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'... to promote and elevate the standards of journalism'

—Agnes Wahl Nieman, the benefactor of the Nieman Foundation

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“Reinvent or die. It’s that simple,” is advice offered to newspapers by **Tim Porter**, an editor and writer with newspapers and now a news media consultant. “And the death will be slow and painful, a continuing slide into mediocrity and irrelevance, as tighter budgets reduce staff and the public opts for newer, more compelling sources of information.” Porter argues that “local journalism,” done in new ways that he describes, will be the difference in whether daily newspapers survive. **Clark G. Gilbert**, an assistant professor at Harvard Business School, and **Scott D. Anthony**, a managing director at Innosight LLC, explain the transformative impact of “disruptive change” on the newspaper industry and describe how mistakes made by other industries that have confronted such change can be instructive. “. . . following these tips, newspaper companies have a chance to successfully navigate through increasingly turbulent times,” they write.

With Knight Ridder, the nation’s second biggest newspaper company, “headed for sale, dismemberment or reorganization because its three largest shareholders were not satisfied with the measly 19.4 percent in operating profit in 2004,” **James Naughton**, formerly an editor at The Philadelphia Inquirer and president of The Poynter Institute, presents the case for why it is essential that journalists serve on the corporate boards of newspaper companies. In the two and a half years since **Amanda Bennett** became editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer, a Knight Ridder paper, budget cuts have reduced the newsroom staff by nearly 21 percent. “In downsizing, we are forced to think hard about the basic question of what exactly journalism is,” writes Bennett, who goes on to describe some new ways of approaching their mission “that necessity is forcing us to examine.”

At the Star Tribune in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the paper’s routine redesign collided with major changes in readership habits and interests. This led to “a sweeping project taking on some of the most difficult questions confronting newspapers,” write Star Tribune editor **Anders Gyllenhaal** and **Monica Moses**, deputy managing editor and the chief architect of the redesign, who explain the changes made to their paper and the lessons learned in the process. Despite experiencing moments of great concern about the future of newspapers, his recent experiences in merging his newspaper’s print and online content have convinced **Michael Riley**, editor of The Roanoke (Va.) Times, that “Newspapers—or, more precisely, newsgathering operations—are in a position of strength.” He shares “an up-close look at what’s happened at our midsized newspaper to enable us to join the digital dance.” After 26 years working as a newspaper reporter, **Carol Bradley** has seen plenty of mistakes made when newsroom cutbacks happen and points to 10 of the more common errors that she hopes editors will avoid making. **Joe Zelnik**, editor of the Cape May (N.J.) County Herald, a weekly community newspaper, reports that “Nothing is shrinking at the Herald, which is doing more with more,” and he explains why his local paper is thriving at a time when many bigger daily newspapers are struggling.

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Melvin Mencher, professor emeritus at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, notices changes in what is taught to journalism students and in news habits of the young and contends that “The question no longer is whether the newspaper will endure but whether the kind of news that is essential to a functioning democracy will survive.” **Peg Finucane**, an assistant professor of journalism and media studies at Hofstra University’s School of Communication, describes the training of journalists for a rapidly changing workplace. “There is no blueprint for this effort, and many newspapers cannot define what they want our journalism graduates to know or do,” she writes. **Joel Kaplan**, an associate dean at the Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, sees the ripple effect from newsroom cutbacks as students move away from journalism toward public relations, advertising and film, and he worries that “journalism appears to be losing some committed students who were on the verge of entering its workforce.” At Yale, **Stanley Flink**, a lecturer in political science, challenged his students to propose ways to buttress the vital journalistic work of newsrooms. He describes the various stages of their thinking and the proposal they arrived at. ■

If Newspapers Are to Rise Again

'Reinvent or die. It's that simple.'

By Tim Porter

Newspapers are in big trouble, the biggest since television began eroding their audience 60 years ago. There is no need for an umpteenth recitation of the demographic, economic and technological trifecta that has endangered newspapering as a vehicle for journalism—which, of course, is why we care about the fate of newspapers: They pay the freight for the type of journalism we have considered a necessity in a democratic society.

There is, however, a need to repeat an unpleasant truth most newspaper journalists, particularly newsroom managers, don't like to hear: They are as responsible for the decline in readership and relevance of newspapers as any of the other bugaboos cited routinely as contributing causes—the Internet, pesky bloggers, disinterested youth, and that Craig guy from San Francisco.

Why is that? Because risk-averse newsrooms have spent several decades with their collective heads in the ink barrel, ignoring the changing society around them, refusing to embrace new technologies, and defensively adhering to both a rigid internal hierarchy and an inflexible definition of “news” that produces a stenographic form of journalism, one that has stood still, frozen by homage to tradition, while the world has moved on.

But there is good news. Amid the carnage of smaller newsroom budgets, buyouts, layoffs and seemingly endless prognostications of doom, opportunity lives. In fact, newspapers have never been presented with an opportunity this large—or with such an urgent reason to take it. Opportunity is not just knocking; it is kicking down the front door to the newsroom and yelling: Reinvention!

Newspapers now have the chance—albeit forced upon them—to discard decades of rote practices and processes.

They have the chance to build new forms of journalism that operate on traditional principles of fairness, stewardship and vigilance but are not bound by tired definitions of what is “news,” how it should be presented, and who should be given the tools to do so. Reinvent or die. It's that simple. And the death

All that's left is the journalism. Local journalism. That is the niche, the slice, newspapers can and must own.

will be slow and painful, a continuing slide into mediocrity and irrelevance, as tighter budgets reduce staff and the public opts for newer, more compelling sources of information.

The Route to Reinvention

Reinvention must begin at the core, the nucleus, the thing all the 1,450 or so daily American newspapers that are not The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, or USA Today must excel at: coverage of local news.

Local is the franchise for newspapers. Local reporting, local photography, local commentary, local information, local interaction with the community. Yahoo! and Google spew out routine national and international news by the screen full. The bleat of the blogosphere and the wail of cable TV heads provide the nation with punditry in spades. Myspace, Flickr and other social network sites built the virtual communities the Internet promised in its nascency. The one-time mass media has been thin-

sliced and cross-diced into me-media, an RSS feed for every person, an opinion expressed for every viewpoint offered, everyone a publisher.

All that's left is the journalism. Local journalism. That is the niche, the slice, newspapers can and must own.

I can hear the protests now. Editors are pointing to the numerous local stories in their papers, to the enterprise projects, and to the staffing that, while no doubt reduced, is devoted primarily to local news. Fair enough, but let's look more closely. True, most newspapers produce hundreds (at least) of column inches of local copy every week, but what is all that ink and all those pixels being used for? In most regional and smaller newspapers, two-thirds to three-quarters of all local, nonsports stories are about institutions (government), crime (courts and cops), and reports (more institutions). Count them in your paper. And, as the papers get smaller, these stories become increasingly eye-glazing, devolving into either recitations of agendas or, worse, poorly executed attempts to mimic the more difficult forms of journalism (narrative, analysis, columns) practiced with excellence by only the best papers.

If newspapers were a restaurant, their motto might be: “C'mon In. The Food Ain't Great, But You Get Plenty of It.”

Sadly, this tired, institutionally focused news formula makes it nearly impossible to provide readers with the one thing the Readership Institute at Northwestern University finds resonates most with the public—an experience. They want journalism that makes them feel smarter or makes them feel safer or makes them shudder, shake, shimmy or otherwise twinge with emotion. You won't find these characteristics in the halls of government, where journalists spend so much time.

Don't misunderstand. Journalists

must cover government, and journalists must cover crime—but politicians and bureaucrats and cops and criminals aren't the audience; the electorate, the taxpayers, the victims, and all the other ordinary people these institutions were formed to serve are the audience. The current beat structure and the reigning newsroom value system produce and reward news reported from the point of view of the government instead of from the perspective of the governed—and that makes for bland reading.

It doesn't have to be this way. We can change the practices and processes of journalism and still keep its principles intact. Here's how:

1. Start with a question. If you could rebuild your newsroom from scratch, with the same full-time equivalent of employees and budget numbers and with the only requirement that you must make a print and an electronic product, what would you change? Would you hire the same people? Create the same beats? Keep the same print and Web designs? Implement the same workflow? Of course you wouldn't. So why do you continue on as you do?

Asking and answering this question—honestly—compels a confrontation with assumptions about staffing, resource allocation and news judgment, and leads to conversations about editorial goals, readership strategy, and producing a newspaper that is unique to its community instead of one that reflects a generic industry template.

In short, it provides a reply to the perennial question: Where do we want to go?

2. Put the bodies in the right places. Put them where the priorities are, where the mission-critical reporting, photography and editing must be done. Is having a staff movie critic essential to your mission? If not, use the job for something else. Foreign and Washington correspondents? Aren't you already paying for the Times, the Post, The Associated Press, and Reuters? Out of town sports? Do readers really care about the byline? Hundreds of column inches for TV grids, entertainment listings, and stocks? Put them online.

After realigning resources behind true, community-oriented priorities, and after some difficult conversations, you've picked up news hole, able-bodied journalists, and production time that can be used for other things—local content, niche editorial packages, interaction with the community around you. This is called product development.

3. Determine the skills your newsroom needs to meet your new goals. Do reporters need to learn how to use digital tools—photography, video, audio? Do copyeditors need to learn how to write? Do managers need to learn to collaborate? Yes, it's training, but training with purpose. It's focused, it's goal oriented, and it's measurable. This is called resource development.

4. Kill the defensive, authoritarian newsroom culture. Break down the hierarchy. Dismantle the content silos. Don't manage, enable. Newsrooms are filled with creative people whose talents and ambitions are shackled by a plethora of inhibiting rules. Reward effort. Fail. Learn. And repeat. Free the newsroom 55,000! This is called fun.

5. Get a persona. I won't use the word "brand" because it makes journalists blanch, so let's use "identity." We all have one, and the paper must have one, too, something for which it is known, a signature type of work that reflects a zeal to excel, to be the absolute best at something that separates it from the rest of the media horde. Great writing. Great investigations. Great columns. Great reader participation. Great simplicity. Objectivity is not a personality.

6. Don't cover the community, be the community. This is an idea borrowed from Hodding Carter, former head of the Knight Foundation, who a while back spoke about his early newspaper days at the Greenville, Mississippi Delta Democrat-Times. His words are better than mine: "We practiced journalism with zeal and, occasionally, foolhardy abandon. We took up the implicit demands—the implicit responsibility inherent in the First Amendment—and let people know our editorial mind

when most of them would have happily been spared that opportunity. We covered our region, warts and all. And we participated in the life and civic causes of our town—Greenville, Mississippi—with avocational fervor. We saw ourselves as citizens as well as journalists. We saw ourselves not simply as a mirror reflecting what was happening in the community, or as its critics, but as indivisible from it, a piece of the community's fabric."

Never has the passion Carter displayed toward journalism's role in building community been more important for newspapers. Because technology has given the people, in the words of PressThink blogger Jay Rosen, "formerly known as the audience" the power to publish, they are talking back and engaging in conversations, with each other, with news sources, and with the press. Newspapers can join this conversation and help gather communities of local interest or stand mute and be left behind.

7. Finally, big ideas rule. It's too late for tinkering. There's no time to rearrange the deck chairs once again; the keel for a new boat must be laid. Media have exploded. We need to explode the newsroom.

This is a time of great transition. The tectonics of technology, demographics and economics are disrupting the ground on which newspaper journalism stood for half a century. Survival requires nimbleness, resoluteness and an unwavering sense of the possible. This is called leadership. Newspapers that acquire those skills will prosper—and so will their journalism. ■

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Can the Newspaper Industry Stare Disruption in the Face?

'Lessons learned from past failures can help to ensure future triumphs.'

By Scott D. Anthony and
Clark G. Gilbert

These are scary times for newspaper veterans. Hardly a day goes by without news about disappearing readers, shrinking revenues, declining stock prices, or looming layoffs. Tellingly, these editors and writers are just as likely to come across this news in a blog or hear it through a podcast as they are to read it in their local newspaper.

The newspaper industry is going through what we call a "disruptive" change, a phenomenon that has transformed industries such as retailing, computing, airlines and automobiles. The bad news is that when the dust of disruptive change settles, historically even the best-run companies typically end up in the loser's column. In the computing industry, for example, Digital Equipment Corporation missed the personal computer (P.C.) in the early 1980's, started to fall apart in the early 1990's, and got acquired by Compaq in 1998. Dell Computer's low-cost business model destroyed Compaq, forcing a merger with Hewlett-Packard (H.P.) in 2001. Dell's continued incursion into the P.C. and printing office now threatens H.P., which announced more than 10,000 layoffs last year in an effort to remain competitive.

There is good news: Lessons learned from past failures can help to ensure future triumphs. Even better, newspaper companies have real assets to bring to this fight, and a number of emerging industry experiments with new products and business models could point the way towards future success.

This article describes some reasons why powerful market leaders stumble in the face of disruption and describes a few simple tips to help companies avoid those pitfalls. Success won't

come easily, but by following these tips, newspaper companies have a chance to successfully navigate through increasingly turbulent times.

Disruptive innovations typically offer lower performance along dimensions that firms consider critical. In exchange, new benefits are introduced along dimensions such as simplicity, convenience, ease of use, or low price.

In the media industry, blogs, Google, eBay, Monster.com, and freely distributed commuter papers each fit the pattern of disruptive innovation. Each emerging competitor lacks something that is core to most newspaper companies' value proposition. Some can't match a newspaper's broad distribution network. Others can't compete with the newspaper's detailed reporting capability or local reach. All, however, compete along dimensions of performance that are different than the traditional metrics emphasized in the print newspaper business.

Three barriers typically make it difficult for market-leading incumbents to get disruption right:

1. Fail to spot the disruptive change early enough:

Disruptive change tends to start innocently at a market's fringes. Market leaders tend to dismiss early disruptive developments because they just don't affect their core business.

2. Fail to allocate sufficient resources towards disruptive offerings:

Disruptive innovations often have lower performance and lower prices than established offerings. Companies find it hard to prioritize spending time and money on disruption when they have seemingly attractive opportunities in their core business.

3. Force the disruptive initiative into the existing business model and product concept:

Eastman Kodak Company spotted digital imaging in the 1970's. It invested billions of dollars to create its first commercial camera, a \$30,000 camera targeting the professional market. Only recently has it embraced simplicity and begun to experiment with new business models. Had Kodak made different choices and realized the potential to create new business models sooner, it could have owned digital imaging instead of being one of many players in space.

Our work with the newspaper industry suggests that the second and third problems are the more pressing. Most newspaper companies still focus a disproportionate share of time and attention on their print product. While not ignoring that product, allocating more resources towards new disruptive products makes sense. It seems clear to us that newspaper companies must reimagine their content and business models if they hope to succeed.

Despite the sense of doom and gloom that pervades the industry today, there are signs of hope. While newspaper readership is declining, information consumption is increasing. Almost every newspaper company has made the transition to the Web, with their properties attracting new audiences and new advertisers. In fact, the interactive nature of the Web allows forward-thinking companies to completely change the way they interact with readers and advertisers. Readers can become content creators and community builders. Web sites can serve advertisers that would eschew the static nature of print.

Additionally, companies are experi-

menting with new approaches. Dozens of companies have launched free papers targeted at young readers or recent immigrants. Last year Knight Ridder, Gannett and Tribune were among top buyers of HomeGain and a controlling stake in news aggregator Topix.net. Earlier this year Gannett took a minority position in an emerging mobile information provider called 4INFO.

To maximize their chances of successfully prospering in the next generation, newspaper companies should remember the following principles.

Assume a market-first perspective: One of the core principles of succeeding with disruptive innovation relates to how to connect with customers. The concept is elegantly simple: People don't buy products, they hire them to get jobs done in their lives. When people encounter a problem, they look around for the solution that allows them to solve the problem. Too often, companies define markets through their own internal lenses, missing great opportunities staring them in the face.

To succeed, then, try to look at the world from the perspective of your readers and advertisers. What are the jobs they are seeking to get done in their lives? How could you improve your current products so they get the job done better than by using any other competitor? What new products could be introduced that address a point of consumer frustration?

These jobs can be very different in different contexts of use. Up to 50 percent of online registrants for newspaper Web sites are not newspaper subscribers. Even print subscribers follow very different patterns of use online. As one former metro editor said to us: "When I first joined the online group, I couldn't understand why everyone referred to our readers as 'users.' It took me more than a year to realize that people read the newspaper, but they use the Internet. The whole relationship with the product is different."

Newspaper companies should look at their local market to identify jobs that people can't get done well today. They should think of the great assets they have at their disposal—top-flight

journalists, strong brands, in-depth local knowledge, healthy balance sheets—and think how they could reconstitute those assets to address important, unsatisfied jobs.

Break old business models: The newspaper industry's business model has stayed broadly consistent for years and its still-high profit margins are a testament to its power. Succeeding with disruption requires embracing new models. Metro International shows how a company can build an attractive business without any circulation revenues at all. Its key is matching its costs to its revenue sources. Metro augments content that its staff produces with substantial contributions from wire feeds and minimizes distribution costs by placing its papers in centralized locations.

The industry's online business model also needs some rethinking. Too many newspaper companies have replicated their print models online, relying on display advertisements and classifieds, instead of creating new business models. A recent study showed that as few as 10 percent of top print advertisers are top online advertisers in newspaper Web sites. These new online advertisers often require different ad metrics than those traditionally used in print media. Newspapers need to ask how much money their sites make from lead-generation, consumer direct marketing, and pay-per-use content. If the answer is zero, then they should not be satisfied with even 50 percent growth rates, because they are missing big growth opportunities.

Embrace new mindsets: Generally, succeeding with disruption requires challenging mindset barriers that might stand in the way of success. There are two specific mindsets that newspaper companies need to watch out for:

- **Don't define quality internally.** Often, companies evaluating a disruptive offering say, "We can't do that. It is just not good enough." The problem comes when a company applies its internal filters to make that evaluation. Although newspaper editors might

scoff at the quality of the writing in the blogosphere, many consumers appreciate the freshness and directness of user-generated content.

- **Assume your first strategy is wrong.** It seems strange that underfunded entrepreneurs so often triumph over resource-rich companies. One challenge that big companies face is that they often run fast and hard in the wrong direction. The initial strategy for a new growth business is typically the wrong strategy. Companies that pursue perfection and fear failure too often shut off signals that suggest they need to change their approach. Learning what's wrong with an approach and adapting appropriately is a good thing, not a failure. Focus early efforts on small-scale experiments that offer more knowledge about key assumptions.

While it might be hard to see through today's clouds, the newspaper industry has the potential to do some very exciting things in the coming years. Most companies have good brand reputations, strong cash positions, and a deep well of content. The plethora of experiments throughout the industry suggests a readiness for change. The newspaper industry has a chance—if companies make the right choices over the next 18 months—to stare disruption in the face and succeed where other industries have failed. ■

Scott D. Anthony is a managing director at Innosight LLC, an innovation consulting company. He is the coauthor of "Seeing What's Next: Using the Theories of Innovation to Predict Industry Change" (Harvard Business School Press, 2004). Clark G. Gilbert is an assistant professor in the entrepreneurial management department at Harvard Business School. He is the coauthor of "From Resource Allocation to Strategy" (Oxford University Press, 2005). Anthony and Gilbert are spearheading the Newspaper Next project with the American Press Institute.

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When Journalists' Voices Are Missing

A former newspaper editor examines the impact of the lack of journalists serving on media company boards.

By James Naughton

When executives of a Florida newspaper company proposed to spend \$30 million on a 12-year marketing venture, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter challenged corporate executives to justify the expenditure. Once the voting began, there was little doubt about the outcome as one after another member voted in favor of the proposal. It might be a surprise that the editorial page editor voted yes. The editor in charge of news coverage in the competing newspaper's home city voted yes. The managing editor voted yes. The executive editor voted yes. Even the Pulitzer-winning reporter voted yes.

This was not your typical media company board. Of the 13 directors, nine were journalists, and the company was the St. Petersburg Times Co., privately owned by The Poynter Institute, a non-profit school for journalists, of which I was then president. (By the way, I also voted yes.)

Those of us on the Times Co. board knew the \$30 million would go to marketing not *instead* of to newsgathering but in *addition*. We knew the Times already had spent many more millions to expand news coverage in the primary market of the rival Tampa Tribune. This \$30 million would go to renaming the region's most important entertainment venue—in downtown Tampa—"The St. Pete Times Forum," and by doing so we'd be reinforcing, not depriving, the St. Pete newsroom's Tampa presence.

The St. Petersburg Times Co. has had and always will have journalists

in charge, which might help explain how it has become Florida's largest newspaper. Its success demonstrates that journalists can be trusted with the business of news, but they aren't

a McClatchy director since he retired in 1995 after 37 years as an editor, publisher and executive in Knight Ridder. He says several McClatchy family members on the board often recite the family

mantra of quality journalism and community service, as does the chairman, Gary Pruitt, a First Amendment lawyer who earned newsroom respect as publisher of The Fresno Bee.

Louis Boccardi, who joined the Gannett board after 36

years at The Associated Press, including 10 as executive editor and 19 as president and CEO, says he had to come up to speed quickly to "understand the myriad pressures on a publicly held media company." He says Gannett's directors focus on business, but "also discuss topics such as new publications (e.g., youth tabs), circulation trends, news ratings in broadcast, Katrina coverage challenges, and similar."

Let's grant that all corporate directors are earnest, including the construction and real estate executives on the Belo board, the Hong Kong banker and the greeting card maker on the Dow Jones board, the investment company executives and the manufacturer of golf cart wheels on the Gannett board, the statistics professor on the Lee board, the family member who is chief executive of the pro baseball team, and the frozen-foods executive on the McClatchy board, the libertarian economist who's a guest host of the Rush Limbaugh show on the Media General board, the razor-blade maker and the German retailer on The New York Times board, the three food and beverage company

Knight Ridder, the nation's second biggest newspaper company, is headed for sale, dismemberment or reorganization because its three largest shareholders were not satisfied with the measly 19.4 percent in operating profit in 2004.

given much chance to be trusted in boardrooms of public companies. Not counting family members like Arthur Sulzberger, Jr. at The New York Times or Donald Graham at The Washington Post or James Ottaway of Dow Jones & Co., who once did newsroom stints as part of their corporate tutelage, here is the current tally of media company directors who have made their careers in newsrooms:

Belo—one journalist of 13 directors

Dow Jones—one of 16

Gannett—two of nine

Knight Ridder—one of 10

Lee—zero of eight

McClatchy—one of 14

Media General—one of 9

New York Times—zero of 15

Tribune—zero of 11

Washington Post—one of 10

Why Journalists Matter on Boards

"I've never felt isolated on the McClatchy board," says Larry Jinks, who has been

An Open Letter From Knight Ridder Alumni

What follows is a letter signed by 92 journalists who have worked for Knight Ridder newspapers. It was distributed to news media outlets in November 2005.

John S. Knight, a founder of the company known today as Knight Ridder, believed—and proved—that excellent journalism is good business. The undersigned, all alumni of Knight Ridder, have lived that creed.

As did the late Jack Knight, we believe profit is not merely nice but necessary. Knight Ridder routinely has generated double-digit operating profits—such as last year's 19.4 percent. We understand the obligation of an institutional investor to maximize return on investment. An investor for whom double digits are

insufficient is free to sell Knight Ridder stock. An investor who instead demands the sale or dismantling of Knight Ridder merely in the name of a larger profit margin is engaged not in good business but in greed.

As did Jack Knight, we speak out of confidence in, not fear of, the future of the good business of excellent journalism. There is durable value in businesses that treat their citizens, their communities and their employees with respect. New technology is an ally of, not a threat to, trustworthy and nimble media. Competition gives rise to innovation and efficiency, much as recent declines in print circulation have been accompanied by increased electronic readership.

Knight Ridder is not merely another public company. It is a public

trust. It must balance corporate profitability with civic purpose. We oppose those who would cripple the purpose by coercing more profit. We abhor those for whom good business is insufficient and excellent journalism is irrelevant.

We have watched mostly in silent dismay as short-term profit demands have diminished long-term capacity of newsrooms in Knight Ridder and other public media companies. We are silent no more. We will support and counsel only corporate leadership that restores to Knight Ridder newspapers the resources to do excellent journalism. We are prepared collectively to nominate candidates for the Knight Ridder board. We wish to reassert John Knight's creed. ■

executives and the avocado farmer on the Tribune board, the two enormously rich people named Buffett and Gates on The Washington Post board—even the four engineers and the lawyer-lobbyist for a toilet tissue manufacturer on the Knight Ridder board.

So what if these people haven't been journalists? Here's what: Knight Ridder, the nation's second biggest newspaper company, is headed for sale, dismemberment or reorganization because its three largest shareholders were not satisfied with the measly 19.4 percent in operating profit in 2004. The board of directors of Knight Ridder will play a crucial role in deciding what happens to the storied company, and it matters whether they have much of a clue about what it takes to do high-quality journalism.

Knight Ridder once was regarded as the big news company that journalists most respected and aspired to join. During the past two decades it lost that luster as the corporation's method of satisfying shareholders was to cut resources, staff and space, year after year and sometimes quarter after quarter.

When Knight Ridder agreed to investor pressure to be put up for sale in November 2005, 92 of Knight Ridder's alumni were so fed up that we signed an Open Letter demanding "corporate leadership that restores to Knight Ridder newspapers the resources to do excellent journalism" and threatening to nominate candidates for the Knight Ridder board [see box above].

We realized this effort is quixotic; if nothing else we can demonstrate the kinds of people who care about journalism and would be excellent candidates for the board of a news company. We know that there is no law, nor any securities regulation, requiring public companies to place on their boards individuals who know anything about the companies' products. Still, logic might suggest that protecting investors is more readily accomplished by directors who have some depth of understanding about the company's reason for existence. If directors of General Motors knew nothing about manufacturing vehicles, how could they guide executives in how to compete against Japanese imports? Oh,

wait. Hmm. The General Motors' board boasts among its 12 members moguls from AstraZeneca, Sara Lee, Kodak, Pfizer, Northrop Grumman, DuPont, Ernst & Young, and Compaq.

The legal obligation of board members is to protect the interest of shareholders. Michael Josephson, the ethicist who may have worn out his welcome teaching in Knight Ridder's executive leadership program when he called the fixation with quarterly profits a Ponzi scheme, says that if they wanted to do so, directors legally could "turn Knight Ridder into a travel agency." Even so, he calls it shocking that media companies have been able to let a focus on shareholder obligations dilute their public trust responsibilities in their communities. Media company boards, says Josephson, are "hiding behind the pretense that they're about journalism. They converted long ago to bankers."

Boccardi and Jinks both say that the boards on which they sit focus primarily on the journalism business and its challenges. But, Jinks says, "you cannot be on that board without being

constantly reminded of McClatchy's commitment to outstanding journalism and community service." He says that commitment is "really a business value," because a strong community franchise is a tremendous corporate asset.

Gannett's board, Boccardi says, is "a corporate board responsible for guiding a seven billion dollar business. But certainly as journalistic issues arise, there is free-flowing discussion. There was, for example, extensive board discussion on the Jack Kelley case at USA Today [in which Kelley was accused of fabricating content in his foreign reporting and fired because of it], and I played a key role in the handling [of that situation], formally and informally. When matters arise to which I can contribute a newsroom perspective, I do—formally and informally. I find the input welcome."

Some public media companies compensate for the board's lack of journalism expertise in various ways. The McClatchy board meets five times each year at the Sacramento headquarters, but always visits one of the more distant newspapers for a sixth meeting and uses the occasion to visit each of its departments, including the newsroom. Most public boards invite a newsroom executive into the room to make the occasional report about news coverage, but not to vote on the company's direction. At Gannett, for instance, the newspaper and broadcast divisions make presentations at every Gannett meeting. "Does the board formally sit and review, say, USA Today's White House coverage? No, I'm not sure it should," says Boccardi. "Local autonomy specifically for Gannett's journalism is part of the creed."

The Washington Post Co. and The New York Times Co. have family leaders who enunciate a clear—and correct—choice between being in journalism to support the business or being in business to support the journalism. Media General has a chief operating officer, O. Reid Ashe, Jr., who cut his teeth in newsrooms and was among Knight Ridder's most innovative publishers. Until Peter Kann was forced out as CEO of Dow

Jones, the controlling Bancroft family had respected a century-old tradition always to have a journalist at the top of the company.

Knight Ridder's Situation

Knight Ridder used to follow the Knight tradition of always having a journalist in one of the company's two senior executive posts. The duality of forceful editors teamed with aggressive business leaders served the company well. Then in 1995,

... logic might suggest that protecting investors is more readily accomplished by directors who have some depth of understanding about the company's reason for existence.

James K. Batten, the journalist who was chairman and CEO of Knight Ridder, died of a brain tumor. That June, after Batten's funeral in Coral Gables, Florida, half a dozen of us Knight Ridder editors gathered in a Miami bar to toast Batten's memory and to lament what we foresaw as the inevitable decline of newsroom influence in the company under his successor, P. Anthony Ridder.

It's wrong to demonize Tony Ridder for his fixation on numbers. Tony always has been a numbers guy. But the six or seven of us who were in the pub that day correctly anticipated that his aversion to forceful editors would cause him to make the fundamental mistake of running the company without the traditional strong journalist as his number two. He picked a lawyer. He picked an accountant. Not until last year, 10 years later, when the company was headed toward total submission to investors, did he pick a journalist.

Here is how Alvah Chapman, the retired Knight Ridder chairman who had selected Batten to succeed him, described it in "Knightfall: Knight Ridder and How the Erosion of Newspaper Journalism Is Putting Democracy at Risk," Davis (Buzz) Merritt's excellent history of the company published last year: "Tony needed to get another Jim Batten to back him up. I told Tony that,

so I'll tell you that. Tony's in a lot of unnecessary hot water because he didn't have a strong number two person who was clearly his successor and somebody with a news/editorial background."

The duality of media company obligations was underscored when, in late January, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) and its Northern California chapter called for national debate on the meaning of Knight Ridder's fate, saying, "We acknowledge that newspapers cannot serve their democratic role unless

they stay in business. But the increasing corporate pressure to squeeze additional returns out of already profitable newspapers, at rates exceeding the margins in most other industries, has skewed the balance between journalism and commerce. SPJ

and the [Northern California] Chapter believe that those directing the production of news have an ethical obligation to readers every bit as significant as their fiduciary accountability to shareholders."

For the two decades that Ridder was president of the newspaper division and then CEO, numbers trumped newsrooms in Knight Ridder. Perhaps the most telling and obvious symptom was that under Tony Ridder The Miami Herald was allowed to decline in quality though Miami was the corporate headquarters. After Ridder moved the headquarters to San Jose, its Mercury News declined in quality, too. And the board of directors, who might have been in position to insist on restoring the yin of newsroom values to the yang of shareholder satisfaction, did not. Chances are they didn't even realize they should. ■

James Naughton instigated the Open Letter that Knight Ridder alumni issued last year. He was an editor for 18 years at The Philadelphia Inquirer before becoming president of The Poynter Institute in 1996. He retired in 2003.

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A Shrinking Staff Propels a Newspaper's Transformation

'If we're forced to be a smaller place, then let's aggressively teach ourselves the virtues that go along with that sensibility.'

By Amanda Bennett

Paraphrasing Samuel Johnson, folks often say that nothing focuses the mind like the sight of the gallows. I like better the version that a friend, the head of a large nonprofit organization here, recently offered. She has it taped to the back of her door: "Nothing inspires creativity like a big budget cut." It is a lesson virtually all of us in newspapers are learning—whether we like it or not.

For all its delusional, Pollyanna/glass-half-full/necessity-is-the-mother-of-invention quality, this wisdom offers us the best—and perhaps the only—way out of the fix we find ourselves in at American newspapers today. Here's the conundrum: All across America our newsrooms are shrinking—leaving us with far fewer resources than ever before to deal with a changing industry that is presenting us with problems and issues that are ever more vexing and intractable. Here's the solution: Use the crisis to do what we should have been doing all along.

Without question our newsroom here at The Philadelphia Inquirer has earned its shrinking-newsroom chops. Since I became editor here two and a half years ago, we've lost 110 people—or nearly 21 percent of our newsroom staff—along with similar cuts in newsprint and our budgets. Those with longer memories can recite even bigger staff, budget and newsprint cuts. The sad result is that more than a few people can look around our newsroom and see 425 people—plus more than 200 ghosts.

The near-constant attrition of the

past few years means that fewer people must do more work. Institutional memory and valuable community ties are severed. Every loss brings a new headache, as those who remain must spend hours, sometimes days, trying to figure out: Who will do this work?

The essence of journalism is providing information, insight, education and entertainment. It is making connections, building community, uncovering secrets and hidden information, and being watchdogs for our community.

How will we train replacements? How do we juggle schedules? What will we do when people possessing unique skills walk out the door?

After big losses—like the ones brought about by cuts we've just emerged from—dozens of us spent months doing little else but figuring out how to remake the newsroom in the wake of the departures. I can't think of one of us who at the end of this process was not emotionally and physically exhausted.

That's the bad news. Now, here's the good news: There is good news.

The skills we're honing through necessity are precisely the ones we will need to propel ourselves into the future that is thrusting itself upon us with such vigor. In the face of these challenges, we don't need to settle for simply being a

big institution—doing what big institutions do only with fewer people. If we're forced to be a smaller place, then let's aggressively teach ourselves the virtues that go along with that sensibility. In fact, as we've worked our way through this process, I've settled on some new favorite words: Resilience. Flexibility. Creativity. Collegiality. Cooperation. Focus.

In shrinking, we are forced almost daily to choose. Aggressive pruning is sad, of course, for ambitious journalists who know what they could do with just a little bit more. But it's also pushing us to think deeply, seriously and profoundly about what we value. About what our readers value. About what value we can bring to them. About what value we should and can bring to our community.

Every choice we make is a reaffirmation of those values. It's like the old desert island game: When you think about the choices you would make if you had only one choice, it forces you to confront what matters most.

In downsizing, we are forced to think hard about the basic question of what exactly journalism is. Newspapers have stayed in much the same form for decades, as everything around us has been changing. Only the sight of the gallows is helping wrench us to the realization that journalism isn't just interviewing people, writing stories and headlines, taking pictures and writing captions. The essence of journalism is providing information, insight, education and entertainment. It is making connections, building community, uncovering secrets and hidden information, and being

watchdogs for our community.

And there are lots of ways to do this—ways that necessity is forcing us to examine.

The New Approach

Here's how we approached transforming what our newspaper does and how we do it with a lot fewer people than we had before.

Within a few days of learning in 2005 that we were going to have to drop 75 people, or 15 percent of our editorial staff, we held an off-site meeting of our department heads. Our nervous and strong urge was simply to try to fix the problem. After all, everyone was feeling anxious about how their own departments were going to be hit. Instead, led by editorial page editor, Chris Satullo, we spent an entire—and sometimes painful—day examining our values. At the end of the day, we reached agreement on some core principles:

We had to maintain our ambition. Our local and regional news would be robust, inclusive and investigative; our national and foreign news would be analytical, forward-looking and informative; our paper valued expertise and voice, good writing, and unique perspectives. Perhaps most important: We would no longer consider ourselves a newspaper, but rather a news organization—one that would aim to operate with equal facility in whatever medium, be it print or electronic, that would serve readers best.

We had to maintain our mission. As important as what we decided we were was what we realized we were not. We were not—nor should we be—a paper of record. The notion fell hard. Still, this was an important conclusion. It had, in fact, been years since any newspaper had truly been the kind of all-inclusive recording-secretary chronicler of the daily institutional activity of the region. What's more, every type of reader survey told us over and over again that readers no longer valued this kind of blow-by-blow incremental institutional coverage. Yet, without a specific recognition of that fact, we feared that our shrinking

resources would go increasingly to a futile, frustrating and ultimately boring attempt to chase down each detail of the day's news.

Our core conclusions underlay our subsequent decision-making. During the next few months, nearly 160 people throughout the organization came together as part of this rebuilding process. One group focused on what we called "regionalism" and was charged with fully integrating coverage of our eight-county region into every beat. One group examined our organization and its structures. Another focused on breaking down our online aspirations into achievable jobs. Yet another was tasked with simply acting as a transition team—getting us from here to there.

Fundamentally we restructured much of our operation. Some of the restructuring, admittedly, was simply for greater efficiency. But the exciting part of the restructuring was where we could merge efficiency with greater effectiveness—and get ourselves closer to our long-term goal of transforming our journalism.

Here are a few of the things we decided to do:

Re-Imagine Page One: We agreed to blast Page One out of its decades-old format, remnants of a day when newspapers were still the prime source of yesterday's news. Instead, we go deep on one daily story, layering the story of the day with background, context, interpretation and analysis. Fewer people means more planning so that we can be prepared to produce excellent packages for the major stories of the day, while creating robust briefs collections for much else inside our lead section.

Think community: We fundamentally altered our labor-intensive, geographically based zoning in favor of team coverage focusing on communities of interest. Rather than trying, unsuccessfully, to blanket all school boards, or crime stories, or town council meetings, our suburban coverage now focuses on issues with impact. Some recent examples: How communities are "unpaving" their roads to retard development

and increase privacy; how high school advanced placement classes aren't just for top scholars any more, and an investigation of underreporting of crime at local colleges and universities.

Create community: Our losses pushed us to pursue bold Internet experiments. As a result of the loss of our two theater critics, we've launched a pilot project to work with local theaters to turn Web pages we create into places where we can go beyond reviews to engage the readers themselves in richer conversations that will, hopefully, turn us into a local hub of discussion about movies.

Train, train train: Our training budgets were slashed to nearly nothing. So we decided to do more training. We used computers freed up from the downsizing to create a training center and launched "Inquirer University." Among our 425 people, we have skilled editors, computer-assisted reporting experts, designers, photographers, interviewers and wordsmiths who can act as coaches. We have launched an ambitious yearlong curriculum including classes in everything from ethics to the use of quotes, interviewing skills and narrative, to using databases, creating audio text for online to creating photo slide shows. One goal is to improve our journalistic quality despite our reduction in numbers. Another goal is to increase our flexibility by giving as many people as possible as many skill sets as possible.

Be flexible: Our cuts left departments without vacation backups. So we paired departments in a buddy system. We cross-trained editorial assistants in multiple jobs. Fewer copyeditors meant looking closely at peak-period scheduling to find dead time that could be filled effectively with nondeadline work. We're working to improve planning to eliminate costly delays and to ruthlessly excise low-value work. We've been breaking down walls between departments so that we can practice on daily stories the same kind of all-hands-on-deck cooperation that every newsroom exhibits during major breaking stories.

Integrate online: With so many fewer people, how can all of this extra on-line work be done? The answer was to make it as little extra work as possible. We worked with designers to make sure that graphics were designed only once—to work in the paper and online. Our director of photography, Hai Do, massaged a software package to turn the job of creating online photo shows from a half-day ordeal to a two-minute

add-on. We took the job of daily posting of breaking news, which previously was done centrally, and trained editors and reporters to do their own work. We're even going back to the "Sweetie, get me rewrite" days by rotating people through a slot that will be available to take dictation from people out of the office—turning that part of the job from a complex technological nightmare to one cell-phone call.

Nobody would contend that they like budget cuts as a spur to creativity and change. But given that is what we have, I am extremely proud of the path our newsroom has chosen. ■

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A Newspaper's Redesign Signals Its Renewal

'... newspapers have enormous strengths to rely on—and that is where we need to concentrate.'

By Anders Gyllenhaal and Monica Moses

When talk of a redesign of the Star Tribune began two years ago, the plan was to launch a simple remake of the newspaper. It had been eight years since the last update, and the paper was due. But as work got under way, the ground seemed to shift under the nation's newspapers. Struggles with circulation and readership came into sharp focus. The advertising base continued to erode. Young readers proved steadily more elusive.

Before long, the remake expanded from a routine redesign to a sweeping project taking on some of the most difficult questions confronting newspapers: How does the newsroom compete in a competitive, around-the-clock media world? How do we hold onto our best traditions while keeping up with the times? How does the newspaper do a better job of hooking and keeping the impatient modern reader?

As the questions multiplied, so did the scope of the project. We scoured the corners of news, circulation and marketing for research on our readers. We talked to scores of readers in interviews, small groups, and surveys. We launched more than a dozen task forces—to study how the newsroom and online departments should interact, how to

write and package information for the hurried reader, how to attract young readers, and more. We set goals, revised them, showed them around, and revised them again. We scrutinized our beats, workflows, deadlines, communications, evaluations, rewards, training and leadership practices.

Changes that went into effect October 12, 2005 included about 100 improvements that fell into three categories.

1. Producing a newspaper that satisfies whether readers have two hours or 20 minutes.

We tried to create a paper that enables readers to get a good measure of information on the surface of almost every story—as well as to go as deep as they wish. We created a new repertoire of story forms that are easy to scan and digest—from various Q & A styles to vignettes to content-rich graphics that have come to be called "charticles."



The Star Tribune before its redesign.

2. Creating new content to reflect what is most meaningful today. The new paper includes a twice-a-week world section, a weekly entertainment section targeted to young singles, and a Sunday section devoted to style, fashion and living well. A growing swath of readers use the Web to broaden their knowledge, so we are becoming much more systematic about online references and about filing early versions of stories to the Web site. We know readers like to talk about news with friends and family, so we put a premium on “talker” stories with the added emphasis that they be done exceptionally well, with depth and perspective that were not always a part of these kinds of pieces in the past.

3. Reorganizing the newsroom to capture new content. We created a new desk at

the center of the newsroom as a kind of news triage operation for both online and print, and we established a host of new beats—from coverage of the Internet and fitness to nightlife, fashion and the seasons. After reorganizations of both local news and features, 80 reporters are in new assignments.

At the heart of this project are a couple of convictions. We know that many changes in the newspaper landscape are beyond our control. We should not expect to turn Sunday back into a leisurely day of endless reading, wrench back the clock on classified competition, or prevent news from flowing out in e-mail, cell phones, and BlackBerries. And yet newspapers have enormous strengths to rely on—and that is where we need to concentrate. Even with our circulation challenges, the paper reaches the largest market of any single competitor. Online sites give newspapers a huge advantage, when they use them well. The experience, knowledge and skills of our staffs give newspapers a vast advantage over the transience of many competitors.

Readers' reactions since the launch in October have been encouraging. Home subscriptions are up substantially in the first three months, and the stop rate is down substantially as well. One of the most gratifying early indications is in single-copy sales, which are running well above last year since the remake.

Lessons Learned

After two years of this project, a number of lessons stand out. Here, in no particular order, are 10 things we discovered.

The more involved every part of the newsroom is, the better the chances of success. By the time this project concluded, a little more than half of the newsroom had been directly involved in one of the task

forces, brainstorming sessions, prototypes or section planning. It might go without saying, but those directly involved tended to be more enthusiastic about the changes.

Listen to ideas from everyone, from clerks to the publisher. One of the most striking changes in the paper—a daily list on the front page called “Have you Heard”—came out of a cross-company group of 20-somethings studying how to attract younger readers. A popular daily print feature called “Web Search,” which outlines what's new online, grew out of a challenge the publisher laid down to cover the Internet as we do television. We offer a front-page forecast for seven different times of day in response to readers telling us they like to anticipate traffic delays during lunch and the drive home. We also borrowed ideas from other newspapers, magazines and the Internet, even though traditional brainstorming led to more good ideas than we could use.

Readership is increasingly fragmented and reading habits are changing—dynamics that the newspaper and Web site must respond to aggressively. In some respects, we'd been putting out a newspaper that primarily served one segment of our readership: heavy readers, who happen to resemble journalists more than other readers do. The more we studied our readers and their needs and interests, the more ways we found of serving a broader array of readers. Ultimately a picture emerged of five discrete reader groups, and we committed ourselves to serving each with specific content and design elements. Research on readership, the market, the current paper, and reader segments should all be part of a project like this. It's hazardous to rely exclusively on research, of course, because it rarely leads to breakthrough ideas. But it's foolish to ignore the kind of deep and compelling studies available from such sources as Northwestern University's Readership Institute, the Poynter Institute, The American Press Institute, Pew Research Center, American Society of Newspaper Editors, and the Newspaper Association of America.



The Star Tribune after its redesign.

Newspaper remakes should not be carried out by the newsroom alone. The newsroom should lead the redesign, but if it doesn't work closely with the advertising, circulation, production and marketing departments from the beginning, the project will not be successful. Some of the freshest thinking on this project came from smart staff members not immersed in the way we've always done things. Many pieces of the launch were successful because they were managed by staff from other departments.

Work hard to keep the newsroom and overall company up to date on the progress. Early on, it's good to develop a communications game plan, and the bigger your organization, the more challenging it will be to engage the staff. We showed prototypes at monthly brown-bag sessions, sent out regular redesign bulletins, involved 75 staff members in prototyping, and conducted nine months of training prior to the launch. Still, in the final training sessions, we had people who asked, "We're starting a world section?" Many folks will wait to tune in until they are directly affected.

Keep explaining to readers what changes are being made and why. Any change is upsetting to many readers; dramatic change will get plenty of reaction. We introduced the redesigned Star Tribune with an eight-page guide, a Web site tour of the changes, and a succession of Weblogs, editors' columns, and front-page notes to readers. Still, the launch prompted questions and complaints from readers—about 5,000 e-mails, calls and letters the first month. Now that we're several months into it, the balance of reaction has been good: A deeper readership study will come in April, when we'll get a methodical look at reader reaction.

Recognize that the arms-length tone we valued in the 1970's feels aloof today to many readers. In the midcentury move to professionalism, journalists embraced the inverted pyramid and objectivity. During the Watergate years, a detached recounting of the facts seemed

important to credibility. Now newspapers compete with a host of other media that feel less cold and conventional. And those Web sites, magazines and cable news outlets are winning people over in a climate of great skepticism toward the media establishment. We're trying to engage Star Tribune readers

The Star Tribune redesign was easier *and* harder than we might have anticipated.

in a warmer, more personable way. We have a daily greeting built into our new nameplate. Our obit pages are labeled "Remembering." We use second-person pronouns in headlines and box text. We try to respond to the readers' interest as quickly and practically as possible. Old headline: "Identity theft costs consumers billions." New: "How to protect yourself from identity theft."

Training is vital, particularly when preparing for a dramatic remake. After months of brainstorming, prototype presentations and other discussions, we began redesign training in earnest nine months before launch. It took 33 three-hour sessions to train the whole staff in reader-focused story planning. We followed up with sessions on alternative story forms, budgeting and summary writing. Two months before launch, many staff said they were just plain tired of talking about the redesign and simply wanted to do it. Still, in the final round of nuts-and-bolts training, there was plenty of anxiety, especially among copyeditors and designers. Expect a certain percentage of folks to be alarmed about learning new ways. Offer extra hands-on help, checklists and, always, reassurances.

There are great advantages to questioning everything and reinventing it. One of the blessings of an ambitious redesign is the chance to stop, look at every ele-

ment of the paper, and ask if it is still valuable. Assembling a newspaper every day is complex, and in the drive to simplify we may develop habits that serve ourselves above our readers. One of our new goals is to make every journalistic decision with our readers foremost in mind. It will take time before we have fully absorbed this shift in thinking.

Improving the paper and Web site should be a constant obsession, not something we do once each decade. While dramatic changes in typography, new sections, and reorganizations have to be well planned, many other changes that were part of this project should not have waited until a formal redesign. Tastes and habits are changing faster than ever, and new beats, fresh features, good ideas for columns, puzzles and other upgrades need to be constantly under consideration.

The Star Tribune redesign was easier *and* harder than we might have anticipated. Once we felt as if we had a real grasp of our various readers' needs, the ideas for how to fulfill those flowed freely. Conceiving a paper that consistently engages and serves is not terribly difficult. The hard part comes in the maintenance. We've challenged our routines and our conventions. Now we have to continually remind ourselves why we are working in new ways and refocus our attention on the people we're working for. For that transformation to be complete, we need a few more years. ■

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Lessons From a Newsroom's Digital Frontline

In Roanoke, Virginia, a midsized newspaper has had 'the freedom to run some experiments, fail, try again, and along the way discover some meaningful success.'

By Michael Riley

What wakes you up in the middle of the night? With me, it's sometimes the dog barking or a growling stomach or perhaps a daughter with the flu, but most times it's a nagging question with no clear answer: Can the daily newspaper be saved? The theoretical angst behind this question gains a stark and frighteningly personal focus when I think about The Roanoke Times, the daily newspaper (circ: 97,000) I oversee in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. And it's a question we've been wrestling with for a number of years.

The depressing news about newspapers seems overwhelming. A stack of studies sits on my desk, all of them lamenting circulation declines, the absence of young readers, the aging of loyal readers, the corporate squeeze for ever-higher profits, and the intense competition for readers' time as the Internet rapidly reshapes our world. The story is all too familiar—it's the end of the world as we know it, and that's enough to make any ink-stained curmudgeon cry.

Yet I'd argue that digital technology and the Internet might offer the best reason to put the cap back on the Prozac. It's counterintuitive, but the future of what we do is not as scary as it seems. Newspapers—or, more precisely, news-gathering operations—are in a position of strength: In most markets, they are the last remaining mass-medium; they are prime creators of original journalism and, in many cases, they are deeply committed to a community's civic life and welfare. Finally, they are blessed with a profitable business model that can, if allowed, underwrite a range of digital experiments and online forays to move us successfully into the future.

Simply put, we need to reinvent

newspapers. That's what we've been trying to do in Roanoke during the past few years as we've merged our print and online content operations. Recently, we launched a funky and fun online video newscast each weekday,¹ which is our way of embracing today the multimedia world of tomorrow.

Granted, this former railroad town is not at the hub of the digital universe. We're not the first place most people would look to see how the Internet is revolutionizing our business. But that's the beauty of the digital revolution—a news organization doesn't have to be in Silicon Valley to make things happen. In fact, not being in a big city is helpful; we have the freedom to run some experiments, fail, try again, and along the way discover some meaningful success.

Crossing the Digital Divide

What follows are some lessons we've learned on the digital front. Consider this an up-close look at what's happened at our midsized newspaper to enable us to join the digital dance. This is designed to be part case study, part practical advice, part big picture, and then, a look at some pitfalls to avoid.

Educate, educate, educate: About two years ago, our newsroom undertook a strategic review dubbed "Looking Ahead." Amid the tumult of change, we asked some basic questions: How is the world changing? What's happening to newspaper readers? What's the impact of shifting demographics? What does national research, such as reports from the Readership Institute, tell us, and how do these findings fit with our local experience? Where are our gaps in coverage? What do readers expect from us? And how is the Internet changing

everything?

As answers emerged, we began to glimpse ways to transform the newsroom culture, first by recognizing that we need to split the word "newspaper" apart and realize that it's the "news" that's most important and not the "paper." Once that happens, other changes follow more easily.

Take the long view: The newspaper's senior leadership team, led by our publisher, Wendy Zomparelli, played a key role in helping the newsroom think hard about the future. Once we identified where the rest of the world is headed, it was easier to decide where we wanted the news operation to go. We decided not to stick our head in the ink tank, but chose to become well-schooled in digital technology so we could find new ways to reach different audiences. We wanted to become a living laboratory and find smart ways to play in the online world.

Don't force change: That's a sure path to failure, because resistance will be high. Look first for allies across the newsroom, staffers who see the need for change and the importance of online. We partnered first with photographers, technophiles who love to experiment and want to see their work go global. As creative storytellers, photographers started posting online slide shows of assignment outtakes, then began playing with an inexpensive video camera and digital mini-disk recorders. Several learned Flash and quickly emerged as teachers. I knew we'd reached a milestone when I spotted two reporters with headphones on, busily editing sound files for online stories to accompany their work in print. The enthusiasm was going viral.

Integrate, don't separate: There's a robust debate about whether a disruptive technology has a place in the traditional newsroom of the newspaper. My belief is that you shouldn't relegate online players to backrooms or basements, particularly if you want others to learn and grow. The online content operation should be integrated into the newsroom, particularly as the seismic shift of resources from print to online gains momentum. We moved our online team into the newsroom more than a year ago, and what a difference it has made. The online editor hears a metro editor talking with a reporter about a breaking story, and within minutes that nugget of news is posted on our Web site. We've even given up the old-fashioned notion that we can scoop ourselves, except in the rarest of cases.

Prepare to get messy: While our online content team is in the newsroom, our digital media operation is a separate department. That works okay, even if it can sometimes be confusing. The digital folks handle the back-shop work, the Web mastering, some advertising, and any disruptive content creation not connected to the newsroom. In this case, some separation is good, because they are free to pursue new and more radical ideas.

Get everyone to drink the Kool-Aid: Beyond our online team, we have key players in the newsroom thinking online. Editors know that breaking news online is important. Our assistant managing editor for content and planning, Dwayne Yancey, is intimately involved in online ventures. Our managing editor, Carole Tarrant, who joined us a year ago, brought with her immense online savvy, creativity and new ideas. It's vital to have key leaders pushing an online vision.

Shore up your weaknesses early: First, claim the online news ground. Plant your flag by breaking news online and beating the TV stations. Go ahead and scoop the newspaper. Anecdotal evidence leads us to believe that breaking news online leads to more interest in the print product. If we didn't



Each weekday afternoon The Roanoke Times delivers an interactive online video newscast, TimesCast (left). On roanoke.com, readers find multimedia projects tied to topics covered in the newspaper (right).

pursue this strategy, we'd then worry about who's going to get there first and eat our lunch. In the end, eyeballs are eyeballs, and we have to capture them wherever we can.

Don't be afraid to invent jobs: Who would have imagined that a newspaper would ever create a slot for a multimedia editor? That's what we did more than a year ago. Seth Gitner, a photographer who gravitated early to online, fills that role. He's helping us with video, audio and slide shows. We've invested heavily in video equipment and are building a studio next to the newsroom to allow us to create, in effect, a guerrilla TV station, so we can do online video on our terms.

So far, this approach has paid off with some stellar multimedia projects, like "An Unlikely Refuge," a chronicle of Bantu resettlement in Roanoke that won first place in the 2005 Associated Press Managing Editors Online Convergence category and "Going Down the Crooked Road," a fascinating multimedia look at old-time mountain music. Finally, we recently launched the TimesCast, an interactive, online video newscast with a playful sensibility that posts each weekday afternoon in time to beat our TV competitors.

Embrace the waves: More than a decade ago, when I was executive producer of allpolitics.com, we used Vivo, a streaming online video software that rendered



jerky, ghostly images of video on the Web. It was an experiment without an immediate payoff, and I used to wonder why we bothered. But with broadband video bearing down like a tornado, everything about this technology has changed. The same for podcasts, which we jumped into last year, and YourPix, a popular photo-sharing site that creates good user-generated content. Finding a way to play with new and emerging technologies is key, even if at first they don't attract huge audiences or drive big dollars.

Interactivity: Play to the medium's strength. Bring users into the site and listen to them. Create message boards. Build polls. Seek comments. Pay attention to the most-read stories. Bring blogs onto the site, including ones written by newspaper staff. Build them around strong communities of interest. We were slow to buy into blogs because of their bad-boy reputation. Now we're looking to drill deep in areas with strong local audiences and use blogs as an interactive reporting tool. Yes, we run them through an editor's eye and monitor the conversations. Next, we plan to pursue and publish in print more user-generated content, particularly as community news items.

Work across traditional barriers: In this new world, different departments need to communicate and coordinate well, so that means that editors will be talking



“Going Down the Crooked Road” provided a multimedia look at old-time mountain music on the newspaper’s Web site.

a lot with advertising and information technology folks. In a recent redesign, for example, we created sellable slots for advertising, which is crucial to our business success. Our content creators are constantly aware of the need to work closely with the technology. In a traditional newspaper world, such conversations might seem jarring, but in this new environment, it is essential that they take place as we construct a new paradigm. This is not always easy for newsroom folks to understand. The irony, of course, is that newspapers, the world’s chroniclers of change, are themselves frightened to death of change, and that fear can often impede vital experimentation. Don’t let that happen.

Maintain journalistic values: As online meshes with journalism, realize that the two are not separate and apart. Journalists’ work is about telling stories, albeit in different (and exceptionally powerful) ways. Core journalistic values must be maintained, for they are what lend the news organization its credibility, whether in print or online. We should not underestimate the value of that credibility, because those fundamental journalistic principles we hold dear—accuracy, verification, fairness, honesty, context, ethics and community service—will become an even more important competitive advantage as the Internet morphs and people seek sources of news they can trust. No matter where this technology is able to take us, it is essential that our strong journalistic foundation be preserved.



Beware of Pitfalls

Along the way to achieving this transition, there are plenty of bumps in the road. For starters, not everyone in the newsroom will embrace the new vision; it’s a foreign concept for many traditional journalists, particularly when the word “video” is involved, given our long-seated disdain for our TV brethren. We’ve had some robust discussions, driven by a fear that our online efforts will undermine our print credibility. Editors daily face the difficult decision of whether to ask a reporter to write a breaking news item for online or allow her to continue reporting for the print edition. We’ve debated whether we should scoop our newspaper by posting news stories online. We’ve argued about whether message board postings should be used in print, and we’ve unfortunately allowed some items on our blogs that clearly didn’t meet our journalistic standards. Currently, an internal debate is rumbling about how much playfulness we can inject in the TimesCast without besmirching the newspaper’s reputation.

For many of us, this is uncharted territory, and as we move into it and experiment, we discover new boundaries, and this can lead to a rather disquieting tension for many.

The Tipping Point

Looking at this as an economist, I would draw a chart with two trend lines to explain our future. On this chart, I’d look to see where the tipping point—when the weight of our news dissemination ef-

fort moves from print to online—might occur. The first line, declining steadily over time, captures the commitment of readers to print newspapers. The second one, increasing steadily, shows users going online to get news. At some point in the not-too-distant future, those lines will cross.

As we head towards that tipping point, these trend lines let us know that a concomitant shift already needs to be taking place at our news operations. Gradually, we need to either add or move resources—people and money—from print to online. This redeployment of resources is one of the more critical questions ahead. Our experience tells us that efforts should already be underway to make time for journalists in the newsroom to experiment with and learn more about digital storytelling. With good planning, the tradeoffs in this transformation need not be too harsh or debilitating.

So far, we’ve been fortunate. Our newspaper is consistently ranked among the Top 10 nationwide for readership, based on the percentage of adults who regularly read us. (In our case, that number for our core market is 73.5 percent, a loyal reader base.) Our corporate culture willingly embraces change, and we’ve devoted real resources to allow our newsroom to experiment. But all we’ve done is still not enough to tell us whether we might save the daily newspaper.

My hunch, however, is that we can, and here’s why: We’re motivated by a glimmer of optimism rather than a pall of fear, and we spy opportunities where others might see problems. In the end, we’ve decided to try to shape our future rather than allowing the future to shape us, and that has a calming influence, particularly in the middle of the night. ■

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📺 The video newscast can be watched at www.roanoke.com

Wrong Turns Make a Difficult Situation Worse

A journalist lists Top 10 bad decisions editors make when facing cuts in staff.

By Carol Bradley

A lot of editors of small- to mid-sized dailies are struggling to overcome the waves of budget cuts that have swept through newsrooms in recent years. Chief among their worries is: Will readers notice the cutbacks? What follows are 10 common mistakes editors can (and have) made in reacting to these cutbacks.

10. Top-down approach: In the face of dwindling resources, decide it's too risky to trust reporters to unearth the stories of the day. Instead, hold morning meetings with middle managers to determine the paper's contents. Let marching orders flow forth from there and ignore entreaties from reporters who insist they can sniff out something better. Insist that reporters remain in the newsroom, accessible at all times, unless out on a specific assignment, to be there at the editor's beck and call when the next brilliant idea pops into his or her head, usually around 4:30 p.m. The result of this thinking will be fewer stories unique to the community and more generic stories, the kind that could appear in any newspaper anywhere.

9. Demand more: Let the job freeze just announced by the publisher sink in for a couple of days before dropping the other shoe: In addition to having to cover for departing colleagues, reporters must add online duties to their job descriptions. Make it clear that evaluations and raises will be based in part on the number of stories reporters flesh out online. Arrange for video interviews and have reporters dump their notebooks into sidebars the print version won't have room to run. Or add a Q & A on that series on toxic waste dumps. Remind reporters that, incidentally, this is not an excuse to let story counts falter. The result: an immediate increase in shallow, just-the-facts stories because that's all that reporters will have time to produce.

8. Less editorial edge: On the editorial page, inch steadily toward a centrist position with the objective of avoiding the alienation of any individual or group to the point that angry readers start canceling subscriptions. Become convinced that if no one calls to complain about an editorial then that's a good sign.

7. Rely on focus groups: Form a focus group of readers and assign more weight to its members' ideas for coverage than to your gut instinct. Readers often have no concept of the public-service mandate newspapers strive to live by. Focus groups will ask for more coverage of the high school girls' volleyball team or the best rides at the state fair. Indulge them their preferences and inevitably the newspaper will move away from bold, grab-'em-by-the-collar coverage toward scrapbook material.

6. Create new community-related projects: Expand the definition of a newspaper and play a bigger role in cosponsoring community events. Better yet, dream up new projects the newspaper can sponsor entirely on its own: a bridal extravaganza or a women's expo. "Borrow" the city hall reporter for a couple of weeks to help coordinate the coverage. Hope that no one notices the sudden dearth of stories about city hall.

5. Public special sections: In a similar vein, compensate for declining revenue by rolling out a series of special sections: A 10-page tab saluting the armed services or a medical directory that's no more in-depth than the Yellow Pages. News columns will be siphoned away from the daily paper and reporting and editing time stolen as well. Gradually, readers' expectations will adjust and they will come to see the paper as less of a public watchdog and more of a community "friend."

4. Focus on "real life moments": Soften the paper's personality by steeping it

with coverage of "real-life moments"—senior proms, 30-year grade-school reunions. Establish monthly quotas for these kinds of stories and make it clear that no reporter gets off the hook, even when real news is unfolding on his/her beat.

3. Swap reporters and beats: Shake up the newsroom by swapping reporters and beats—and do it without input from your staff. Don't give a senior reporter the chance to argue that he plans to retire long before he tops the learning curve on that new technology beat he was just assigned. Create enough disequilibrium and a few of more veteran (i.e. higher-priced) reporters might decide to leave. Ka-ching! At the very least, morale will be seriously damaged, and the morning pages will reflect it.

2. Establish story quotas: Generate even more turmoil by establishing story quotas. Some newspapers require an average of a story a day. To give themselves time to work on meaty stories, reporters will take an item worth a paragraph or two, stretch it to 15 inches, and call it good.

And the Number One mistake:

1. WWCW: Wield as your constant yardstick the mantra WWCW—What Would Corporate Want? Corporate would want pretty papers filled with cute, inoffensive stories. But corporate has no idea what real news had to be overlooked to serve up the warm-fuzzies. Stick to pleasing the corporate managers and readers will definitely notice something lacking in their newspaper—probably its soul. ■

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Community News Drives a Newspaper's Vigorous Growth

'We joke about how almost every day maintenance people seem to be assembling another desk.'

By Joe Zelnik

When I started as editor—one of a two-man news staff—of the Cape May (N.J.) County Herald in December 1982, the newspaper's half-dozen other employees seemed a little nervous. Finally one of them asked me if this meant they would soon be jobless. My reputation had preceded me. Twelve months earlier, the Philadelphia Bulletin, where I was a reporter, ended publication. After failing to achieve everyone's goal—usually this meant a job offer from The Philadelphia Inquirer—I went to the editorial page staff of the Buffalo (N.Y.) Courier-Express. Six months later, it closed its doors.

The Herald, a free distribution, tabloid-sized weekly newspaper, then averaged 20 pages. We worked in a two-room hovel just south of the bridge going over the canal into Cape May. If someone wanted to use the bathroom, I had to get up from my desk and let them by. Since then, there have been several physical moves as the staff and newspaper have expanded; the Herald offices are now in a modern office building in Rio Grande, New Jersey, and the company is in the process of buying a building next door that will double the square footage.

The paper is still tabloid size, still free, and still a weekly community newspaper, running as many as 100 pages with 35-40 percent news. Rows of journalism awards, for editorial and advertising, line the walls. The newspaper is available Wednesday morning at several hundred locations. Among the busiest is the Herald building where, we say without hyperbole, people stand in the rain or snow to wait for it. Well, some people.

If I had gotten the call from The Philadelphia Inquirer in 1982, I would have run to it. And undoubtedly been laid off long ago. For as former Inquirer reporter Huntly Collins wrote in Nieman Reports last summer, there have been "successive waves of buyouts" during which "scores of other reporters and editors" have left the Inky. So when Nieman Reports was recruiting stories about "shrinking newspaper/newsrooms," where people are trying to do more with less, I thought of what could have been and was delighted to instead be able to report on what is.

Nothing is shrinking at the Herald, which is doing more with more. Last year the paper hired an additional reporter, a community news editor (and two part-time assistants), a real estate editor (and one assistant). Growth is similar in other departments. We joke about how almost every day maintenance people seem to be assembling another desk.

The Value of Local News

The Herald apparently is doing something right. All local news? Or is it that nothing can compare or compete with a community newspaper? Actually, we have "competition" from a daily newspaper, local TV station, a few radio stations that rip and read, and four or five weeklies. Many communities have their own Web sites, as do all of our media competitors. None of this has slowed the Herald's growth. Advertising—display and classified—is up and with it our news hole.

Our news coverage is heavy into local government. I, along with five other reporters, report on all facets of county

government, as well as keeping an eye on the just-opened local community college, and by going to about 40 meetings each month, we bring news of local interest from 13 of the 16 towns in this county. The paper also carries a healthy mix of features from reporting about successful lung transplants to a story about a three-legged dog euthanized because no one would adopt him. We make no effort to cover local sports, though we do run some columns on various topics, including one written by a 13-year-old who follows NASCAR.

The paper publishes a strong editorial page that includes a "From the Publisher" and a column I write. Op-ed pieces can take up to three pages and include occasional columns by staffers and regular columns by contributors who include a high-school sophomore and a college freshman. We publish about 250 letters each year.

Perhaps our most widely read feature is something we call "Spout Off," a column that publishes anonymous call-in, write-in, e-mail opinions on almost every subject. This column receives hundreds of submissions a week and maybe a third of them survive our selection process. On our Web site, this column is interactive, with little attempt made by us to edit them.

Owner-publisher Art Hall embraces the Internet as an opportunity, not a threat, and has had developed an all-new Web site¹ with all sorts of interactive opportunities. Several summer publications—this is a tourism county—are being merged into an all-new weekend edition. This paper designed the software for its own classified management system that has enjoyed phenomenal success and is being pitched to other

newspapers.

As the new kid on the block, the Internet is getting a lot of attention at the Herald. But it is seen as one element of an integrated approach, in which news and information "best conveyed in print" will be in the newspaper, and what will go on the Web are "the things

that are best communicated that way," as the publisher wrote recently.

As a lifelong print guy, I note with satisfaction that this newspaper recently replaced the three trucks that were used to deliver the paper. Each replacement was larger, to accommodate the anticipated increase in circulation. ■

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Will the Meaning of Journalism Survive?

'Journalism educators are in a state of disquiet, if not distress, at their students' lack of the broad background essential for independent journalism.'

By Melvin Mencher

The question no longer is whether the newspaper will endure but whether the kind of news that is essential to a functioning democracy will survive. Studies of the reading habits of the young conclude that the drift from print to screen is steady and irreversible and that the interests of the 18-34 demographic may well generate a news budget heavily slanted to the popular culture and the quick read.

Whether this key demographic group will have an interest in "a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context that gives them some meaning," as the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press described the obligation of journalism, is uncertain. Equally uncertain is whether the new generation of journalists, most of them graduates of journalism programs, will be able to supply the public with a meaningful news account. Sower and reaper are locked in a troubling embrace.

Journalism is "the quintessential knowledge profession," says Vartan Gregorian, president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which recently funded an effort to improve journalism education, and as such "deserves the best educated and trained practitioners." Less clear to Gregorian is "whether our graduate and undergraduate programs in journalism provide adequate intellectual and technical preparation to meet those challenges."

The technical preparation is more than adequate. I am not as certain of the intellectual preparation.

Journalism training, to which I have devoted the past 40 years, increasingly centers on the techniques and the technology crucial to news delivery in this electronic age. Students are being taught to prepare news for a variety of platforms. Writing is aimed at the two-line/sentence screen reader. For reporting, pad and pencil will be supplemented, possibly replaced, with a megapixel still and digital video camera, digital audio recorder, laptop computer, digital cell phone, and half a dozen other pieces of hardware. Given the cutbacks in staffing, the future reporter cannot count on being accompanied by a photographer or any other technician on assignment. He or she will have to go solo, which adds further emphasis to the need for wide technical training. Since the journalism curriculum is limited by its accrediting association, this additional technology instruction squeezes out content, subject matter.

What's Missing?

The widening of instruction in technology by many programs recalls Thoreau's warning about our becoming the tools of our tools, or T. S. Eliot's observation, "We had the experience but missed the meaning."

The reporting process centers on the

knowledgeable reporter who is able to develop ideas that guide his or her questions and observations. Despite all the sophisticated equipment reporters might haul to an assignment, they are limited by the background knowledge that guides their reporting. The British scientist W.I.B. Beveridge said that developing ideas or hypotheses helps a person "see the significance of an object or event that otherwise would mean nothing." Or, as a former editor of Time magazine, Thomas Griffith, put it, reporting is "conjecture subject to verification." The political writer Irving Kristol said, "A person doesn't know what he has seen unless he knows what he is looking for."

Without wide-ranging knowledge, journalists are forced to rely on flacks or, at best, engage in "he said, she said" journalism.

Journalism educators are in a state of disquiet, if not distress, at their students' lack of the broad background essential for independent journalism. An instructor told me she listed Charles Darwin in a quiz in which students were asked to identify the subject and tell why he/she is in the news. "Out of 10 students, only two identified Darwin—both said he had something to do with 'survival of the fittest.' Nobody mentioned the theory of evolution. In a follow-up discussion, most knew nothing about the brouhaha over intelligent design."

Another instructor suggested I drop

a reference to Walt Whitman in a section on writing in the next edition of my journalism textbook. "Keep Stephen King," he wrote. "Drop Whitman. My students have never heard of him." From another: "I expend precious time explaining such matters as the fact that World War II followed World War I."

David T.Z. Mindich, a journalism instructor at St. Michael's College in Vermont, begins his book "Tuned Out: Why Americans Under 40 Don't Follow the News," by recalling a quiz he gave his students when the Supreme Court had ruled on the Florida Bush-Gore vote count and John Ashcroft was nominated for attorney general. He writes: "Of 23 students, 18 could not identify even one Supreme Court justice. Only one could name the attorney general nominee. Most revealing of all, four wrote that the attorney general was Colin Powell; it is likely they homed in on the word 'general,' reflecting a total ignorance of what an attorney general is or does."

Mindich observes that "young people no longer see the need to keep up with the news." The result, he continues, is that "America is facing the greatest exodus of informed citizenship in its history."

Textbook publishers are aware of the state of the student mind. They consider today's freshman the equivalent of a high school junior of a few decades back and want textbooks simplified. The author of a copyediting textbook told me that her publisher asked that in her next edition she reduce the "reading matter" and try to make it more

"skimmable." As it is, student reading matter is confined to textbooks, many of which nowadays are accompanied by a CD-ROM that duplicates the text, and to the screen. Andrea Panciera, online editor of *The Providence Journal*, says on her visits to campuses "nobody is reading the newspaper."

Not to worry about the decline of the newspaper, argue the optimists. There's cable TV, the insatiably curious bloggers, and many excellent magazines whose correspondents do a good job of digging. To which a journalism instructor in Nebraska responds, "But I defy anyone to show me how I can get reliable, thorough, unbiased information about my schools, my city, my county, even my state government if my newspaper has abdicated its responsibility to provide that. Where do I find that on the Web? On TV?"

The answer might lie in a comment by Andrew Heyward when he was president of CBS News: "There is a broader, new definition of news that we will need to develop for this next generation." This new definition may be closer to the observations of Rupert Murdoch than to those of Dean Baquet, editor of the *Los Angeles Times*:

Murdoch: "[Young readers] want control over their media instead of being controlled by it. ... Too often, the question we ask is: 'Do we have the story?' Rather than: 'Does anyone want the story?'"

Baquet: "It's not always our job to give readers what they want. What if

they don't want war coverage or foreign coverage or to see poverty in their communities?"

Does any of this really matter in the scheme of things? Associate Justice Stephen Breyer thinks it does. He writes that the First Amendment should be understood "as seeking to facilitate a conversation that will encourage the informed participation in the electoral process." But then there is the observation of John G. Roberts, Jr., now chief justice, then a White House associate counsel in the Reagan administration. In a memorandum dated August 28, 1985, Roberts said he favored relaxing the standards established by the Supreme Court in *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan* libel case.

Forty years ago, which Mindich dates as the beginning of the decline of interest in news, the British philosopher Stuart Hampshire worried that we were heading for an "ice age of not caring ... passivity and nonattachment, in a general spreading coldness." Perhaps the cold wind blowing is what many of us now feel. ■

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Teaching Journalism for an Unknown Future

Journalism professors work to align essential skills with emerging technology.

By Peg Finucane

Imagine the world 65 million years ago, where great, lumbering dinosaurs roamed. Imagine that some of them heard a warning, deep within their small, unevolved brains, that they were about to become extinct. The climate was changing. Their food was

disappearing. Smaller, more nimble creatures were gathering the best leaves and refusing to stand still long enough to be killed and eaten. Some would ignore it: How could the largest beasts on earth all die? Some would worry, but go on with their lives. Perhaps a few

in this imaginary world would look at the other beasts and try to find a way to survive; if this happened, we know they did not succeed.

In the media world today, newspapers are the great, lumbering dinosaurs. For almost 40 years, we have been hearing

warnings that newspapers were about to become extinct. But many journalists and educators have ignored them, even as papers have died and others suffered drastic cuts in a triage effort to stay alive or increase profits.

As an educator with almost 30 years experience in the newspaper business, I sometimes think of myself as a dinosaur who has learned to use tools. My colleagues and I are trying to teach the next generation how to evolve quickly while retaining the best parts of our dinosaur culture. We are training them for both the current, rapidly evolving world and a near future of changed media. We are training some students who will graduate and assume traditional jobs, but we are training others for jobs that haven't even been invented.

Passing on Necessary Skills

There is no blueprint for this effort, and many newspapers cannot define what they want our journalism graduates to know or do. Do they want writers? Interviewers? Storytellers? Multimedia producers? Chat room monitors? Community developers? Podcast recorders? The newspapers don't know, and neither do we. Yet in committee meetings and conversations, my colleagues and I find important points of agreement that form the foundations of our teaching:

- Good journalism—good writing and editing—is just as important as ever.
- Good journalism works in all media—the delivery methods might change, but the content must be informative, interesting and reliable.
- Flexibility—the ability to manage change rather than being overwhelmed by it—is required for survival.

Agreement on the first point is unanimous. We teach the same reporting skills today that my professors taught me years ago: What is news? How do journalists find information, ask questions, talk to real people, or talk to newsmakers and their professional handlers? And we teach the same writing skills: how to organize a story; how to make a story

both fair and accurate; how to interest an audience through active language, compelling narrative, and precise details; how to avoid libel or copyright issues. We discuss the same issues, practical and philosophical, including news judgment, history, ethics and the importance of communication for individuals, community and culture.

On the second point, there is majority approval, if not unanimity. It is hard for some print dinosaurs to admit that other media might serve their audiences as well as newspapers. Most journalists are not early adapters to innovations. But almost all newspapers, even the smallest, have established a presence on the Web by now. In its early form, this presence generally is no more than a straight transfer of stories and pictures from the newspaper to a Web site. Web readers get no more or less than their neighbors who read ink on paper. As newspaper Web sites become more sophisticated, newspaper staff members are pulled inexorably toward digital journalism as they are asked to edit Web content, report special or additional features, or even join online chats or podcasts. Not surprisingly, these staff members find they are doing the same work, but the end product just looks different—and it might not appear on the front porch at all.

The third point, flexibility, is complex. I've never heard anyone argue against flexibility, but it's clear that not everyone thinks change is good per se. Change is often seen not as evolution, but as criticism or rejection of older ways; therefore, this change might be easier for journalism students to embrace than for middle-aged professors and journalists. Remember, our students are the children of the baby boomers—many of whom are included in the decreased newspaper readership tracked since the 1960's. Few of our students, even the print majors, come from newspaper-reading households. They don't read newspapers every day unless we threaten them with news quizzes, yet they are constantly gathering and sharing information: online at desks, laptops and PDA's; texting or taking pictures with their cell phones, sometimes even starring on their Webcams.

This generation of students knows how to communicate in this era of round-the-clock deadlines; we need to show them how to tailor their energy to communicate with mass audiences, maybe even in service of the First Amendment.

The Converging Future

Many of us remember the transitions from hot type to cold type and from typewriters to word processors. If we squint myopically into the past we're bound to see reporters and editors who resisted these changes before being forced to adapt, plus a few who left the news business rather than change. The transition now from print journalist to multimedia journalist is meeting the same resistance throughout the industry, primarily from the over-40 crowd, who might feel they've changed enough. Some of these journalists are taking buyouts or retiring early in part because they're not sure they want to jump onto the good ship convergence. Many others are reserving judgment or trying to ignore this new technological future, fearing and rejecting the Internet and other digital tools just as their predecessors first ignored and then opposed the introduction of radio and then television as news media.

Thus, the area of least consensus among journalism educators and practitioners involves the tools we use to produce news and other information for our audience. Some of my colleagues in academia, like Hofstra's Carol Fletcher, who heads a committee studying convergence, believe we should expose students "to as many different technologies and strategies for storytelling as possible, without sacrificing the fundamentals." To guarantee this exposure, many universities have developed converged newsrooms or, like mine, are working to develop one.

Many, including me, also try to emphasize that the reporting skills and values useful in print are useful in all media and that all the "rules" stay the same whether the story is on paper or onscreen. This is the lead and the bottom line for journalism educators. A large part of our mission remains the

same: producing quality people who will produce good journalism, whatever their job titles or specs.

"There is always going to be a need for content, and honest reporters provide the best, most reliable, most trustworthy content," according to Carol R. Richards, recently retired deputy editorial page editor at Newsday on Long Island. "Newspapers have a product of great value, particularly in a marketplace where there's so much content and so little of it is thoroughly vetted," she said, even if "how we deliver it in the future is unclear."

The difficulty is not only in maintaining that reliable, trustworthy content, but also in convincing the audience that the journalists producing it still are different, dare I say better, than bloggers, interest-group commentators, or citizen monitors. Although the

notorious Matt Drudge has asserted that "Anyone with a modem can report on the world," he also has admitted that his original reporting may be accurate only 80 percent of the time. Unless we want to cede the powerful tools provided by the Internet to nonjournalistic information purveyors like Drudge, we must teach young journalists to understand the visual and digital world, plus yet-unseen technologies, and to use these to produce and distribute good journalism—news gathered and sourced with the traditional values.

In other words, while parts of the journalistic world are changing rapidly, in full color, ear-splitting audio and eye-catching video, other parts remain more essential than ever. We dinosaurs are still teaching our students all of the old tricks while preparing them to learn new ones; we can explain the evolution

of our industry as it's happening and help them to manage change. But as Professor Steven Knowlton, another colleague and former ink-stained wretch, said, "Journalism is still journalism and biased, unsourced junk is still biased, unsourced junk." It remains our task to teach the difference. ■

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Damaging Ripple Effects of Newsroom Cutbacks

'In previous downturns, rookie reporters reinvigorated the newsroom; now, there might not be any quality, young journalists to take over.'

By Joel Kaplan

It's not news to anyone who teaches journalism that the allure and prestige of being a journalist long ago vanished. For the past 10 years we've seen a steady stream of those who enter even the more prestigious communications schools planning to become journalists switching to alternative majors within the school, including film, advertising and the current favorite, public relations.

This movement away from journalism has been periodically explained by a number of factors: more money; better hours; more money; less stress; more money; better working conditions, and more money. Still, during the past decade my colleagues and I at the Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University have justified this noticeable outflow from our favored profession by rationalizing that the best and the brightest of our

students still flock to journalism. Public relations and advertising might get the numbers now, but we get the smartest, most aggressive, and most committed students. These are the students who are still captivated by our showing the movie, "All the President's Men." (Some still read the book, though only if assigned.) These students also tend to read and watch each year's Investigative Reporters and Editors' award-winning series.

This year only about 100 of the Newhouse students are newspaper majors out of 1,850 undergraduates. Almost twice that amount are magazine majors. We still have more than 300 broadcast journalism majors, though students who want to follow Marv Albert, Bob Costas, and Mike Tirico into sports broadcasting dominate that group. In contrast, we now have nearly 300 advertising majors, another 300 public

relations majors, and almost 400 majors in television, radio and film.

Given the state of journalism, it probably is not a bad thing that so few of our students are deciding to major in it. After all, in this age of newsroom cutbacks if we had as many newspaper majors as public relations majors we would be hearing from parents who have shelled out more than \$150,000 in tuition, room and board over four years and now want to know why their kids can't even get jobs as stringers for weekly newspapers.

Because of the small numbers, virtually all of our students who want to be newspaper reporters or copyeditors get to be. And some of them find jobs on great (or used to be great) newspapers. Others have their choice of several prestigious internships, which often turn into full-time jobs. And for the most part, they excel. They do great because

they received a good deal of personalized attention in college, did several internships over their college career, and because they are bright, motivated and inquisitive students.

Students and News

But events of the past year are having a profound effect on this cadre of students. It appears that newspapers are now making the same mistake with their future employees that they made with their old clients—the readers. Newspapers took their readers for granted and now have fewer and fewer, particularly younger ones. It is so rare on a college campus to see students reading a newspaper even though on our campus, like many others, they get *The New York Times* and *USA Today* for free. (The cost comes out of their student fees, for those of you seeking another circulation scandal.)

The truth is that most students no longer care about news, period. They think news no longer affects them or their lifestyle. If something important is happening in the world, then they are sure to find out about it from their friends, teachers or parents—in one of the four cell phone conversations per day they have with them. Instead of sneaking a peak at a newspaper during class, they are more likely to be glancing down at their cell phone (put on vibrate) to see the latest text message from a friend. When class is over, they don't take out a newspaper or magazine or glance at the latest news from CNN. Instead, they take their iPod from their backpack, put the earphones on, and go grab a cup of coffee.

This is true even of those hardcore, committed journalism students who were editors of their high school newspapers (at least those high schools who still have newspapers) or ran the high school television station. Even those students see the assignment of reading a daily newspaper the equivalent of reading a chapter of a textbook. Most journalism professors require at least one newspaper to be read each day by all members of their class. The result is that those papers are only read on the days of class in order to prepare for that

day's current events quiz.

How do I know this? Those free boxes of *The New York Times* and *USA Today* remain full on Fridays—the day when there are hardly any journalism classes.

These are some very discouraging signs as newspapers and other news organizations try to figure out a way to produce quality journalism in this era of significant downsizing.

Business Changes Affect Student Choices

But what I believe is even more frightening is the impact these changes are having on future journalists. Let me share one e-mail our newspaper listserv recently received from an undergraduate contemplating changing her major:

"So I'll admit it, I'm not sure about a future in journalism. This week Woodward gets grilled for protecting sources, the *L. Times* cuts 85 newsroom employees, the *Chicago Tribune* cuts 100, and *Knight Ridder* goes up for sale. On top of all of this, Google announces plans for Google Base, which has the potential to replace just about any written periodical anywhere. I'm concerned. I think many of us are. I was just wondering if there was anyone who could provide an explanation I haven't already heard providing a reason why I shouldn't be [unsure about a future in journalism.]"

Certainly that comment is not unusual. Similar sentiments probably echo across many newsrooms. But the difference is that a bright 20-year-old said this and not a jaded 55-year-old checking out his 401(k) statement. In previous downturns, rookie reporters reinvigorated the newsroom; now, there might not be any quality, young journalists to take over.

Last year, in my advanced reporting class, our most rigorous course for journalism majors, I started out with 13 students. Within one week, it was down to five. The students simply did not want to put in the time and effort required of the class. (I can't complain, I dubbed the remaining students the

"Fantastic Five," and they undertook a spirited investigation of the Syracuse Police Department and produced a terrific series that ran in the school newspaper.) Still, only two of those five will probably end up in journalism.

Here is what one of those students wrote on our listserv:

"Why do I feel like I'm the only newspaper major who is looking forward to working in the newsroom after I graduate in December? Of the undergrad newspaper students in my three Newhouse classes this semester, I can count on one hand the number of students who are looking for a long-term career in journalism. Sixty percent of students in one newspaper class I took last semester are headed for either grad or law school in May. One senior with a healthy newspaper resumé recently announced that he is headed for politics where he's going to make so much money that one day he will be able to 'buy me' as a reporter. Other senior newspaper majors are even choosing uncertainty over journalism. This idea has infected fresh newspaper alums too in at least two cases where people are looking to 'get out of newspapers' as though the career is some poverty-ridden country plagued by an oppressive dictatorship."

Journalism appears to be losing some committed students who were on the verge of entering its workforce. But the reverberations of this past year go far beyond that. Newhouse Dean David Rubin, who teaches about 75 freshmen in a general survey course, has a group of women in the class who have dubbed themselves the "Jumping Ship" students. They all came to Newhouse to major in broadcast journalism, and they have all decided to leave the major. Among the reasons they cited: general working conditions, including the inability to have a life outside of work; low salaries in small markets where they are unwilling to live; the entertainment nature of the business including the focus on soft news, and the general uncertainty about the future of news.

I fear that the difference between today and past newsroom recessions

is that in the past there was a strong cadre of young journalists ready and willing to do battle for low pay and under harsh conditions when media companies began to hire again. All indications make me think that this time, what lies ahead for newsrooms will be very different.

Is this depressing enough? It should be. But there is hope on the horizon. Innovative journalism schools are trying to teach students how to cope with the changing technological and economics dynamics of the modern-day newsroom.

And some of our students see the current crisis as an opportunity. As one of our freshman journalism majors wrote, "The Internet and new technology present significant challenges. This problem should make us excited, because it is our generation that will be given the chance to reinvent the newspaper. It's up to us to come up with a solution to the problem, something that's never been tried before."

Still, unless companies that now own news operations embrace that enthusiasm and take some chances, fewer and

fewer talented writers and top-notch reporters will aspire to journalism careers. And that would be the saddest development of all. ■

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Preserving What It Is Newsrooms Do

A teacher challenges his students 'to devise a proposal for the protection of newsroom independence and integrity' in a changing media environment.

By Stanley Flink

It was more than 20 years ago that I began teaching a seminar called "Ethics and the Media" at New York University School of Journalism. In 1985, these graduate students read newspapers and newsmagazines with some regularity and, though computers were in wide use, they were not nearly so pervasive as they have become. During our discussions of ethical issues, I asked students to think of themselves as a hypothetical editorial board, and this was something they could do with ease.

When, in the 1990's, I moved the course to Yale, a dramatic shift from print to cable television and online services was already happening. During the past five years, not more than a handful of undergraduates in this seminar have read the news on paper or watched network news. They were (and are) dependent on the Internet and are increasingly interested in blogs, those self-anointed online sites largely given to opinion on public affairs and lately devoted to highlighting errors or falsity in mainstream reporting. Students, who seem usually to seek out blogs with opinions in concert with their own, credit blogs with being a

kind of "vox populi" in the tradition of free expression protected by the First Amendment. I don't quarrel with that assumption, but I ask them to consider the challenge of arriving at some kind of consensus, to say nothing about truth, out of multitudinous voices and hidden agendas.

As part of our classroom discussion, I've asked them to consider how these forms of "new media" might replicate the efforts of mainstream news organizations that employ experienced reporters and editors engaged in the difficult business of producing reliable information on a daily basis. In a question I put to my hypothetical 2005 editorial board members, I asked if they regard the generic newsroom as an entity portable from print to television to Internet. (To ask the question a bit differently, I wanted to know if they support a process of truth-seeking by talented and skilled practitioners working together with the assistance of technology, but not in thrall to it.) The class—average age, 20—voted in the affirmative.

I next challenged them to devise a proposal for the protection of newsroom independence and integrity. To prepare for that project, they read and

discussed various texts (Confucius, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle) on the origin of ethical principles, on the evolution of freedom of expression and political discourse (Milton, Kant, Mill), and about the critical importance of a free press in the formation of the United States (the Founding Fathers and the constitutional debates).

With sadness I must acknowledge that during all of my years of teaching "Ethics and the Media," I've encountered among the students little knowledge of American history, particularly in regard to the constitutional issues that are inseparable from the role of the press in assuring an informed electorate. The concept that a nation defines itself by the deal it strikes with its press is not commonly discussed these days but, most simply put, no government can function as a democracy if it does not permit unfettered freedom of expression. In this context, students read Walter Lippmann's "Public Opinion" and Alexander Bickel's "The Morality of Consent." And as a class, we examined two critical Supreme Court cases—New York Times Co. v. Sullivan, which eliminated sedition charges as a means of silencing the press, and the Pentagon

Papers case, which confronted national security issues not unlike those being debated in regard to global terrorism. Finally, we visited the long-neglected, 1947 Hutchins Commission report, "A Free and Responsible Press," which laid out moral requirements still timely more than half a century later.

Protecting the Newsroom

All of this preceded the attempt to craft a proposal to protect the modern newsroom from the budgetary and technological forces that are buffeting it today. Though I acknowledged from the start that much of what we were contemplating wore a tinge of romanticism, I said that should not discourage thoughtful resolve. And it didn't. Some of the goals offered by the class, however, were unrealistic.

In the first draft, the students envisioned a very substantial foundation to be funded by the media corporations (and perhaps other benefactors) for the purpose of subsidizing salary increases for journalists who produced outstanding work. The notion that large corporations would donate millions to an outside organization that might reward some of their employees, or the employees of other corporations, was not explored with much sophistication.

Back to the drawing board. In the second draft, they lowered their sights. Up for discussion this time was an internal fund that could be managed by outside directors at each corporation who would have editorial experience and primary responsibility for newsroom compensation. The fund would reward excellence based on the judgment of experts. This would enhance individual careers, but in the students' view it would also be emblematic of the parent corporation's commitment.

We began a conversation about the unique status of news organizations, which are private enterprises with a constitutional protection. There is no other business with a similar obligation to serve the public interest. But the irony of ethical and enterprising journalism is that what is in the public interest does not always interest the public.

Add to this conundrum the realization that awakening and reawakening the public to moral standards has never been a natural pastime for journalists in a competitive marketplace.

Nonetheless the students were learning that newsrooms, which are generic centers of newsgathering, editing and editorializing, are confronted today with great uncertainty. As traditional media outlets and publications seek a base in cyberspace, the economic viability of newsrooms suffers. But this does not alter the fact that only vigorous, independent reporting can counter the charge that the First Amendment is being used to reinforce concentration of private power in the hands of conglomerates that now control cable

Not much has changed— except the stakes.

and television, telephone and computer networks, as well as some publishing franchises. Irrefutably, the power to distribute information is potentially the power to select content.

With these thoughts in mind, the "board members" turned to a more practical approach involving an internal fund. They were prompted to head in this direction by a reminder I made of the kind of communication with which they are most familiar—the Internet—and a suggestion that they research the growth of online services already offered by major media organizations. These include archival materials, research and analysis, maps, photographs, videos and DVDs. Fees are, or soon will be, charged for these services as well as, on some news sites, payment to read specific daily content. And advertisers are using these media Web sites because of the precision with which specific audiences can be targeted.

The students' final proposal recommends that some reasonable portion of online revenues should go to the "Newsroom Fund." Their reasoning in selecting this revenue base was two-fold: Most or all of the material and services are supplied by newsroom personnel,

and the fund will balance the fact that stock options, offered to others in the corporation, are inappropriate for reporters and editors who might have to cover the activities of separate interests owned by their parent company.

Clearly media organizations contributing to a "Newsroom Fund" will have earned the trust of the public—whatever technology is used to reach them. To keep that trust, the students agreed, requires independence and financial viability. Ultimately, the confidence of the consumer will attach to the news organizations that demonstrate consistent, uncompromising ethical standards.

In composing our proposal, we adopted three suggestions made in 2002 to newspaper companies by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Press, comprised of nine well-known senior journalists. These were: Outside directors, with editorial experience, to monitor the quality of news operations; outside directors to supervise newsroom compensation policy, and prohibition of stock options for newsroom staff and outside directors.

The Hutchins Commission report prophetically observed: "The quality of the press depends in large part upon the capacity and independence of the working members in the lower ranks. At the present time their wages and prestige are low and their tenure precarious. Adequate recognition and adequate contracts seem to us an indispensable prerequisite to the development of professional personnel."

Not much has changed—except the stakes. The question looming largest now concerns the dangers of extreme political fragmentation and the increasing individual isolation. If a social compact is to survive in the digital age, it will need the help of dedicated newsrooms. ■

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