THE IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA ON THE PRACTICE OF JOURNALISM

by

Valerie Lambros
A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
English

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Date: _April 29, 2008_   Spring Semester 2008
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA ON THE PRACTICE OF JOURNALISM

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The rise of the Internet has altered many industries, including the field of journalism.

With its multitude of resources and myriad online tools, the Web affords those who use it

the ability to quickly reach many people all over the globe. However, these same

characteristics have brought about unforeseen challenges for news professionals and have

presented a host of items to consider in today's wired world. This thesis examines the

encroachment of the Web imperative on traditional journalistic practices by focusing on

three aspects of the newest medium: 1) the immediacy of the Web and the subsequent

imperative to update frequently, often with little new to say; 2) the ability to track

audiences as never before, with the result that newsroom staff and business managers

seek new ways to engage, document, and track the audience through eye-grabbing stories

and images and interactive features, hoping to keep viewers coming back in a highly

competitive medium; and 3) the inherent ability for anyone and everyone to publish

online and the pressure that public accessibility places on the professional news outlets.

By analyzing the input of practitioners in the field, we learn that not only do feelings about the Internet's impact on the telling of news vary widely, so do the perceived notions for what we as the audience should expect as the Web looms even larger in our day-to-day lives.

Introduction

When I was a television newsroom intern in Baltimore in the summer of 1997, I wrote copy and ripped scripts on a schedule. The six o'clock news always came at the same time every night, but that didn't necessarily mean that the "breaking news" was any newer than four or five hours old. The stories read by the anchors off the TelePrompters would make it to the public before the newspapers could get it in the morning paper, but to me it still felt old and—even if it was only for a few hours—as if I knew some great secret few others knew. While I thought that was kind of cool at the time, I still thought it was a slight failing of the field. The faster people had information that mattered to them, the faster they could act on it.

Later, from 2000 to 2004, when I worked at a weekly newspaper that covered local news in a seaside South Carolina town, the only way we could claim to "break news" was if a meeting, a fire, or a bad accident happened late Wednesday evening, we were the sole news outlet represented at the scene, and we got the piece written and ready for print before the galleys went to press. This rarely was the case. Instead, we most often did what I will call news features, or news examinations. We could rarely bring anything to our readership they hadn't at least heard of in passing for several days. I seemed to be going a bit backwards in my urgency to get news to the public, but I enjoyed writing features, so I let it pass.

Ordinarily, I'm known for having a fairly large amount of patience, but when it comes to wanting to know something, I can be downright intolerable. Given spare time, I devour newspapers and news magazines, and scour the usual suspects (CNN, MSNBC) online or on television for information about what's going on. I enjoy newspapers and magazines for their in-depth analyses; however, these days – and especially when the story is an emerging one – I'm much more apt to seek my updates on the Web, where outlets have the capacity to update readers within minutes – not hours or days – of the latest events. I suspect I am not alone in seeking news this way, and if my methods of news viewing have changed and expanded along with those of many other people, I can only wonder what it's done to the journalism profession at large. This thesis examines how the Internet has affected the practice of journalism and argues that the alterations to this practice courtesy of the Web medium have caused a change in the field's traditional standard.

Current Discussion

Journalism and the exchanging of news have been critical functions of a civilized society since the days of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Since that time, of course, the technologies, methods, and participants have changed, but the core of the equation has stayed the same for centuries. An event, a decision, or a crisis happens, and someone entrusted with the responsibility of telling the tale recounts the story for everyone else.

However, with the advent of the Internet and the inherent ability of the public to publish, post, and broadcast their own brand of news, "everyone else" isn't content to remain members of a passive audience. The methods available to report the news have

grown and technological advances have forever altered the environment in which news is delivered. Anyone with a computer, a modem, and the inclination to put forth the necessary effort can put their ideas and commentary into this tangible ether. This new possibility for popular participation catapults news professionals into uncharted territory.

Additionally, the Web has altered the classic vision of reporting by obscuring the concept of universal deadlines, ramping up the speed with which news can be distributed, and opening up the newsroom to social communities that before interfaced with the editorial staff through letters to the editor and ombudsmen. How should journalists see themselves and the career they chose now that the game has changed, become more complex, and more players crowd the field?

In the 2006 seventh edition of *Mass Media and American Politics*, author Doris A. Graber writes, "Web sites…now rival and often surpass newspapers in completeness of coverage of breaking news" (133). The field of journalism on the Web is an evolving and still-growing one, filled with tools and opinions that are forever in flux as more and more people find themselves online and taking part in the largest worldwide conversation ever. Long-standing members of the traditional journalism profession finds themselves defending that the idea that the craft will survive this newest incarnation of the field. "The Internet is just the latest in a long series of advances that contribute to the demassification of the media," writes journalism professor Philip Meyer in his book, *The Vanishing Newspaper* (2). The real purpose of journalism, writes journalist James Fallows, "is to satisfy the general desire for information to have meaning" (129). Even casual observations of consumer trends play some part in the discussion of how the

Internet is impacting journalism. In one such essay posted by Neil Morton, the editor of

www.shift.com, on January 18, 2002, and later quoted in a 2005 volume that highlights

opposing viewpoints, he states that though he grew up reading newspapers, he finds

himself and others like him more and more drawn to online news sources. "With the net,

now *we* go and find the news; the news doesn't get selected for us by editors and writers.

We go out and discuss various viewpoints on political events in threads and discussion

boards rather than having them dictated to us by op-ed pages with their own agenda"

(168). It's the one place where variety, curiosity, and honest debate live on unfettered by

corporate motive. The concept of the Internet as an open forum has even garnered

judicial protection. As quoted by authors Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu in their book *Who*

Controls the Internet?: Illusions of a Borderless World, cyberspace, wrote Supreme

Court Justice John Paul Stevens for the majority in the 1996 case of ACLU v. Reno, is

"located in no particular geographical location but available to anyone, anywhere in the

world" (21). Individual people, connecting to other individuals, via their own computers

in one big imaginary meeting room.

　　But with more people flocking to the Internet for their news, perhaps there is a risk

that consumers will accept online news without questions and without perspective on

how the evolution of news arrived at that point. "Because of their limited experience

with the traditional news media, they do not become trained to know which online

sources are credible and which ones are not" (Johnson, Kaye 634). Fallows is also

skeptical that the coming wave of ordinary citizens seeking news will be able to discern

proper reporting as the Internet age soldiers on. "Enfeebling doubts about whether the

public even notices the difference between a good and bad reporting job have been encouraged by the rise of the so-called 'new media'" (70).

Many of today's journalists, whose careers have straddled both traditional forms and new media, offer us a vast trove of information and insight onto this new era in the field. We must capture this moment in the field's history if we are to gain proper perspective on how new media and traditional forms interplay now, and before we reach a point in which there remains no one who remembers news without the Internet.

If the Internet was itself a person, it would just now be old enough to vote. Born in 1989, the World Wide Web has come a long way from its humble beginnings on one solitary Web server as the brain child of Tim Berners-Lee. Though Berners-Lee envisioned the Web as a read-write forum, dial-up connections and minimal read-only informational content constituted the very best of the Web in those early years, and the thought of Internet security was almost laughable. Broadband services now enable users to launch Web sites and post photos and video in the blink of an eye all around the globe, active blogs in cyberspace numbered more than 106 million in September 2007 according to the techie site Technorati.com, and the threat of invasions of personal privacy through interlinked social sites is a very real possibility. Perhaps because of the Web's current iteration, it is difficult to remember what life was like before we could be measured in countable clicks, page cookies, and browsing history. The news evolution has become a critical part of this change.

Scholars and theorists are currently considering this evolution, and voices on all sides and from all backgrounds are weighing in on whether the Internet and all its

peripheral accoutrements work to the detriment or betterment of the institution that is news. There are plenty of angles to consider, including how working digitally impacts the news product, and considering what say audiences should have in the product they are presented.

Longtime journalists and champions of the profession have been biting their fingernails for years over what the Internet and its resources could do to hinder, and even damage, the profession they so respect. In this new realm ripe for study, both formal scholars and pundits have a variety of topics to consider. One debate centers around the ethics of posting news as it happens, rather than marinating the news for perhaps a few hours and teasing out the most pertinent parts for public consumption, and the threat to credibility that comes with trying to be the first with an often-incomplete and unchecked story. Most people fully recognize that the Internet is great for speed, but some hesitate to condone the up-to-the-minute availability of information as an all-good thing. Even more than a decade ago, scholars and critics were dialing in the Internet for scrutiny and examination. In a 1994 piece printed in the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, Jay Black wrote, "Gatekeeping procedures—if any—are slipshod; much of the 'news' being delivered globally is error-ridden if not totally untrue" (131). Author John V. Pavlik, the executive director for the Center for New Media at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, backs up this fear of a poorly-produced news product when he talks of the growing online public going to the Web for their news in his 2001 book, *Journalism and New Media*: "Of course, the Internet provides a lot of information of

dubious value and origin… How can a news consumer tell what's reliable? It's not necessarily easy, and it makes going online potentially hazardous" (28).

There is also a fair amount of debate over what the power of the people to publish, post, and promote their own news adds to the credibility threat. Authors Mark Deuze and Daphna Yeshua wrote in a 2001 piece printed in the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* that "most people in the field of journalism more or less agree on one thing: The Internet is particularly affecting journalism in terms of its credibility… in an anonymous global communications environment where everyone is both producer and consumer" (274). While that article was written some six years ago, it's still relevant today. On blogging, David Kline and Dan Burstein acknowledge in their book *Blog!*, "What began as a hobby is evolving into a new medium that is changing the landscape for journalists and policymakers alike" (84). Some authors have more harsh criticism to offer about the newest newcomers to the journalism table. Andrew Keen, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur, finds in his 2007 book, *The Cult of the Amateur*, that the constant regurgitation of mindless ordinary online matter by regular people is something like the blind leading the blind. "The Internet's infinite monkey experiment is not limited to the written word. T.H. Huxley's nineteenth-century typewriter has evolved into not only the computer, but also the camcorder, turning the Internet into a vast library for user-generated video content" (5).

Online reporting by both news practitioners and engaged audiences has led to something of an evolution in journalist's role in newsmaking. Jane B. Singer relates in a 2006 article in *Journalism &Mass Communication Quarterly* that reporters using the

interactive nature of the Web to connect with their audiences signals a "movement toward integration of the traditional role of the journalist as provider of credible, accurate information with the nature of an open, participatory medium" (275). This change represents a shift away from journalists as gate-keepers who decided what their audiences did and did not see. Dan Gillmor, the founder of the Center for Citizen Media and the founding director of Arizona State University's Knight Center for Digital Media Entrepreneurship at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, agrees that journalists must take advantage of this new interactive capability in his 2006 book: "Core values… will remain important, and professionals will still be the gatekeepers in some ways, but the ability to shape larger conversations—and to provide context—will be at least as important as the ability to gather facts and report them" (xxv). Long gone are the days in which news practitioners got the final word when it came to the news. With something of an interesting twist on things, even conservative voices find that the openness of the Internet and its read-write capacity should be considered a boon to public discourse. "The power of elites to determine what was news via a tightly controlled dissemination system was shattered. The ability and authority to distribute text are now truly democratized," writes right-wing pundit Hugh Hewitt in his book *Blog* (70-71).

Studies show people are also concerned with the thought that the continued rise of the Internet will give way to the demise of the printed newspaper. Pavlik illustrates this concern. "Imagine a library that carries the equivalent of 4,925 daily newspapers from all over the globe. Stop imagining: it's here. The Internet provides more news content than

that every day, most of it free. So it's not surprising that increasing numbers of the

world's estimated 359 million-plus Internet users are going online for their news" (28).

By now, these figures are surely out-of-date, and I would venture an educated guess that

it is not looking any better for the print newspapers than it did six years ago. Similarly,

there is real reason why fans of newspapers are a bit nervous about the Web's continued

prominence in the marketplace. Though widely read, the Internet doesn't present the

money-making strategy that has historically come from printing advertisements in

newsprint, so many times original content is not generated strictly for that medium.

According to scholar Michael B. Salwen in the 2005 book *Online News and the Public*,

most publishers and general managers of news groups "fear that too much original online

content could compete with and threaten the main offline organizations, their primary

moneymakers" (48). And with most online resources being provided free of charge, the

result of the financial equation isn't in managements' favor.

  With alarming premonition, authors Scott L. Althaus and David Tewksbury foresaw

the tender balance newspapers would have to strike with the adolescent Internet in order

to stay alive as they documented in their 1998 paper—later reprinted as an article in the

journal *Political Communication*. "The popularity of Web-based news services and the

burgeoning number of on-line news outlets raise the possibility that sizeable audiences

might abandon newspapers and television news in favor of an on-line news medium that

is in many ways more convenient, timely, and information-rich than traditional print and

broadcast media" (22). With declining subscription numbers and greater potions of the

population having regular access to the Internet, this prediction seems to have been on the mark.

This isn't to say that traditional journalists are fighting a losing battle. Far from it. What *successful* traditional journalists and news outlets are doing is becoming multi-dimensional. Many traditional newspapers also now carry an online component that handles as much, if not more than, their print editions. For example, CBS.com recently completed a redesign of their news site that allows for more emphasis on video and the ability to add local newspaper headlines to the home page. By using all online tools at their disposal, Web news outlets are simultaneously able to be a newspaper, a broadcast station, and a portable radio program by embedding downloadable podcasts that play immediately or filter directly onto a consumer's MP3 player. The news organization— like many others—has diversified, and it has worked to become all things to all people. However, there is also some fear that exists concerning becoming too personalized to the individual reader in a way that would limit exposure to other news that they might find interesting or worth their while. David T.Z. Mindich reflects on this point in his 2005 book, *Tuned Out: Why Americans Under 40 Don't Follow the News*. "E-mail, Instant Messenger, and countless Web sites give us a "daily me," tailored to our particular tastes; we are all beat…reporters now" (77-78). It seems online outlets are caught in something of a predicament. While they want to be appealing to their audiences and keep them interested, they are also compelled to do what journalists are trained to do from the start: tell the stories people need to know, not just those they want to know.

The stories themselves on Web sites have also undergone a transformation with the new palette of technological possibilities rendered by the medium itself. By providing hyperlinks to referenced critical information covered elsewhere, the online version also has more flexibility and can use its real estate much more efficiently than a print publication that must explain every reference as if the reader is seeing it for the first time. With online news sites, if an outlet wants to talk about excessive police force and references the tasering incident that occurred at the John Kerry speech in September 2007, the writer can merely link to the appropriate YouTube link to bring the reader up to speed if he or she hasn't yet seen it. But for those readers who have, they can just keep on reading and bypass the included link. It's the modern version of a footnote. However, there is some discussion over whether this changes not only the content, but the contextual reading experience itself, likely driving a reader deeper into a Web site and into other related content do to the hyperlinks' convenience. Mark Tremayne concluded in his 2004 *Journalism &Mass Communication Quarterly* article on the use of hyperlinks, "it is reasonable to conclude that the time a reader spends on such presentation would, on average, exceed the time spent on a story that did not provide any linked material. The Web could drive coverage… in part, by its technology" (250).

Even this simple tactic of using hyperlinks is a point of concern for the old guard. In his 2005 book, *Digitizing the News*, author-scholar Pablo J. Boczkowski commented on the regular use of links in news pieces after watching articles come together in the *New York Times CyberTimes* newsroom: "their presence affected the character of storytelling by reducing the space devoted to background information within an article.

This was most noticeable in the case of stories unfolding over extended periods, in which authors provided a series of links to past articles instead of … summarizing context and history" (82). To Boczkowski, this use of hyperlinks in place of further explanation of news terms presents a challenge to the editorial gatekeeping process. What do you decide to link to, and does that serve the interests of the story, or is it just a convenient shortcut that keeps reporters from having to flesh out their stories?

The addition of technology in news reporting extends beyond hyperlinks, however. New media has the potential to offer reporters and their audiences a new way to receive material of even the most basic kind. Jeff Jarvis, associate professor at City University of New York's Graduate School of Journalism, writes on his www.buzzmachine.com in a June 3, 2007, posting about the reporter staple, the interview, "Why should journalism be immune from improvement? Thanks to email interviews, as I've said before, subjects can give more accurate, complete, and cogent answers to questions."

According to his 2004 book, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, Joe Trippi, who ran Howard Dean's unsuccessful bid for the presidency but learned volumes on how to effectively use the Internet in campaigning, (something he later applied to the campaign of John Edwards), the lessons of the failed attempt only strengthened his resolve that the way to win a race was by "taking democracy to the last place where democracy stood a chance. The Internet" (xvii). In a 1996 piece included in the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* scholar Singer agrees that the Internet may be the one place where divergent thinking and wayward sentiments have the best chance to be included in a democratic discussion. "It may not be possible—or even desirable—to change the nature of the

'virtual anonymity' afforded the participants in online political discussion. There is a certain freedom in such anonymity that may encourage" (101).

And freedom extended to the Web's audiences opens the door to some ingenuity in how these thoughts and opinions will be shared. The more ambitious and talented online contributors post enough material that they not only add to the conversation, but lead parts of it by picking up details the professionals miss. *San Francisco Chronicle* staff writer Matthew B. Stannard commented in an April 9, 2006, online piece, that participation by the public in the information age may be good competition for an industry that has seen its fair share of corporate mergers and takeovers, sagging market share, and few technological advances specific to the news media. "The Internet has given readers unprecedented access to overseas newspapers, original transcripts of White House briefings…and blogs written by American soldiers, amateur journalists, armchair critics, Iraqi citizens and the next-door neighbor," he wrote. The Web has also developed its own novel concept on the sharing and disseminating of news in a way that has never before occurred. In an essay within his 2007 book, *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media*, Tremayne picks up his point from an earlier journal article to reinforce what the technology has done to the informal news process. "Because of its network structure, the power of the blogosphere comes in its collective reporting power and its informal peer-review process" (265). By achieving "group-bestowed credibility" through peer review, the blog's message is promoted by being highlighted on a main page or tagged in a prominent way. News professionals are taking notice of this trend, and many mainstream media sites now contain a place where individuals can leave their own input.

Adding citizen content reflects one way in which news is changing with the Internet's rise, among myriad others. One of those ways is the transformative debate now about what exactly allows someone to claim he or she is a journalist. In his 2007 book, *We're All Journalists Now*, Scott Gant, a Washington attorney and constitutional law scholar, writes "this transformation should help bring into focus a reality we somehow lost sight of—that journalism is an endeavor, not a job title; it is defined by activity, not by how one makes a living, or the quality of one's work" (6). By this sentiment, at least, it is clear some members of the larger community are not put off by the entry of newcomers to journalism courtesy of the Web.

However, this rapid-fire new medium has given rise to concerns relating to reporting speed, writing style, time given to analysis, interactivity with the audience, and cross-medium competition. The searchable, informational bulletin board that is today's Internet could just be seen as the common, evolutionary next step of professional news mediums, community newsletters, and ham radio, but in many respects it has become much more than that. By appearing via the same medium as honest-to-goodness news sites, the news gathering, opining, and posturing done by novices may gain a sense of validity, much as anything published in newsprint takes on the aura and authority of a newspaper, especially now that more and more people who read their news online do so without a background that includes more traditional forms. Journalists in the current environment have innumerably more pressures being placed on them due to the effects of what the new medium affords.

Scholars and pundits, then, tell us there is plenty of change occurring within the news field – the steady invention of new online tools, the drive to reaffirm credibility, the need to supply fresh online material, even where the public fits in the big picture. What I feel is important to understand is how practitioners in the field of news are living these changes in work culture and attitude and what these experiences represent for the news field. Just what are the effects of lightning-quick posting speed, audience engagement, and universal accessibility?

Do practitioners embrace these changes, or do they fear the downfall of some aspects of journalism they hold in high regard? How have they seen their work practices and patterns change as these shifts have arrived? And what do they think the future holds for them, and for everyone who consumes the news? By eliciting and analyzing the views of a representative few, I've identified three areas of critical importance that show discernible changes in work patterns and attitudes that should offer a new perspective to other analyses in the field. These areas are: the immediacy of the Web medium, the ability to track and interact with audiences via Web tools, and the ability to allow anyone to publish online that today's Web affords. Furthermore, the practitioner views on how the practice and presentation of news has changed for journalists, as well as what they feel these shifts mean for the future of their field, fill in a void in the academic conversation and invite further analysis.

The news industry is at a peculiar crossroads with, among many other things, itself, and so it is important to know how the essential stakeholders in the journalism field are experiencing and living these shifts to their work.

The bedrock of this thesis is the collected reflections on work trends of some practitioners who cover the news. Their accounts are indispensable – not only for the insight each offers on the individuals, but for how much they capture the real-time state of affairs in the field. Attempts to find solid published resources on this one topic become a lesson in trying to hit a moving target. Many other studies focus on other impacts of the online progression – political ramifications, social effects of joining communities, or perhaps the impact of sharing content between countries and continents – but few touch on the effects the medium is having on the profession. And nearly as soon as resources on cultural trends can be updated, they're once again rendered irrelevant by the steady morphing of Web 2.0 and the dawning of a new set of priorities and realities.

Few have broached the topic of how this Web evolution is changing not only the face of news, but its soul – the way the profession itself is being conceptualized and practiced. Merely trying to get a handle on the enormity of how much the Internet is used for news purposes – due to its propensity to constantly change the details of the news product itself – is daunting. It seems as though Althaus and Tewksbury knew the inherent complexity of studying this type of topic almost a decade ago. "The continuing evolution of Internet technology and consumption patterns ensures that any study of the general population's Internet use will be extremely time-bound" (22). Likewise, in her 2006 *Journalism &Mass Communication Quarterly* article studying content in both print and online newspapers, Lindsay H. Hoffman remarked, "the changing nature of the Internet environment demands that researchers take into account how both its audience

and its content must continually be monitored" (69). Though the study of audiences is out of the realm of this study, it is telling to note how much of a challenge it is to examine this ever-changing resource.

However, this is the ideal time to have a discussion about the impact of the Web on the work of journalists. Now that online news processes have grown and matured to a point where the product is a direct competitor of more traditional forms of news delivery, it stands to be the perfect opportunity to study the impact the Internet is having on the practice of journalism. While there still remain a cadre of reporters and editors who remember life—and work—before the Web, analyzing their current views on how the new medium is affecting their work is essential to understanding the latest evolution in news.

Methods

To learn about how the Internet is impacting journalists' work lives, I've interviewed practitioners from a variety of levels and specialties about their current experiences in print and on line journalism, and then analyzed those responses for common themes and trends. Each participant identified him- or herself as a journalist, either a writer or editor, or both. All six participants live and work in the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area, and the institutions for which they respectively work vary in both size and scope, from a highly specialized publication intended for human resources professionals to a newspaper company's Web site whose print product predictably reaches 700,000 subscribers a day (the Internet audience is more difficult to approximate). All of the participants have at least 10 years in the field of journalism; half

are reporters, half have more editorial responsibilities. Likewise, participants are equally balanced between those who now work online after having started their careers in print, and those who work primarily in print but have seen their careers be affected by the advent of the Internet. As practitioners in a field that has shown enormous change due to the Web, the study participants, with their knowledge of some history of the field as well as their current involvement in it, are ideal representatives to discuss the trends impacting the news profession today. Pseudonyms have been used for all participants, and some descriptive elements of their workplaces have been altered or obscured to further protect anonymity. All measures have been taken to comply with the approval given for this project by the university's Human Subjects Review Board, and all participants were made aware of their rights in advance of the interviews and willingly agreed to be a part of the project.

Access to each interviewee was gained either by my own previous relationship to that person, or through a friend's introduction. Interviews were conducted between August and October 2007 and reflect the interview subject's opinions and experiences at the time of the interview. Each interview was tape recorded, lasted from 45 minutes to 90 minutes (depending on the interviewee's available time), and a set of standard questions were asked to garner a core of like-framed responses. From those core responses, the remainder of the interview focused on eliciting more information on ideas that seemed as though they could be explained in greater detail, oftentimes through additional questions. The taped interviews were then transcribed for a total of 55 single-spaced pages, analyzed through open coding to identify and track like themes and

concerns, and then related responses were corralled together to form outlines of discussable material.

All of the interview subjects identified themselves as belonging to the field of journalism in some fashion, though their roles in the field are different. I introduce them here.

Brad Jameson is a high-level editor with 20 years in the journalism field; his first eight years were spent in newspapers, and the last 12 years have been worked in online mediums. Drawn to the idea of journalism in college through his love of sports, Jameson found newspapers couldn't keep up with how quickly he wanted new information. Originally from another large metropolitan city, Jameson found it torturous to wait for the box scores to come out in the newspaper's morning edition telling him how his favorite hometown sports team did in its game the previous night. He believed things could be faster and jumped when he got an offer to work in the early iteration of an online component to a newspaper. He's been digital ever since.

Kim Patrick has been a journalist for 17 years, writing mainly for newspapers and now also their companion web sites, as both print and Web products emerge from the same newsroom. A correspondent for a specialized news outlet, Patrick also freelances, contributing to a number of other newspapers and magazines, and she greatly admires the print mediums and their solid history. She has served as a news editor, but prefers writing over editing.

Sara Lessert has been in the journalism field for 25 years, mostly as an editor, although she has also covered events as a reporter. For all but the last year, she has

worked in print, but recently made the switch to the publication's online offering due to –
what she called – "the forward momentum of our industry." As she watches novice
reporters graduating from journalism school armed with enormous skill sets, Lessert said
she finds herself constantly adapting to an ever-changing world in which she expects
some new facet of the medium to be just around the corner. Just when she thinks she's
mastered the latest gadget there is, she said, yet another web creation presents itself.

Harold Keith has been a journalist for 18 years, all with the same company, and has
been on his current publication for 13 years. The organization publishes a number of
products, some hardcopy, some digital; all focus on the workings of the federal
government and their impacts on the nation's economic heartbeat. Keith's audience is
very narrow, but he too sees a trend toward all-digital media. In fact, he said he would
not be surprised if his company ceased to print its paper versions in the not too distant
future.

Karen Wendt leads a something of a dual life. Not only has she freelanced for a
major news outlet for the past 10 years, she also maintains a well-respected blog that is
now going on its third year. As a blogger, she is chef, maitre d' and dishwasher or, as she
says, "the mistress of my own leaky ship." Interestingly enough, her blogging has lead to
her being considered an expert in her field, and Wendt hopes to one day be paid for her
efforts, as its post-as-you-are-able daily schedule fits in better with her busy home life
than her freelancing does, which is sporadic.

Lisa Dieter is a publisher of a specialty parenting magazine that has an enormous
online presence. Originally from the tech field, Dieter recognized how print mediums

were going to be influenced by online as soon as the Internet began gaining steam. She

began her latest publication by establishing an online community first, and used it to

drive traffic to her magazine, and vice versa once the magazine was off the ground.

 Not everyone I interviewed was thrilled about how their work had begun migrating

away from print. They all recognize it is the way of future news reporting; however,

some of them had needed a bit of convincing to embrace the Web as a news tool, and

even with the understanding of the Web as the most dynamic of mediums, there are

different levels of appreciation for the online resource among my participants. A couple

of the interview subjects still cling with nostalgia to the smell of fresh newsprint and talk

longingly about having more extended periods of time to coax and massage a story until

it was a work of journalistic art. Still the others, more open to the idea that news—like

any other industry—is prone to change, seem more agreeable to the idea that their work

lives have also had to adjust to fit the rhythm of the latest form. Their opinions,

accordingly, reflect this diversity of opinion.

 When possible, I met with the participants in person and recorded our conversations

by digital recorder. One participant was interviewed over the phone, and I recorded our

conversation utilizing speakerphone and my digital voice recorder. One participant – the

blogger and part-time freelance writer – completed the interview via email which, given

the circumstances surrounding her work, I found to be appropriate. All others were

conducted in person.

 As a former news reporter myself, I was eager to hear how the industry had

changed since I last filed a story. Coming from a small newspaper that had a minimal

online presence, I had not experienced the added dimension the Web is placing upon the profession today, so I was curious more than anything to understand how others were actively living this change. I approached this project with something of a reporter's zeal – by doing research, interviewing critical stakeholders, then putting all the pieces together to discover what it all meant. In Appendix A, you will find a list of questions used in this study. The practitioners' responses to these questions became the basis for discussing the three encroachment areas – the immediacy of the Web, the ability to track and interact with audiences, and the ability for anyone to post and publish online.

Overview: Always Online

      The most dominant, pervasive theme in all the interviews was that of encroachment: encroachment of the Web imperative on traditional journalistic practices. I will explore the responses of the interview subjects as they relate to this concept of encroachment on the profession, as well as what the encroachment means to these journalists on a personal level. The responses will illuminate not only the affordances of the Web medium that impact the overall news effort, but the attitudes and feelings that accompany these impacts as news practitioners react to the stealthy trespasses made on the product and the profession by doing work in the Internet age. That encroachment is the result of several marked trends in the field, which I record in this report. Those trends are: 1) the immediacy of the Web and the subsequent imperative to update frequently, often with little new to say; 2) the ability to track audiences as never before, with the result that newsroom staff and business managers seek new ways to engage, document, and track

the audience through eye-grabbing stories and images and interactive features, hoping to keep viewers coming back in a highly competitive medium; and 3) the inherent ability for anyone and everyone to publish online and the pressure that public accessibility places on the professional news outlets. The collective result of these trends seems to point to an erosion of the traditionally acknowledged journalism standard, and to an evolution that has produced a new norm in the field. The interview subjects all agree these trends exist; however, there are mixed feelings on these changes and what they mean for the profession.

If there was one common factor of every interview, it was this need to communicate to me that due to the Web's constant availability for public viewing, there is an almost-constant demand to remain vibrant, new, and fresh in the public eye – a need to never present old news. To do anything less than that would seem a failure – not just that you've failed the audience – but that you've failed the medium. If the Web can bring you the newest information, the participants collectively emoted, then you had better be putting up something new as often as you can. It is because of what the Web affords to all who use it – speed, the ability to be interactive and engaged on the end of both the producer and the consumer, and the ability to be the author of new content without need of a printing press – that a little earthquake has occurred in the way people craft, experience, and work in the news field.

For example, Kim Patrick has seen the gradual landslide to online throughout her career. When she first began her career as a journalist nearly two decades ago, her

publication used the Web strictly to look for information, and had no responsibility to put more news out for public consumption. Now, that's all changed. As she tells it,

> They automatically will take my stories that supposedly I generate for print, but they get posted to the Web almost right away. And then they get recycled in the paper so it's almost like the Web is, in my company, the Web is the main push right now and the paper has almost become secondary. If you're anybody who reads the Internet, you've probably seen all my stories before that weekly paper comes out.

Patrick says this dynamic, to be blunt, is killing the newspaper. Thankfully for her, her publication's audience is very broad: some readers are young, new media mobile consumers who like the electronic resource, while others are older readers who still enjoy the feel of papers between their fingers and the faint smell of newsprint when they turn the page. For this reason, she doesn't imagine the physical paper will ever go away—at least as long as there's a group of people still around who want to read it.

But Patrick, like many others like her, is seeing a number of decidedly curious trends happening in the field of journalism that are having a direct impact on the way work is done. And it seems to be impacting not only the work, but the very business model of news itself. For the purposes of this project, I will focus mostly on the changes in the journalists' work; however, where relevant, I will show how the business change brought about by the Web is also influencing how practitioners must rethink their approach to their profession.

The Immediacy of the Web

The drumbeat of the online medium leads news practitioners in a march whose pace is forever quickening. Knowing the medium can be updated at a moment's notice,

supervisors are asking reporters to produce stories on the spot, pushing writers into crafting material with little to no time to incorporate multiple angles or be placed into a larger context. While some reporters appreciate the pace of the medium for its ability to cover, say, an unfolding news event, there still remains a fair amount of resentment over the standing request for reporters to do more with less time and potentially sacrifice quality to meet the deadlines and demands. As noted by several practitioners in this study, these pressures force an unsteady syncopation into the news cycle, rushing reporters through their usual pattern of composing stories and causing a frenetic pace which most everyone—reporter, editor, and consumer alike—is pushed to buy into.

Logically, news never stops happening – it was just our ability to report and receive it that was stalled before the Internet age. Some mediums did better than others at serving up hot to lukewarm news, but others seemed as though they had nothing but leftovers to offer. No more. The Web has made waiting obsolete. Sports games can be watched or listened to live online, video of any covered event be delivered via streaming feed, and news is no further away than a mouse click. The online world a constant font of new material, and the news cycle that once depended on working towards a print or broadcast deadline has been replaced by the desire to post as soon as information is in hand. But what sort of environment does this create when it becomes expected that the Internet will have something new to tell us every time we open a browser window?

The immediacy of the medium itself becomes a function of its appeal, as well as its undoing to some extent. It is the assumption of new-ness online that sends people clicking instead of page-turning. Karen Wendt, the blogger and freelancer, says the

dynamic created by the Web is exciting. "Online is instantaneous. That's hard to beat when you're a print outlet." Indeed, it is. Many print organizations are scratching their heads on how to compete – most have taken on an online presence, and there are at least a few who have contemplated going completely virtual – all because of what the newest medium offers, a chance to say it first. But first doesn't mean it is a better product, just that it posted quickly.

The conventional understanding of journalistic practice is being challenged by the desire to use the rapidity of the medium. For example, the rush to get the news up online may mean that stories no longer incorporate counterbalance, an element that has been integral to sound reporting throughout generations of journalism. Kim Patrick says one situation in particular stands out in her mind. She had covered a convention, attended a forum and was instructed by her employer to post immediately after the forum concluded. While she understood the desire for news in the now, she could not help but think she was just giving a rundown of what had happened, not what it meant. Sitting down to write next to a friend of hers, the friend remarked to her, "I feel like I'm writing a… press release." Patrick couldn't agree more, and finds the whole concept frustrating. "I mean there was no, there's no counterbalance, there's just this is what happened. There wasn't time for Q and A afterwards, you were just sort of expected to throw this news on there, and that's what they want." Patrick's example suggests that while some reporters recognize that there is something lacking in their stories due to this rushing, it seems many news organizations have no problem asking their staff to pick up the pace at the expense of the more traditional journalistic process.

Additionally, the Web's ability to live in the now offers news organizations a novel chance at defining how journalism is covered and presented in the coming years. This gives heartburn to many practitioners, but for all the changes that are enacted due to the Web's influence, even journalists gilded in the field's newspaper age cannot ignore what is offered by the form that is housed in the ether. But a gain in speed often means a loss of article length, a point that is troublesome for practitioners. Patrick finds there is much to like about the Web, she's just wary about what it's going to do to print and the journalism profession.

> I always wanted to work for a wire service because I love the short, get-the-news-out-there, I mean I really do, and so now the Web has given me that opportunity and it's very exciting. But what it doesn't allow you to do, if you're so busy always posting news and breaking news and trying to beat out your competitors, it doesn't give you the time to do the long-form journalism that I think is going to save newspapers.

She says she has always considered herself better at writing the short pieces, but she admires the long, in-depth pieces that typically appear in print, and she just doesn't see that people will be willing to scroll through and read those long pieces online due to their length. While she says she loves the availability of information she has at her desk, even just for research purposes, she fears that the enormous selection of where to find news also leads to something akin to impatience with anything longer than a sound bite. Though some long-form material is re-purposed for online use straight from its print origins, much of what is written strictly for the Web or with the Web in mind cannot run the lengths seen in print. Shorter, choppier writing becomes commonplace, and thought processes are condensed dramatically in the interest of time.

The immediacy of the Internet affords journalists and communicators the ability to share news at a pace and breadth never before seen in the field, but because of this affordance, it practically demands that new information be constantly made available for public consumption. Harold Keith describes that the urgency to share news appears to arise from the desire to capitalize on the online medium's ever-ready and refreshable status. "When you've got something that immediate, and you're dealing with a 24-hour news cycle where you've got news coming at you just like that [snaps his fingers several times], you're going to put it online." And often, says Keith, it is only after the initial report has been made that the news staff has time to step back and reflect on the information, or even double-check to ensure it is accurate. This is a massive departure from the days of checking, double-checking, even triple-checking a story's accuracy. Prior to the Web, it seems, journalists were much more apt to hold back a story over accuracy concerns. Though still prized, the extent to which something is accurate appears to have become more so relative to the brevity with which the piece was produced. This has lead to other missteps that threaten the journalism standard.

The speed at which new material is delivered often leads to imperfections, and not just the kind that would take a magnifying glass and a keen eye to spot. These sorts of errors show there is little if any real time devoted to copyediting news text prior to its posting as live material. The former newspaper man-turned-online-editor, Brad Jameson, says it is not uncommon for small mistakes – misspellings in the copy or juxtaposed letters in a headline – to be posted as the team hurries to put it up for public view, although he says the errors are never the sort that change the meaning of the story itself.

"There are a lot of sites that try to move too quickly, and the fact that we can all put a story up at any time definitely, I think, has lead to some shoddiness on our site and others, so that's something we have to get better at." That said, he mentioned perfection is also not a given for print mediums. That's why there's a corrections page for that sort of thing, he says, but with online, you can correct virtually immediately instead of waiting for the next issue. But still, inaccuracies occur. In the crush of a swirling news event, there is a never-ending pressing need to give more information and give it quickly, even if it is only one small detail that—to anything than a transitory and loose medium such as the Internet—would not be enough to stop the presses for. Sara Lessert says the trick to not getting carried away is to recognize the medium for what it is and what it allows. "The key is to be fast and flexible. Online you're not so tightened down – you can take full advantage of the different tools. It all just sort of merges the mediums into one." However, it would appear this merger is made at the sacrifice of some precision.

　　Speed of information in itself would seem to be a good thing. The faster the public can receive news, one could argue, the better everyone could stay abreast of everything that concerns them. But Keith says the medium is also limited by this dynamic. Even though online news organizations always want to appear new, sometimes, despite all the effort, there is no new news to be had. He compares it to someone sitting at a news desk broadcasting around the clock.

> Well, news is going to be updated, but I guess also you get into this same
> situation where you repeat the same thing over and over again for 20 minutes
> then you get an update 20 minutes down the road saying that, ok, we got new
> information saying that blah blah blah blah so you're going to have that
> immediacy in the moment. So in other words, when the news comes out, you're

going to have that information put out there, and at that point then it may be repeated several times over the next several minutes.

The speed of the medium allows for quick updates, but when there is no update given for minutes, or even hours, it can feel as though the medium is not able to keep pace, when in fact there may just not be any new information to offer. This can also happen across mediums owned by the same organization. Patrick said she has seen stories regurgitated from an online resource to the news group's print publication. She said that for now, due to her paper's broad audience, some of whom may or may not go online, the balance may be all right. "They don't really care if it's regurgitated stories from the web but, it is kind of funny, there's nothing fresh," she said. But she can notice the difference and she sees larger papers doing it all the time. Referring to a piece in the area's major newspaper, "this front page of the [employment] section is a story I've already read online." She thinks it's telling and a bit scary that even major news outlets cut corners on what is presented as "new."

While I was in Jameson's newsroom, I could not get over how quiet it was – just the sound of nearly a hundred people typing and clicking away. Thinking back to my years in newsrooms, all I could remember was the incessant cacophony of sound that rose to a maddening pitch as deadline approached. I was not accustomed to being in a newsroom in which I didn't hear a phone ring, a fax machine hum, or one reporter calling to another from across the room. I asked Jameson about it and he said that while there is no daily deadline any longer, in essence, everyone's always on deadline. They post throughout the day when they get news. This represents a tremendous departure from the deadline-driven culture of any other newsrooms in which there is a finite point at which

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news must be ready to print or broadcast. In the online realm, news is ready when it is

ready. However, given an online news organization's unquenchable thirst for new

material to publish, it is not a stretch to say there is little if no down time for anyone in

the newsroom. If there is a story to be written, chances are the reporters are almost

consistently working as though their deadlines are only minutes away, pounding out copy

to be posted as fast as they can type the words.

     Unmistakably, the rhythm of the news cycle itself has been permanently altered by

the introduction of online resources. Instead of everyone's work building to a glorious

collective crescendo, the cadence instead thumps along steadily, each individual's tempo

driven by hypertext and server speed. With the Internet, now news is ready whenever

someone posts it live. To some, this is a delicious opportunity, a chance to define the

next era in journalism. Jameson says there's nothing like that rush of being at the helm of

something truly new.

> The daily newspaper used to be the front lines but now, the Web has just changed
> that dramatically and now newspapers are great for depth and analysis and the
> Web is really great for immediacy and the ability to tell stories in so many
> different ways, you know. Video and photo galleries or text or graphics… a
> mixture of all those different things.

But at the same time, Jameson says the online medium and the requisite pressure to post

has lead to shortcomings for his organization as well as others. This, however, raises the

question: Is it worth it to be fast and risk being incorrect, or would waiting long enough

to ensure accuracy beyond the surface level cost too much of the quickness that's

desired? Every person interviewed for this project expressed they value being correct

over being the first to present news; however, it appears several acknowledge there is

little way to be completely sure and still use the medium's speed and all that offers in a timely manner.

The answer may lie in the differences between mentalities in print and online newsrooms; for many organizations, however, those rooms could be one and the same, as it is for Patrick, for example. Jameson—whose newsroom is a separate entity from the print arm of the company—says the ebb and flow of his newsroom is often difficult for his print contemporaries to understand. He says often representatives from the print arm of his parent company will call him up to tell him that a story's headline doesn't sound engaging enough and ask if he can "punch it up." He says he often has to remind them his job is to get the story up first. "We don't have 20 minutes, 30 minutes to sit there and craft a perfect headline, I mean we've got to get the story up… then we go back and we work on the headline." It seems there is never the luxury of time when you're working online and you want to be first with the news and that has put journalists in the position of having to spool up a process into a matter of minutes or hours that would ordinarily take all day.

These practitioners tell us that while the idea of delivering news as swiftly as possible is admired, it is also resented in some ways for what this desire for immediacy means for the journalists' work lives. There is little time to fully explore stories that are covered when deadlines are shorter and shorter and an editor is eager to fill a Web page. Stories prepared for public consumption are churned out like machine gun fire – short bursts of coarse, automatic writing that cover desired territory, but primitively so.

May I Have Your Attention, Please?

Audience engagement is paramount to success in the news business. The newest medium's ability to document numbers of viewers a day, as well as those sites, pages, and even stories consumers have viewed, means that news organizations – in an effort to attract and hold even more readers – constantly solicit reporters for material to publish online, and the more sensational the better. The data received from the medium's documentation also indicates to news management the sorts of stories that garner the most eyes, leading editors to press reporters for the type of material that will lure a maximum amount of readers. This pressure for eye-grabbing stories incenses some writers, who view tantalizing audiences with sensational news stories as not a part of a true journalist's job. Likewise, the work an online news outlet does to continually engage its audience and keep readers from clicking to another site is at times distracting reporters from their foremost job of reporting the news. The speed with which reporters must crank out copy, joined with the drive to be more engaging to the audience, has led writers to shudder at the idea that the concept of communicating news for the sheer purpose of informing others has become a critically endangered pursuit.

As more news organizations look to be savvy in the Internet realm, most of them are feeling the need to not only drive traffic to their sites, but keep it there, and for good reason. When news organizations worked in only one medium, it was not too difficult to gauge how many people picked up the daily newspaper or even turned on the nightly newscast. Executives could count copies sold or monitor the Nielsen ratings. Based on the predictable number of eyes that would view the medium, news organizations could

use those figures to set advertising rates and tailor marketing material to those same groups. Consumer statistics told businesses what audiences cared about, and newspapers responded accordingly, adjusting the weight and treatment they gave different types of stories and placing advertising accordingly.

Countable page views offer the same sort of information to online businesses, but Internet audiences can be fickle and transient. Online news outlets can never really know what their audiences are going to resemble on any given day, and losing a reader is only a matter of a mouse click. But the number of people who go online is staggering, with nearly 70 percent of American adults using the Internet and about the same percentage of that figure using it on a daily basis, according to a February-March 2007 Pew Internet & American Life survey. Many audiences have become divergent, drifting out in many directions, getting a little news here, a little news there. Some people get some news from newspapers, a little from the radio, the rest from online. For others, that proportion could be entirely the opposite. The one thing Web resources let audiences do better than any other medium is interact in real time. And this interaction can be both a positive and a negative for practitioners in the field. There is now an awareness of the audience as never before, and those pairs of eyes can be counted, sorted, analyzed, and marketed to – but only if they remain on the page. Unlike a newspaper operation knowing only how many copies have been purchased, a Web site can document with electronic accuracy exactly what stories were read and how long the pages stayed open. And with this degree of knowledge, advertisers can ask online executives for quantifiable evidence that their

ad has been viewed. This imperative to keep an audience on the Web page has certainly

impacted journalists who work online.

Different informational formats go about securing audiences in a variety of ways.

Lisa Dieter, the magazine publisher, recognized the power of an online presence long

before she put her print product into circulation. To ensure her publication would enjoy a

large readership, she used the Internet to put her finger on the pulse of what her audience

was going to want to read. As someone who came from a tech background, Dieter built

an online community separate from her company's Web site (which was still being built)

and used its viral capacity to get people talking about the future magazine, but she also

used it as a collection tool, presenting surveys that gave her valuable information.

> We really were very focused on trying to drive people to the Web site to get them
> to sign up, and so we created a survey early on before the Web site started, the
> survey was to go out and ask them what kinds of sections they thought they
> wanted in the magazine, what topics they felt were most important, and that
> actually was the beginning of the viral storm. So we created the survey, the
> survey gave us email addresses of people that would want to know about the
> publication when it went live on the web site… I knew a lot of them were online.
> I knew they were already out there and it was an easy way to get to them.

Her legwork not only gained her a built-in audience, but it dictated some of the topics her

magazine staff would cover in future issues. Instead of her staff telling the audience what

they thought they wanted to hear, the opposite occurred. The audience dictated the

content, and this direction had all happened prior to the magazine's first issue. Such

input can be a boon for the news product, but some scholars and pundits, such as Deuze,

Yeshua, and Keen, see allowing the audience to pick what information is presented sets

something of a dangerous precedent. Their writings suggest the public feels it is just as

knowledgeable as journalists, and is able to direct what ought to be included in a news report instead of entrusting the journalists with these newsmaking decisions.

Of course, for others in the field, the pressure to attract readers is not delivered directly by the audience, but instead channeled through the format of the news organization's business model. The news outlet may encourage reporters and editors to write with their audience in mind, which may in itself sound innocuous, but again it may not be. By being asked to engage the audience, the writer may be asked to write with the agenda of trying to tempt more eyes to the page. Instead of trusting a writer to report a news event in a clean and concise way, there may be pressure placed on the reporter to write in a more provocative or jazzy manner in order to maintain an audience, teasing readership with juicy or sensational details that may really not be all that interesting or pertinent to the news item. Kim Patrick sees this desire to grasp an audience as something of a double-edged sword. On one hand, she understands the need to engage readers, and on the other hand, she feels that doing the business of marketing the news shouldn't be part of a journalist's job. This balancing act manifests itself in a number of ways.

As something of an extension on the idea of being first with the news, Patrick says her organization always wants her to write something on a news event, even if it's been amply covered in other places. She explained it happens all the time with press releases that her organization could just post to their own site. Instead, they want her to write up something just so it can carry the label of her news organization.

> Basically what I just did was re-write the press release and post it to the Web…
> but that's what they want… we want to have people clicking. That's not actually

news. You're only wanting me to beat AP's version of the story? I don't even
want to put my byline on it, that's like not worth putting a byline on, I mean I
don't want my byline on it, because I don't have ownership of it, I didn't *write*
this, you know, maybe I made one phone call to verify the information is true,
but is that reporting? No.

The fact that Patrick wishes to deny ownership of the re-worked press release is telling of

a decline in pride of the work. While there are certainly items on which she can reflect

with a smile, paraphrased releases and articles that grab at audiences for the sake of doing

so aren't among them. The writing has become part of the material with which

advertising and marketing seek to hook and keep audiences.

Patrick finds this practice ridiculous. Further amplifying this dynamic for Patrick

are a pair of other factors that, "really drives me nuts." The first is that, unlike the online-

only newsroom of people like Brad Jameson and Sara Lessert, Patrick's newsroom—

which has always been considered a newspaper-centric organization—is now constantly

being asked for material for the Web site, forcing the staff to multi-task with no

additional compensation. Newsroom-wide emails go out in the morning and the

afternoon, Patrick says, in an attempt to somehow get more news for the online edition

than what the staff is already trying to produce. The relentless demand for more material

seems a related cousin to the fact that the new medium allows organizations to be

immediate and up-to-date and so they strive to be that way; however, it has much to do

with trying to constantly engage those readers so they don't drift elsewhere for their

content.

Keeping readers on your page and not roaming around the rest of the Internet means

you had better have interesting material to present, making the news presentation itself a

competitive endeavor. Compounding the requests for more stories in Patrick's newsroom is management informing everyone of what the most clicked-on stories were that day or that week. Patrick says that sort of attempt at stoking competition among reporters to get the top articles probably leads people to sensationalize their stories. The managers clearly like the clicks those stories get and they reward the writers by boasting of their popularity with the audience.

> We're already stressed about enough… it's a great feeling when you have yours that is the story that has generated all the clicks, but do we really care? I feel like reporters should not be involved in this… and they will send out the rankings of how well the cover did, you know how many copies, newsstand copies, they want everybody to know. It's obnoxious, it's like something the editors want to know and may need to know because that's their job, but the journalists?

Patrick says this preference for sensationalism translates into pressure to produce exciting copy. "The sensational covers are what sells… I mean we call them the 'gunny was a pimp' stories [big laugh], and it really does, you know, the weird news, that's the thing." The sensationalism leads to more trackable eyes on the page, which leads to the news organization setting higher advertising rates, which makes for a more satisfying bottom line for news executives. But being trackable for the reason of selling advertising can be somewhat tricky. "In a print publication, you can't exactly quantify the response… but online you can very clearly track the response to your advertisement," says Dieter. "That makes the traditionalists very nervous." So when the only product sold is news, there is any number of places where people could go to get it, and there are very detailed ways to prove whether or not someone has been to a site, a news organization must either produce work over and above that of any other outlet or present it in such a way to give itself a competitive edge. Journalism purists rail against this encroachment on the journalist's

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primary job, but the Internet presents a remarkable way to identify and cater to readers as never before, and the business model has adjusted for it.

But writing to engage an audience isn't always a bad thing, nor is giving an audience some sense of ownership of the medium so they feel valued as a member of a larger community. Brad Jameson's online product allows viewers to customize to a degree the information they see when the home page is brought up, and to comment on posted articles. Reporters are encouraged to be multi-dimensional and use various tools to tell a story. However innovative this may seem to be, this is something of a survivalist tactic. "We've got to fight every day for an audience and we have some loyalty," said Jameson. "But for the most part it's a bit of a crap shoot." Jameson says unless readers are consistently arriving through the home page, there's almost no way to predict where the audience is going to come from every day, so writers had better make their writing solid and desirable. Or, as some reporters have done, you need to become multi-dimensional. Jameson tells the story of one writer who not only reports in print and online, he markets himself as a news resource through all other forms of media too, including blogs, radio, television, and live online chats. By spreading himself around, this writer has made himself a brand that the public can identify wherever they happen to see him. However, even Jameson admits this can present problems in addition to advantages.

> People say well he's crazy man he must have no time to actually do reporting, somehow he figures out how to do it and you know what, the fact that his name is as big as it is, people know him, means he gets calls other people don't get, so [he] always kind of got having his name out there more and… [that] will eventually lead to stuff that will produce good journalism, you just have to make

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a compromise about how much of that he's willing to do before it would impact his reporting.

By spreading himself across many mediums, this writer has taken the concept of engaging the audience to a whole new level. This not only connects him to his audience, it provides something of job security for him. He is valuable to his employer as a marketable face of news and news reporting, and he has become part of the way the news organization engages its audience.

But while some people might see engaging the public as a delicate balance, others don't find it to be all that much of a science. It's more of a pleasure. Karen Wendt's blogging is almost completely about engaging the public. Her work online is something of a conversation rather than a dictation. "It's more accessible, written in an accessible manner (reader-friendly), is not constrained by size or advertising demands and can cater to niche or specialty markets." It is in many ways freeing for Wendt that she does not have to answer to the pressure other outlets face. She does not need to wonder if she is drawing a large number of people to her site, she can just focus on producing a good blog. "Good writing will always be good writing, whether it's online or in print." If she gets feedback and page views, that's great, but if she doesn't, it is not going to influence whether or not she keeps writing. The volume of feedback does not necessarily matter blog post to blog post. Wendt is writing for others, but only on an independent level. She is not doing it to earn a paycheck.

But it does matter in a corporate setting. Getting feedback posted to a posted piece shows the organization is resonating with audiences. It also offers the audience a way to interact with the news outlet, or at least be counted as a viewer. Sara Lessert says that is

one of the reasons why she's so excited about the online medium. The news outlet now has multiple ways of reaching news consumers, as well as sorting clickable data to find trends for what works and what doesn't, and she sees that as a benefit.

> The ability to personalize and give our readers directly what they want instead of creating a one size fits all… the multiple ways you can tell something visually, you can really bring that sight and sound of a story much more into people's desktops or living rooms than you can when it's just a newspaper.

By having many levels of engagement, the chances of capturing an audience increase. And the more reasons you can give people to stay on your site – a place to add comments, a live chat discussion, a place to upload and share photos, links that take readers further into the Web site – the more you can count the page views and sell advertising. It's a way of adapting the newspaper business model to the World Wide Web, but online news outlets aren't seeing the revenue that you'd think they might by proving the clicks to advertisers.

Referencing a 2007 study that shows a striking difference between how much time is spent online and how much money is allocated for advertising, Brad Jameson said he can't imagine what is keeping money dollars from coming online. "Advertisers are notoriously conservative about where they put their money, they're going to wait to see if this thing is the real deal, and I don't know what the hell they're waiting for because it seems to be obvious." Jameson wonders if perhaps they're waiting for better tools to gauge how effective their ads are or target their audiences more precisely to be sure they are getting a good value from being online.

> But I think that gap will close. More money will come online, but it may take five or ten years before it sorts itself out so it could be a rough stretch for journalism still but I think it'll stabilize at some point and maybe newsrooms will

be a little bit smaller when it's all over, I don't know. Some newsrooms could
stand to be a little bit smaller, some can't.

Dieter sees the same thing happening with her publication. "Advertisers are trying to

understand this new niche, one that they've really never addressed before, so that's been

a struggle for us to get advertising to catch up." With these sorts of sentiments floating

around in the field, it stands to reason news organizations will do everything possible to

engage their readers, prove to advertisers the size of their audiences, and continuously

and steadily work to maintain that connection with consumers, including encouraging

reporters to use marketing tactics and tools to seize audience curiosity.

Practitioners' reflections show us that in the effort to remain competitive, news

companies and even editors are forced to rethink the way they package and present the

news to engage their readers. The need to remain eye-catching and appealing has in

some ways supplanted the need to ensure the highest of journalistic standards – the desire

to be competitive is itself competing against the integrity of the very news the

organization is producing for public view. With less and less time given to craft a spot-

on news piece, compounded with the drive to display more and more inviting copy, what

suffers in the end is the security of knowing a final news article was achieved without

compromising its message. Likewise, the push to craft work that interacts and

deliberately engages the audience in a news discussion is now more the norm, not the

rarity. So, too, is the imperative to produce a piece of writing strictly so the organization

can carry it as its own, under its banner. This leaves journalists wondering why they

must regurgitate information strictly for the sake of their home publication. The answer,

it seems, points to branding—marketing the news organization so that it would appear to

have an edge over competitors. So not only do journalists need to produce large amounts

of fresh, inviting, and sometimes barely original copy, they must do so while cognizant of

what is good for the company and good for the news brand. These journalists' concerns

about this balancing act suggest that the line between writing clever news copy and

writing more seductive text that serves the news companies' business interests is growing

dangerously thin.

The Internet: The Great Equalizer

Now that the Web has gone from read-only to read-write, consumers are not only

reading and watching, but becoming authors of more content for everyone else to read

and watch. This encroachment by the public into a news realm that had once solely been

the domain of paid journalists places the professionals in a bit of a predicament. Charged

not only with the task of writing attention-grabbing news text in a hurry, news

practitioners now must also contend with the efforts of amateurs. Because it is so

important to engage online audiences, an interesting relationship has formed between the

news practitioners and their audiences, bringing with it anxieties and concerns for news

professionals over how to best distinguish themselves from the citizen journalists. This

new dynamic has forced practitioners into a position of defining and defending that

which sets them apart from the newest entrants to the expanding online field. With

reporters and editors no longer the only ones with access to news events or the means to

talk about them, they still must regularly prove they deserve our attention and our trust,

forcing them to rely on their training and perseverance as journalists to distinguish

themselves from the citizen journalist population.

Of course, the Web being the open forum that it is, audiences have a wealth of sites to choose from to get their news, including blogs and sites that do a blend of news, editorializing, and commentary, such as Huffington Post and DailyKos. For straight news consumers, nearly every news organization carries a Web site in addition to their more traditional offering, including television networks and local stations. But a bit of a twist has been added with the inclusion of many regular people who have something to say and now have the means to say it on a broad scale. News people are no longer the gatekeepers of everything there is to know, and there are mixed feelings about the erosion of boundaries now that publishing is not restricted to those who own printing presses. This erosion has led to somewhat of a fractured approach to viewing amateur content and subsequently guarding against its encroachment on the professional ranks. While news practitioners acknowledge the right of the public to self-publish and the potential value contributed by these news laymen, they've also adopted a somewhat defensive posture. News professionals are quick to distinguish themselves by recalling and adhering to established elements of the practice, namely lack of bias, a sense of fairness, accuracy, and a real desire to get at the truth. But even those tenets are debated and juggled when faced with an amateur who meets all the criteria.

Some of those who are leery of the Internet's open gates fear that including amateurs in the news arena will cut into the authority of traditional news sources, boundaries will become muddled, and news consumers will no longer look at each outlet on its individual merits. Once presented on the Web, everyone could conceivably be lumped in together. Patrick is especially incensed by the latest breed of journalists that

the Web has produced. "New media allows every Tom, Dick, and Harry to post whatever it is they think is actually news and then to present themselves as some kind of news type organization, when they have no editorial oversight or anything." She is not impressed by citizens taking to their computers with equal parts zeal and ignorance. Without an impartial filtering process in place for these bloggers that is meant to strip away bias and agenda, she does not see how they can be looked at in the same light as societally recognized, mainstream news groups. Taking a different perspective, Keith believes some people look to blog sites because they see them as not connected to large-scale corporations and therefore untainted by big business. "Now you get these ordinary citizens coming out saying that this is what the government is doing, you need to watch out for this and whatever, and I think people are saying that here's an alternative, let's see what they have to say." While Patrick and Keith both feel bloggers may have great opinions that further discussion and participation, they both express it is perhaps dangerous to include them as part of the larger news community. This consequence of the medium's open nature represents one segment of the friction that has evolved due to the Internet's accessibility. By removing the barriers to self-publishing, the Web has inadvertently invited more participants into the news field, forcing news professionals to try to define for their audiences what constitutes a trusted news source and position themselves as credible.

In this process of defending their status in the field, news professionals can easily point to amateurs and explain what is not being done in their work. In one example, Patrick said a blogger who writes about similar subjects that she covers is being linked to

by larger, more dominant news sites, giving him undue credibility. "This guy has no idea what he's talking about, so then you've got this person who's presenting themselves and is then being picked up as news." The part that, again, drives her "nuts," is the fact that it is clear to her that this person not only is not familiar with the material he is writing about, he doesn't know the right questions to ask when he does come across something that requires a seasoned reporter's knowledge. The result is further sensationalism that could possibly compromise the credibility of everyone else, or—because it is sensational and may gain a large number of viewers—professionals in news management might look more favorably at this content and be swayed to link to it from the organization's formal site because of the traffic it receives. But by not knowing what the critical parts of the story are, a blogger is inferring what he or she feels is important and basing the piece on that assumption. It is sub-par material such as this that threatens the perception of all news organizations, say professionals, so much so that there has been born something of a need to distinguish and distance professional writing from that of so-called citizen journalists. However, a tenuous—yet at times symbiotic—relationship has started, each needing the other at times for sustenance and momentum.

The blogosphere opens opportunities for journalists aligned with a more formal newsroom to scratch around for story ideas. Karen Wendt says she can tell her blog gets viewed for that purpose. "Many traditional news sites troll my blog for news," she said. And perhaps it is because of this relationship that she hopes for two things: one, that she'll eventually get paid for her blogging; and two, that print and online mediums will supplement and complement each other, offering audiences a variety of choices and

views. As she straddles the two realms with both blogging and freelance reporting, it is

not difficult to see why she would desire this outcome. In her work, Dieter has seen

blogs on her publication's companion Web site garner huge responses because they allow

readers to speak almost directly to each other about specific topics in a trusting

environment. For the most part, blogs are not viewed negatively when taken in isolation.

It is when they're billed as news that journalists take issue with them.

Even Patrick admits that it is useful to sift through reader contributions. For her,

this is one of the positives of audience engagement – the potential to start a new piece

with an idea found in a posting. She is not quite ready to open up to blogs as originators

of journalistic subject matter, but she does relish the chance to read citizen responses.

She said a columnist was able to use a reader comment to take a rumor he had heard and,

after contacting the responding reader, put a source to the story.

> He had just known of the rumor, had no verification, no way to verify anything,
> saw that this little reader had written one little thing that said, oh wait he knows
> about this. So then the columnist was able to call that reader and say hey, how
> do you know, could you be the source?

The story wound up blowing the doors off of an event that revealed racial tensions and

eventually forced administrative action. But without the source, the story would have

likely never happened and the racial rift would not have been addressed. This represents

one of the pluses of the new relationship that has formed – professionals can better reach

out and take advantage of the engagement that the medium has allowed, and it has

impacted how they go about their work, in ways as simple as finding a source.

However, the draw of citizen commentary and blogs on the Web can be very

tempting for the rest of the worldwide audience to take as credible. Harold Keith agrees

that blogs and reader comments are often a good place to start, but he is more apt to think of these sorts of postings as starter material or potential sources, not content to be seen as equal to work of standard journalists. "Now the blogger is sending out this information, the reporter's picking it up and then if he's a proper journalist he's doing his fact-checking and then that's where the story develops." But Keith says he can see why reading blogs is attractive to many – it's regular people writing for other regular people, not the "talking heads that have been giving us the opinions and reporting the news for decades." It is this dynamic that has sent professionals scurrying for how to brand themselves as the definitive resource for news on the Web where the public is both audience and contributor.

Some in the online segment of the profession are happy to consider using or linking to citizen-produced content, so long as it follows the basic tenets of journalism – fairness, accuracy, lack of conflict of interest. "It may not be good journalism, but it fits the criteria for me. We have no problem… with using citizen-generated content. I don't know if some of it qualifies as journalism, maybe some of it doesn't," said Jameson. The overall sentiment from professionals who embrace the newcomers is one that seems to relish the chance to prove their worth over this new external competition. But even with the generous spirit of welcoming amateurs, that still leaves the public having to read copious amounts of copy in order to determine who they wish to trust to tell them the news. Said Lessert:

> I think it puts more onus on the individual looking to get news or information pay attention to what their sources to what they're reading, not quite as transparent on the Web, but if you pick up a newspaper or a magazine, it's pretty evident what you're looking at.

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Of course, leaving it up to the reader to decide what is or is not a trustable source takes what had once been a mostly passive activity—reading the news—and makes it active. That means the professionals are assuming a lot about their audience: that its members are willing, able, and savvy enough to do their own sort of investigative work in determining what they will read. It is this assumptive stance that reflects a mentality to distinguish professional versus non-professional content that is changing the way news practitioners view their work and their role in the field.

The flexibility of the new medium has added another facet to the professionals' anxiety over being perceived as a thoroughly valid and trustable source. Compounded by the rapid fire posting ability, online news practitioners lament that putting something up for public view is a relatively simple process – almost too simple, some feel. Said Dieter:

> There is a sense of can you trust what you read online. It's almost like the process was too easy to get that information up there, and it is, it is really easy to get news online. Web sites do an awful lot to attract people and get them to trust them for their information and to get them to come back.

Not only do reporters and editors need to generate solid copy, they are further aware that even once the story is posted, they are still fighting for an audience's confidence. Material must be updated often or the audience may perceive a failing by the news organization. Other sites may also post some version of the same story – further evidence that the openness of the Web has lead to a degradation of proprietary sensibility when it comes to who has an exclusive angle on what news. Trust and legitimacy are holy grails in a medium that is fluid and malleable. For professionals, awareness of this dynamic and the need to find the perfect balance leads invariably to an impact on the job.

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This struggle to balance so many variables can be a strain for news practitioners. Pressed not only to produce engaging material quickly, they must also grip tightly onto the journalistic principles they've been taught lest they risk losing their professional foothold in an environment that caters to sensational quicksand. It is as if the professionals must defend the very ground they've held for centuries or risk losing not only their audiences but their reputations if they let amateurs get the better of them online. Even the smaller news outfits can use defend their news dominance if they use the Web for what it offers. "It allows the little papers to play with the big dogs. It puts everybody on an equal playing field in that sense," said Patrick. But for all the anxiety over the medium and how best to put it to use in the professional realm, practitioners stand to gain more than they stand to lose, so long as they maintain the practices that have served them so well up until now with more traditional mediums.

These practitioners tell us that journalists are less worried about amateur competitors than they are other pressures presented by the online medium. But to address this concern, industry insiders still feel confident they have the upper hand in quality if not in quantity of news product. The practitioners grant that there will continue to be erosion in the boundaries between professional and amateur, but feel it will be through maintaining the rigorous reporting standards which set them apart as a whole from citizen interlopers that they will preserve the role of professionals in the field.

Conclusion

The journalism profession is experiencing several not-so-subtle alterations to the way work is conceived and carried out courtesy of the Web's influence. The

practitioners interviewed for this study tell us the pace of their work has increased; there's less and less time to go over and re-check stories; the pieces are shorter and no longer is there the time or space to go into depth in order to put the topic into greater perspective; writers are encouraged to write vivid, engaging text as a way to retain audiences; the reporters themselves are presenting themselves as media personalities to some extent to become recognized as trusted voices; amateurs and newcomers to the online world threaten the validity of news by posting misunderstood interpretations of news events; and journalists must fight the temptation to cut corners or ignore their reporting responsibilities in the interest of achieving a solid news product despite the above circumstances. The extraordinary immediacy of the medium, coupled with the Web's news business model that demands that audiences not only be engaged, but proof of that engagement be tracked, as well as the new relationship that has been formed by the accessibility that brings everyone into the news mix, has pressed news practitioners into uneasy territory. Not only must professionals compete against other professionals and now amateurs to some extent, they must do so while being mindful of speed, accuracy, and the drive to remain trustworthy.

How the practitioners feel about these new pressures does vary. While Karen Wendt employs the Web daily with her blog, Lisa Dieter utilizes it as a companion to her print publication, and Brad Jameson and Sara Lessert embrace the new medium and everything it offers, warts and all, others such as Kim Patrick and Harold Keith are more hesitant to give the newest medium their rubber stamp of approval. It is interesting that while folks like Jameson and Lessert enjoy and appreciate the Web for characteristics

such as immediacy and audience engagement, those are exactly the same reasons Patrick

and Keith cite when questioning whether or not to fully buy into the Web. For them, it

seems a double-edged sword. Sure, they like the quickness, the ability to reach large

sums of people quickly and connect with them, but they fear the fallout that could come

if hard copy news sensibilities are lost in the process – the extraordinary attention to

detail, the time built in to catch mistakes, the means to put a story into greater context

through history, and the space to craft a piece of long-form journalism that not only is a

story, but piece of contemporary literature.

Matthew B. Stannard, the writer for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, has stated these

demands on journalists may be just what the industry needs as it redefines itself in a field

full of new options and new players. All of these challenges together may signal a move

towards an open, participatory medium, says researcher Jane B. Singer, but one that still

retains the core values of journalism, notes scholar Dan Gillmor. As evidenced by the

practitioners' input, it seems the journalists are leery of how much the idea of journalism

could get lost in this big, changing machine. They acknowledge all things change, but

the speed with which things are changing gives them pause and has them hoping that the

industry will be mindful enough to not shred the integrity of the profession as it reinvents

itself again and again.

These interviews suggest that practitioners now need to combine the perfect blend

of quickness, news-telling agility, suggestion of sensationalism, and rock-solid authority

to attract and retain audiences, or someone else will do so. The compression of time

available to craft and edit a story, combined with imperative to produce attention-

grabbing copy, as well as the added competition of amateur players in the news field, is driving news professionals into a corner. Practitioners' reactions to these changes range from the defensive to the celebratory. But regardless of how practitioners personally feel about the changes afoot and the yet untapped potential of the online resource, most seem to agree that the unhinging of the journalism standard from what it was in the days of newspapers and television has put many professionals on edge about the future of their craft. News organizations must diversify and take on properties of other mediums, material is repurposed time and again to fill cyber voids on Web sites, and news staffs are asked to change the way they respond to these new influences. Though what the newest medium affords is admirable, this permanent new presence comes with some uncertainty, trepidation, and even resentment. Yet some see this as a perfect opportunity to prove the journalism field can stay ahead of the game.

The best advice, it seems, for those in the field who have reservations about the Web's impact on their work, is to leave misgivings at the door, accept the Web's arrival in the news world, and strive to strengthen and improve the online news medium from the inside. "I think that it's a lot better to just jump on board than try to fight it and naysay. There's no stopping it, it's just question of how do you make it work for what you want to do," said Lessert. Perhaps by being a part of the most current evolution in the field will practitioners be able to have a say in what the next iteration of news telling looks like.

APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been active in your field?

2. What is your primary role in your current position?

3. Have your responsibilities changed since assuming your role? If so, how?

4. How has your career evolved and changed with respect to new media?

5. Do you think the nature of your job will change as more and more media moves online? If so, do you feel there will only be the obvious changes (writing for the Web as opposed to newspapers, magazines), or do you feel there will be other integral parts that will also alter? If so, how?

6. How have you seen your research methods change with the availability of online access?

   a. To what degree would you say you depend on information found online?
   b. Is the Internet one of your first resources when you set out to research a topic?

7. How accurate do you perceive the news found online?

8. How do you feel online news differs from more traditional forms of media – newspapers, magazines, television?

   a. How much would you say the existence of the online forms impacts the more traditional news outlets?
   b. Do you think online media poses a long-term threat to more traditional media forms?
   c. What roles do you think each will take on in time?

9. Describe your philosophy concerning accuracy and reliability in presenting the news.

   a. How would you say the reliability of news has been impacted by the rise of online media sources?
   b. Do you find yourself positively or negatively regarding the validity of the information that is found online?

10. Please discuss what you like and dislike about your primary form of media.

11. What do you see as the benefits and drawbacks of traditional media? Of new media?

12. How do you perceive the news-telling approach is different for the available media forms?

13. What would you say are limitations for the various news media forms?

14. In this era of new technology, who do you consider to be a newsmaker or journalist?

15. Do you consider yourself a journalist? If so, do you think there's a distinction to be made between the work you do and the work of others in other media forms?

      a. What is that distinction?

16. Which do you value more: being the first to report news, or being slower to report but ensuring accuracy?

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