The Future of Newspapers: Adapting to the Web

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Abstract

The newspaper industry is in a period of transition. Circulation is shrinking, readership is decreasing and stock prices are falling. In addition, newspapers continue to struggle to compete with broadcast and online news. As more readers chose to get their news from timelier sources, newspaper editors and publishers have slowly realized the importance of creating their own newspaper Web sites. However, they are concerned that devoting too much time and too many resources to their papers’ online products will bring out the newspaper industry’s much-prophesized death.

Embracing the Internet does not necessarily mean that newspapers will cease to exist. Publishing news on Web sites rather than in print signifies a format change. Newspaper-style journalism (regarded for in-depth reporting and extensive coverage) will remain a valuable commodity. To prove the industry’s ability to overcome this new challenge, the paper discusses past format changes to which newspapers have adjusted. In addition, the paper discusses the “WebFirst” project and the implications of the project’s findings in relation to the industry.
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Introduction

The newspaper industry is in a rut. Circulation is decreasing, stock prices are shrinking, and more and more readers are getting their news from other sources. Skeptics speculate that newspapers are an outdated medium destined to disappear. Critics claim credibility and accuracy have been tossed to the side. Readers refuse to buy papers when they can find the same information somewhere else for free. Some would even say that newspapers are dying.

It would be easy to argue that newspapers will soon be a thing of the past. For years people have forecasted the demise of the newspaper. Generations of loyal newspaper readers are getting older, and younger people seem hesitant to subscribe. With 24-hour news channels like CNN and MSNBC, who boast continually updated news programs and Web sites, newspapers seem painfully slow. In fact, newspapers have struggled to compete with timelier broadcast news programs and the immediacy of online news for years. Still, newspapers survive. Newspapers survived and even thrived after the creation of television and radio news. Surely newspapers will be able to survive the recent popularity of online news.

The challenge to compete with television and online media outlets is merely another trend with which newspapers must adapt. "Anyone who's been around the news business any length of time remembers the angst that came with the advent of electronic typesetting, the appearance of computers in the newsroom, digital photography and pagination," Carl Redman, managing editor of The Advocate in Baton Rouge, La. said. "The rise of multimedia brought great changes in even the smallest newsrooms" (Redman). At first, these technological advances caused upheaval in the news business. Now it's hard to imagine a newsroom bereft of page designers, digital cameras, and computers. Just as the industry has embraced new technology in the past, newsrooms will integrate online news with the traditional print product.
And although newspapers may be in peril, the news industry doesn’t seem to be disappearing. In the words of Clark Hoyt, former Washington bureau chief for Knight Ridder, “The future of news is secure. People will always want news of their communities, the nation and the world and will find ways to get it from many sources” (Hoyt).

Hoyt and Redman were two of the participants in Poynter’s Future of News Conference last May. During two days, 27 editors and publishers met to dissect and develop ideas and predictions about the future of news. Their consensus: News has a future. “The end of news is as inconceivable as the end of history,” Pittsburgh Post-Gazette executive editor David Shribman said.

“While news moves into a new electronic future, both irresistible and unavoidable, let’s not conclude that the Internet is the end of the life cycle of the news business. Just as television did not represent the natural conclusion of the evolution of news, neither does the Internet” (Shribman).

Though the end of news is “inconceivable,” the future of newspapers as we know them may be in jeopardy. Broadcast news and online news are immediate. In a culture in which time is money and the being fastest often equates with being the most successful, more consumers turn to those news organizations for up-to-date information.

Recently some newspaper editors and publishers have adopted an “adapt or die” mentality. Because readership, circulation and advertising dollars have decreased, some shareholders of publicly-traded media companies have become dissatisfied with newspaper products. After Knight-Ridder shareholder Bruce Sherman forced the media company to put itself up for sale in November 2005, the newspaper industry realized it must make online products a priority to regain readers and advertisers. In an American Journalism Review article,
Howard Weaver, the vice-president for news at McClatchy, said that newspapers have little chance for survival unless they embrace the Internet. “You look at the choices that face journalists today. You can give up, you can hunker down and bleed, or you can fight back. Well, I want to fight back” (Smolkin).

Unless newsrooms can remain flexible and devote resources to develop extensive Web sites, the industry could meet its prophesized end. With each new competitor (radio news, television news, and now online news) newspapers have been forced to reconsider their more traditional ways of delivering the news. With even more organizations offering information, newspaper editors and publishers must be willing to change. They must be willing to delve into the Internet, and they must do it as quickly and thoroughly as possible. And, most important, newspapers must keep readers’ wants and needs in mind. Newspapers now have the ability to present information for multiple platforms. And with each technological innovation, newspaper editors must ask, “Is this the best way to present the information, or are we doing things because it’s the way we’ve always done them?”

At McClatchy and other media companies, like Gannett, the fight for survival is taking shape as a willingness to experiment with form (Smolkin). Newspapers are beginning to create online niche products to appeal to specific demographics. Media companies are no longer interested only in their papers’ print products. They see the need for news “portfolios,” or multiple sources for community news (i.e. the newspaper and the newspaper Web site). Although newspapers editors and publishers are beginning to repurpose their papers’ Web sites, online growth has been slow. “There has been no easy epiphany. No ‘Eureka! The answer to my problems is to transform my newspaper into a multi-platform portfolio’” (Smolkin).
Though the odds seem stacked against them, newspapers will likely overcome the slow start into the online medium because they have shown the ability to change. After the creation of USA Today, newspapers added color to pages. After the “Eyes on the News” EYE-TRAK research study, conducted by Dr. Mario Garcia and Pegie Stark Adam in 1990, papers began to view good design as an essential element of storytelling. More recently, newspapers have made the page size smaller to cut the cost of paper. And, because technology has improved, newspapers are now working to embrace multimedia and create Web sites that will be invaluable resources for their readers. Using the Internet to its fullest potential should be a goal for the entire industry. Even smaller newspapers, like the Palladium-Item in Richmond, Ind., are developing new ways to better use their Web sites. Teamed up with students from a local university in a project called “WebFirst”, the Palladium-Item worked to develop strategies for the papers that would better serve its community by putting more resources and emphasis on its Web site. By publishing breaking news online, continually updating stories and devoting more time and resources to the Web, the Palladium-Item editors have made an effort to make their Web site a priority without sacrificing their print product. The WebFirst project focused on providing a model for how a newsroom could create a stronger online presence.

Thus, there can be no doubt that through the years, newspaper journalists have shown a sincere willingness to evolve. In fact, several key turning points in recent history help establish clear signs that newspaper journalists will be able to adapt to future change. The following sections, beginning with a brief history of trends in newspaper design, will help flush out the dramatic changes that have influenced how newspaper journalists present news and information over the years.
Redesigns & Changes in Format

Sixteen years ago, The Poynter Institute for Media Studies published a groundbreaking study about how people read the news. In fact, “Eyes on the News,” by Garcia and Stark, revolutionized newspaper design and presentation. The first significant independent study for the newspaper industry using EYE-TRAK technology, the research disproved many common theories about newspaper readership.

The research used EYE-TRAK technology to record each subject’s precise eye movement. The study used realistic 20-page prototypes of newspapers in three cities and focused primarily on the use of color. But ultimately, the study changed the way newspapers organized content. In his introduction to "Eyes on the News," Poynter's Roy Peter Clark wrote: "As I read [the findings], I sat scratching my head as myth after myth about newspaper reading fell by the wayside" (qtd. in Eyetrack: A History, Outing). The study’s key findings showed:

- Color photos do not automatically draw readers. Content, size, and placement are more important.
- Readers will enter a newspaper page wherever the most powerful element is -- and are willing to follow trails that editors lay for them.
- Readers look at facing pages as single units.
- Readers are willing to accept bold, even outrageous color experiments.
- Color does not detract from a reader's acquisition of visual information (qtd. in Eyetrack: A History, Outing).

Traditionally papers emphasized the strength of the written word. Pages contained as many words as possible. When published, photographs were typically small. However, “Eyes on the News” proved that readers looked at content as a packages or a cohesive unit with a headline, picture and story. Dominant art and headlines drew readers’ eyes to a particular package. Photographs caught the readers’ attention first. If the dominant art was interesting enough, the
reader moved on to look at the headline, cutline and secondary elements. Finally, if all the previous elements were interesting, the reader was more likely to read the story (Outing).

The study had a tremendous effect on how pages were designed and created jobs for visual journalists. Suddenly papers were realizing the importance of well-designed, easy-to-navigate pages. After the study, large numbers of papers began redesigning in an attempt to create better packaging and presentation strategies and ultimately, better serve their readers.

“Editors (the word people) have come to accept visual journalism for what it is: the packaging of content to make it easier to access, easier to read, easier to comprehend. There is respect for our craft as visual journalists” (Garcia).

According to Garcia, founder and CEO of Garcia Media Global Group, redesigns were not really in the vocabulary of newspapers until the 1970s, when the introduction of color made it necessary to look at how color would affect other areas of design. He prefers to use the term “rethinking” because the concept “redesign” implies only a cosmetic change to the paper.

When newspapers rethink content, organization and navigation, the end result can be higher readership and circulation. “Redesigns, by themselves, do not boost circulation,” Garcia said. “If however, a redesign represents a rethinking of the newspaper, from to top bottom with emphasis on content, then you are in business.” He also emphasizes the importance of navigation. A well-designed paper can help readers choose the stories that interest them. “If well done, one creates story structures to aid the storytelling process. [It] creates hierarchy to save the readers’ time as they travel through the newspaper” (Garcia).

Current trends in redesign begin with content. The trends emphasize navigation starting on Page One, as well as, page architecture that highlights hierarchy to indicate to readers what the importance of each item is. Redesigns also create color palettes that are functional, not
decorative, and create advertising positioning that integrates ads better visually with the rest of the paper. When these goals are met, the newspaper becomes more useful to its readers.

Newspapers survived and adapted after the findings from "Eyes on the News" study were released. The research may have temporarily caused upheaval in some newsrooms, but ultimately it created a new branch of journalism and a new, more enlightened way of thinking. Most important, the findings developed ways to make the paper easier for readers to use. The findings of the "Eyes on the News" study forced the newspaper industry to move away from its traditional way of thinking. Just as redesigns challenged journalists to creatively solve navigation and content-packaging problems, developing a strong online presence gives journalists an opportunity to think outside the newspaper's traditional parameters. Both industry trends, redesign and online development, have changed the format of news products. Although redesigns revolutionized the industry, they did not bring it to a crashing halt. Just as those papers accepted their new, more visual format, today's papers should be able to accept their newest format change; the Web.

More recently, newspapers pages have been shrinking in size. Newspapers across the country have trimmed up to four inches from the width of a traditional page. Dropping from 52-inch web to a 48-inch web, papers have realized the advantage of a smaller sized paper. A narrower paper is more manageable, some say. But ultimately, the driving force behind the change is that a smaller paper translates to a 10 percent cut in the cost of newsprint (Doll).

In the market for a new printing press, the Gannett-owned Journal and Courier in Lafayette, Ind. changed page sizes after Gannett expressed interest in testing the effectiveness of "Berliner" sized paper. The Journal and Courier became the first paper in the United States to switch to the Berliner size. Popular in Europe, Berliner-sized pages are 12 inches wide by 18.5
inches deep. The decision to change to the Berliner was a two-year process involving numerous prototypes and focus groups.

Executive Editor Julie Doll said the change also gave the staff the opportunity to improve the paper from the inside. "The [new] size allowed us to get outside the usual page design box... It made us rethink how we approach the story hierarchy. It tended to make us think in more innovative and creative ways about how we present the news" (Doll).

The community's response to the new size has been "overwhelmingly positive," she added.

If done well, similar press conversions and redesigns address navigation and story placement. In addition, they offer journalists the opportunity to question more traditional ways of organization. The chance to brainstorm and exchange fresh ideas can create ideal ways to reorganize the paper's content. Ultimately, newspapers have used redesigns and format changes to respond to changes in the industry. And although the current state of newspapers may seem more perilous than ever before, there has been no solid evidence that the industry can't overcome the current issues through more adaptive change. And, just as redesigns and smaller page sizes breed relevant organization conversations, the creation and further use of Web sites should also create lively newsroom discussions. Although the print page may disappear, the type of journalism newspapers have provided will remain valuable. Extensive coverage and in-depth reporting, the hallmarks of newspaper journalism, will remain a commodity in our democratic culture. Newspaper journalism will survive because readers will still want to understand the relevance and the context of the news. And though the print page may be replaced by a digital version of the news, reporting and in-depth storytelling will always be relevant and timely. Using Web sites as the primary platform for delivering news is merely another format change. And just
as the Journal and Courier adapted to a narrower page, newspapers will also evolve and adapt to the Internet. Better use of the Internet doesn’t signify an end to newspaper journalism; it signifies a change in format.

**Newspaper Web sites & Breaking News**

After technology made it possible to post stories online, newspapers began to create Web sites as an additional way to provide information to readers. Newspapers originally used Web sites as a place to recycle stories from the print edition. According to Don Wittekind, assistant professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and former graphics director at the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, only a small portion of the newspaper on the Internet because papers were afraid of “scooping themselves.” Important news stories were held to run in the next day’s paper instead of first publishing the story on the web. “Newspapers were used to competing with newspapers,” Wittekind said. “We didn’t want to put something out there and have another newspaper get it. We ignored the fact that while we were holding these stories back, TV and radio were running them. We really weren’t scooping anybody for years anyway. When newspapers realized they weren’t just competing with newspapers, this is where the change happened. They realized they were competing with TV, with radio, with other Web sites. They were competing on an international basis now” (Wittekind).

Although some papers realize their competition has grown to include broadcast news, many papers are still worried about “scooping themselves.” The *Sun-Sentinel* understood the importance of publishing breaking news online. “When I worked at the *Sun-Sentinel* and we put a story on the web and got it up five minutes before the *Miami Herald*, we considered that a
scoop. Any time you know someone is going to break the same story; it is the news organization’s job to get it out there as soon as possible. That’s what people want” (Wittekind).

The transition to publishing breaking news online has not occurred across the industry. A 2004 study conducted by the University of Texas found that many papers fill their Web sites with recycled newspaper stories, or “shovelware,” that were posted online and rarely updated. In the analysis of 30 newspapers from Editor & Publisher’s 2002 list of 100 largest-circulating newspapers, the study found that five papers made no updates during the day, while 13 updated their sites with breaking news stories. Less than half the papers updated their sites consistently (Alves). Although newspapers have worked to overcome the discrepancy, many seem to be struggling to break away from a once-a-day publishing cycle.

Newspaper Web Sites & Multimedia

Once newspapers began to publish breaking news online, it was only a matter of time before more progressive newsrooms expanded their Web sites to include additional information. Once animation and conversion programs became available, “multimedia storytelling” became the new buzzwords in many newsrooms across the country. Former Sun-Sentinel Graphics Director Leavitt Biles realized the importance of using the new platform as a way to integrate graphics, audio and video. Wittekind said newspapers have yet to widely use multimedia content—the blending of text and photos with audio and video—on their sites. “Video is a single media. Audio is a single media. And if they’re not used together to tell a story, then I don’t consider it multimedia. Multimedia is bringing all those elements together in a single place…and telling a story using those things as tools. While I think you find a lot of those little pieces, I’m still
stun how many places aren’t doing any of it.” Wittekind says the Sun-Sentinel was the first paper to try to incorporate multimedia content on a regular basis. Under the direction of Biles, the Sun-Sentinel began creating multimedia informational graphics. The paper published its first project in 1996 using Macromedia Director. “For the next two or three years, it surprised me how few people were using it. We thought it was just going to take off” (Wittekind). Macromedia Flash, a much simpler program to use, helped bring multimedia content to newspaper readers. The program appealed to artists and photographers and became integrated in newsrooms across the country. In addition, high-speed Internet also helped animated informational graphics, slideshows, and video gain popularity among readers.

**What are papers doing now?**

Many newsrooms are beginning to view online news as an integral part of a successful media organization. Large media companies, like Gannett, are seeking ways to expand their newspapers’ Web sites to more fully meet the needs of readers. Gannett has created a new initiative, called “the information center” for its newsrooms based on pilot projects at 11 newspapers. The research showed breaking news on the Web and updating for the paper drew more people to both the print and the Web products. Deep databases with local information and more community interaction made the Web site more valuable to readers. In addition, the more popular Web sites attracted the type of customer online advertisers want. According to the company’s Web site, information centers work by focusing and gathering news and information in multiple media formats. “The Information Center will let us gather the very local news and information that customers want, then distributed it when, where and how our customers seek it.”
Gannett CEO Craig Dublow said the Information Center is the newsroom of the future (http://gannett.gci/infocenter).

Not only will the structure of Gannett newsrooms change, the traditional moniker will also change. Gannett newsrooms will be renamed “Local Information Centers.” The adjustment comes because Gannett executives wanted the name to reflect newspapers’ broadened commitment to providing more than the news.

“Increasingly, we are realizing that our customers are interested in much more than news from our products. While news remains our preeminent mission, other information — especially local information — is increasingly in demand. Calendars, recommendations, lifestyle topics as well as neighborhood level stories are all new elements that will have ongoing coverage across platforms. We are also embracing community interactivity in our sites with increased involvement. Changing the name acknowledges this additional responsibility and emphasizes that we are gathering news and information for websites, mobile devices and other products as well as for our daily newspapers” (http://gannett.gci/infocenter).

The Courier-Journal, the Gannett-owned paper in Louisville, Ky., hopes to have its newsroom restructuring completed by January 2007. The new “local information center” will become a “24/7 operation where we have people here working on delivering the news in different platforms,” Bennie Ivory said. Ivory, the executive editor of the Courier-Journal, said the transition will be a challenge. “We just need to figure out how to organize it, put the right people in the right places and do it” (Ivory).

In addition to restructuring, many employees need training to be able to report information in different platforms. “There are very few newsrooms that have a lot of people who are trained to deal with this new stuff. We have to train people to think about multiple platforms beyond the traditional print product” (Ivory). The Courier-Journal has already begun to train its reporters and photographers to use video cameras. Also, graphic reporters are working with the online staff to create animated informational graphics.
While some professionals seem wary that the industry will require every journalist to learn all the skills needed to create multimedia content, the concept of "super journalists" has yet to gain much popularity, Wittekind says. He adds that it's not realistic to expect journalists to master all these technical skills; the newspaper industry would be full of mediocrity. However, he says it's fair to ask reporters to collect audio during interviews, to teach graphics reporters to use animation programs and to encourage photographers to also try videography. Teaching these skills seems more like a natural progression for newsroom employees (Wittekind).

While dealing with staffing issues, the Courier-Journal is also planning to create "portal" Web sites. These separate sites focus on specific topics with information, not news, that would be relevant to readers. The Courier-Journal's "Dining Guide" portal site provides a searchable database of local restaurants with additional reviews and recipes. Ivory said the customization of newspaper Web sites is important. Providing specific information to a targeted demographic is the future, he said (Ivory).

In the works is a portal site for young, working mothers, as well. "[Focus groups] were very clear about what they want. They want us to make their lives easier." The young women also wanted to interact with each other. "Social interaction is going to be really important. People are looking for a sense of community" (Ivory). The Courier-Journal is hoping to corner the Louisville market in online social interaction by using chat tools.

The Courier-Journal also is making strides to break news stories on its Web site and continually update them. After a 2004 University of Texas study showed most papers update Web sites by shoveling content from the newspaper, newsrooms have tried to offer more Web-original content. Ivory said the Courier-Journal is no longer waiting for the print edition before
breaking stories. As soon as the story is verified, it goes online. The paper sends E-mail news alerts to readers who subscribe to the Courier-Journal's online newsletter.

Although paper's readership is strong, the Courier-Journal is working to improve its Web site. The Courier-Journal ranks 48th in Scarborough Research's Top 100 Newspapers (measured by newspaper readership on an average weekday), but Ivory realizes that a stronger Web site is crucial to paper's success (www.naa.org). The print product seems to be thriving, and Ivory sees the paper's success an indication of the possible popularity of the Web site. He believes creating a better site could help the Courier-Journal corner the media market in Louisville. "Our issue is just growing our website" (Ivory).

**Going WebFirst**

The newspaper industry is dynamic. From modifying the size and look of papers to learning to successfully use Web sites and multimedia, newspapers have embrace change. More important, papers have strived to rethink traditional ways of presenting information to their readers. In order to provide the best information in the least amount of time and to be able to compete with other news sources, newspapers must be flexible and willing to tread on new ground. The print product may not always be the newsroom's primary focus. Newspapers already realize the value of the Internet and understand the need to develop new ways to benefit the reader.

Former executive editor of the Richmond Palladium-Item Rich Jackson says newspaper Web sites must be more innovative to provide the kind of information readers want and need. "We need to think a lot more about how to help people live their lives" (Jackson).
In the spring of 2006, Jackson and the staff of the *Palladium-Item* partnered with an advanced journalism class at Ball State University to develop the paper’s online capabilities. Jackson’s original reason for cultivating the partnership was to create the multimedia projects typical of larger papers with a much smaller, untrained staff. “Metro-sized newspapers are going to have 15-20 people in custom graphics alone. I’m not going to have anyone specialized. I had a newsroom of about 25 generalists” (Jackson). Metro-sized papers, with circulations more than 100,000 have more resources to devote to creating in-house informational graphics and multimedia content. Papers like the *Palladium-Item*, with an average daily circulation of more than 17,000, realize the value of additional online content, but struggle to find employees with the necessary skills and time to master the advanced software necessary for generating these projects (Jackson).

Jackson said training a newsroom of “generalists” to think creatively about the Web and its possibilities would be a challenge. A shortage of trained staff and limited time to devote to developing the Web site posed problems. He realized the importance of “making a significant move towards the Web” but understood the constraints of his limited staff. “We realized we didn’t have enough staff members, nor do we have enough expertise to do that and to do it well” (WebFirst presentation).

Jackson also understood the possible limitations of employees with a long history in the newspapers profession. “Another realization we had is that the management is older,” he said. “We realized we needed the expertise of people of who’ve grown up with the Internet, grown up with the technology we want to move to. That’s another reason for going to a place like Ball State” (WebFirst presentation).
Many journalists follow Jackson’s reasoning and are looking to younger journalists to help them think outside the “print” box. In Internet-related discussions, older journalism professionals are listening to their younger counterparts. Young journalists and journalism students, in the important demographic of 18 to 30-year-olds, have grown up using the Internet and better understand its capabilities (WebFirst presentation).

New to the profession, young journalists also have fresh perspectives. Younger journalists hopefully will be able to see beyond the current state of newspaper Web sites to envision better ways to serve their readers and themselves. Tony Majeri, former senior editor for innovation at the Chicago Tribune and visiting consultant for the class, agreed that young people have an advantage. “Young people are the future,” he said. “They are the digital natives. They understand intuitively why and what to do. They simply and seamlessly solve problems because that’s how they think.” He added that young journalists aren’t hindered by “baggage” that older journalists have to put aside to create solutions to Internet-related problems (WebFirst presentation).

These young professionals embody the quote from playwright George Bernard Shaw, made famous by Senator Robert Kennedy. “You see things; and you say, ‘Why?’ But I dream things that never were; and I say, ‘Why not?’” (Shaw 75). According to Majeri, these journalists have the ability to envision what newspaper Web sites have the potential of becoming.

Jennifer George-Palilonis, who co-taught the class with fellow professor Lori Demo, agreed that the partnership provided a valuable opportunity for the students and the Palladium-Item. Students were given the chance to work with professionals on a timely and relevant topic, while the Palladium-Item was able to tap into the minds of the audience they were trying to reach (Palilonis).
Once the class began, Jackson asked students for their opinions and ideas. “I asked them what they wanted from a site like ours and then to develop ideas from that” (Jackson). Members of the class drew from personal web experience as well as asking for the opinions of their peers. Students critiqued the *Palladium-Item*’s Web site and brainstormed ways to improve it.

Katie Higley, another graphics major, said the students wanted to prove that young people could have an effect in newsrooms. “We all had some really great ideas. We weren’t scared to share them because we wanted to make an impression,” she said. “I think we had a lot of ideas that didn’t have limitations because we haven’t been in our fields to hear people say, ‘No, you can’t do that’” (WebFirst presentation). Divided into project teams, the students worked to find efficient and realistic ways to help the *Palladium-Item* reach its multimedia goals.

The students proposed a valuable solution to help small papers incorporate multimedia on the paper’s Web site. Newspapers frequently publish stories that require maps and charts. Many health-related stories would benefit from graphics illustrating possible effects on the body. So, the students created basic Flash graphics that could be easily altered to meet the specific needs of a particular story. “That’s a really terrifically valuable idea for small newspapers,” Jackson said. “Something we can go in and quickly type some information and reuse the graphic time and again” (Jackson).

In addition to reusable graphics, the students also worked on templates for the types of stories that are frequently published. The basic template can be used countless times, and having templates with easily changed components cuts down on the time spent on online projects. Graduate student Miranda Mulligan said working on the project was appealing to her because the many stories could be posted on the site quickly. After the first post, stories can be updated easily as more information is gathered. “It lends itself to multiple publishing times so you can
get the most important information up immediately,” she said. “As time goes by you can keep publishing” (WebFirst presentation).

The students also applied their personal Internet experience to the projects. In the online world, stories are constantly updating, new projects are continually being posted, and there are countless places to get information. With a multitude of online media choices, it’s important that newspapers provide readers with a reason to come back to their Web site. Posting interactive multimedia content brings more readers to the site. Continually updating information makes readers come back. Theresa Auch said that Web users can be apathetic unless newspapers give them a reason to return. Updates and big multimedia projects are ways to bring repeat visitors. “They [the updates and projects] can’t be far apart because people don’t care,” she said. “They won’t have a reason to come back to your paper’s site” (WebFirst presentation).

In the past, editors have realized the importance of understanding their newspaper audience. However, it’s difficult to gauge how well they understand their online audience. Auch said the best place to develop solutions to Internet problems is at a small newspaper like the Palladium-Item. “But you can’t do this if you don’t know your audience,” she said. “You need to know what they need and what they want” (WebFirst presentation). Majeri and Jacson both said that working with young journalists is a good way to understand the needs and wants of the Internet generation (WebFirst presentation).

Students also improved the way large stories are told online. “I wanted them to approach the news stories in a different way,” Jen Noland said. “Not as though it was a top to bottom story, but as if they were chunks” (WebFirst presentation). Thinking of stories as separate chunks breaks long in-depth stories into more manageable pieces. Each piece can be read as part of the whole story or can be read alone. Also the chunks can present information in various
combinations of multimedia content. Jackson found the idea impressive. "I was terribly impressed with longer stories that would be broken down into parts online that would be able to stand alone as its own story," he said (WebFirst presentation).

To help small papers create discussions about what to publish online, the class created a simulative Flash presentation. The presentation chronicled the work of the class and allowed newspapers to actively learn how to create a multimedia environment for the newsroom. In addition to explaining the purpose of the class, the presentation also describes the projects the students worked on. The presentation also shows journalists what components translate to the Web and teaches them the basic skills to be able to create interactive content themselves. The simulative walks journalists through the process of covering a story for multimedia.

Jason Luebke, a senior in George-Palilonis' advanced graphics class, helped develop the Flash presentation. He worked closely with Mulligan and classmate Brandon Stuck to finalize the project. He said the Flash presentation would help journalists combine the right skills and information to create a more interactive online experience for readers. It's critical that papers begin conditioning their employees to think about the Web. Today's newspapers are evolving to become media centers (Luebke). He said becoming a media center meant newspapers would still gather all possible information, but now journalists must decide the best platform to present that information. He argues the Internet is the best place for reporting that information. Luebke said Web sites are the best places to disseminate information because they provide a timely way to deliver information. Web sites also can employ various methods that newspapers are unable to use to distribute the information (Luebke).

Mulligan agrees that newspapers must push them themselves to reconsider the importance of the Internet. She also says that the change won't come quickly or easily.
“This involves a drastic change in the way of thinking deeply ingrained in the newsroom. Many news folk are older journalists seemingly afraid that their job descriptions will change and they will be pushed out of a business they dedicated the majority of their career-life to; they see the Web as a threat” (Mulligan).

**Conclusion**

If developing a Web site is considered a threat to job security, how can journalists overcome their wariness of the medium? The Internet should be viewed as a stepping stone to a better relationship with newspaper readers. Inside every journalist should be an unyielding desire to serve readers. Keep the readers’ wants and needs in mind, and the news industry will survive. Mulligan asserts that newspapers should dive into online news. “The Web needs to be seen as a tool for information delivery and a no-fear mentality needs to be adopted in the newsroom. There is a desperate need for open-mindedness and a dedication from the top of the food chain to support the transition and training.”

The desire to improve every facet of newspaper Web sites can’t simply begin with young journalists. While younger professionals may implicitly understand Internet trends, they can’t fight entire newsrooms to change online practices. As Mulligan said, the impetus for change must come from the publishers and editors. To fully embrace online news and better the lives of readers will take a concerted effort from the entire news industry.

The newspaper industry is in a transitional period. Readership and circulation numbers are decreasing while the popularity of other media groups is growing. Fewer people are reading the paper, but more people than ever before are seeking information about their communities. To compete with other news providers, it’s crucial that newspapers embrace and harness the power of the Internet.
Papers are slowly realizing the benefits of a well-developed Web site. In addition to breaking news online, papers can offer interactive multimedia content, community calendars and blogs, networking opportunities and deep databases of local information. Jackson’s idea that newspapers and their Web sites should simplify their readers’ lives is the future.

Newspapers have provided research, in-depth analysis and insight into the world’s biggest stories. That isn’t enough anymore. Now papers should help readers successfully live in their communities, in addition to reporting the news. The newspaper should use its Web site as a one-stop, all-inclusive, easy-to-navigate platform to give the community what it wants and needs. Newspapers aren’t dying. They’re evolving. The newspaper industry isn’t dead. It’s reinventing itself.
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