belfast kitchen to the managing editor's secretary in St. Louis. He kept telling me my voice was fading. I spoke louder and louder. He couldn't seem to get the part about the three little Protestant school girls who were chanting, "Buy a penny rope and hang the fucking Pope." To get it through to him, I finally had to shout it



Richard Dudman in Laos in 1959, his first assignment in Southeast Asia.

at the top of my lungs. But of course the paper wouldn't print such a thing.

Covering the Vietnam War, I often had to make two carbons, one for myself and the second for the censor. At the telegraph office, a Vietnamese man, who could speak only a little English, would punch the story into a Telex machine. If I was lucky, I could see a printout and send corrections. What with errors in punching and trouble from the censor, my stories sometimes were badly mangled.

On presidential campaigns and foreign presidential trips, I would dictate stories to St. Louis out of my head, a paragraph at a time, relying on a few scrawled notes to remind me of points I wanted to cover. When an overseas phone connection was bad, I had to

shout, "Working! Working!" over and over again to keep the operator from cutting me off.

Reporting from Washington, I could punch my stories in the daytime on a dedicated teletype line to St. Louis or else hand them to Estie or Helen-Marie or Peachy, who would punch them and often would catch my errors.

Everything has changed since then. I've been retired for 20 years and know nothing of the portable phones which enable foreign correspondents to connect instantly with their editors by satellite.

But the new high-tech era helps me at our summer place on an island three miles out in the Atlantic. I have been writing two editorials a week on a freelance basis for the Bangor

Daily News. I type them into my Apple iBook, cut and paste them onto an e-mail message, and send them instantly to the editorial page editor. Each day around noon, after the mail boat has arrived, I can pick up my paper at the village post office and see whether one of my editorials has made the page. If the mail is late, I can check the morning's editorials on the News's Internet site.

If it were not for the Internet, I would be out of a job. I doubt that the News would be able to provide a dictationist, and it probably would find fax too cumbersome. ■

*Richard Dudman is a 1954 Nieman Fellow.*

“...to promote and elevate the standards of journalism”

—Agnes Wahl Nieman, the benefactor of the Nieman Foundation.

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