WebFirst Project:
the evolution of the newspaper industry

An Honors Thesis (Honors 499)

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Abstract

The newspaper industry is in a state of evolution because of declining circulation and the increasing popularity of the Internet. More and more people are going online, instead of reading the print publication, to get their news. In the WebFirst Project, a group of Ball State University students studied how newspapers with limited resources and small staffs can overcome their fear of the Internet to create a conversation between their Web site and print publication.

For my thesis I helped create a CD detailing the goals and projects undertaken by the WebFirst Project team. I also created written content for a Web site about the WebFirst Project. The final element of my thesis is a research paper I wrote detailing the evolution of the newspaper industry and why the WebFirst Project is an important step in the right direction for newspapers.
Artist’s Statement

My honors thesis changed a lot from the vision my adviser and I had from the beginning of the semester. Originally, one part of my thesis was going to focus on my work helping to implement the WebFirst Project, a model I helped create with a group of Ball State University students, at the Muncie Star Press. The goal of the WebFirst Project is to help newspapers overcome the challenges they face as the media industry changes.

Problems arose, however, when the Star Press kept delaying its involvement. In the end, my adviser and I only had one meeting with the Star Press staff members, and they never let us try to put the plan into action in their newsroom. Obviously, this put a big hole in my thesis; so instead of including information on the implementation process, I wrote a research paper about the state of the news industry and why the WebFirst Project is an important step in the process of helping newspapers deal with the troubles they are facing.

The other two sections of my honors thesis involved the creation of a CD and Web site to help people learn about WebFirst. Although our WebFirst Project team began the DVD last year, it was never completed. In order to help finish the CD, I worked with my adviser and a graduate student who helped with the design aspect because I am not trained in Flash, the program the CD was created in. My role in creating this CD, besides helping dream up the ideas and projects being shown on it, was to write the text, help interview people and edit the CD. I spent hours working my way through the sections of the CD, watching it over and over to make sure we caught all the mistakes. A copy of this CD is included as a section of my thesis.
The third section of my thesis is material that I have written for a Web site about the WebFirst Project. Because I am not a designer or computer wizard, my role in this is strictly text-based. I wrote information about several aspects of WebFirst, which will later be used by the journalism department to create a Web site about the project.

Although my honors thesis changed during the semester, I am proud of the work I accomplished. I also think the fact that my project has several aspects to it, not just a text-based research paper, gives it something extra.
Acknowledgements

- I want to thank my thesis advisor and mentor Lori Demo for all the help she has given me, not only in completing this project but in getting through my college education as well.

- I want to thank Jennifer George-Palilonis as well for her guidance on the WebFirst Project.

- And, of course, I have to thank all the other WebFirst project team members who made our dreams become a reality in the form of the projects and CD.
WebFirst Project:  
Analyzing the State of the News Industry

By Emily Ortman
INTRODUCTION

The future of newspapers hangs in an uncertain balance. Because of flat advertising sales, circulation declining and competition from other news mediums, many people are predicting the death of the print paper. Newspapers are not dying, though. They are evolving. And newspapers that don’t embrace this evolution are making survival in this changing media market harder for themselves.

For journalism professionals who have grown up with the traditional newspaper industry, this revolutionary shift of readers to the Internet is viewed as threatening.¹ The Internet is forcing journalists to re-evaluate the way they approach news and the routines they have followed for decades. Many newspapers simply take the print stories from the newspaper and shovel them unchanged onto the Web site, which creates a static environment. People, especially younger consumers, go online for news for two main reasons: immediacy and interactivity. This old model of journalism gives them neither elements, and therefore is not taking advantage of the strengths of the Internet.

The goal of newspapers is to find a journalistic model to better serve their readers both online and in print. According to the State of the News Media 2007, this type of online model has been explored little and does not exist yet.

The field is still highly experimental, with an array of options, but it can be hard to discern what one site offers, in contrast to another. And some of the Web’s potential abilities seem less developed than others. Sites have done more, for instance, to exploit immediacy, but they have done less to exploit the potential for depth.²

The WebFirst Project, conducted by students and faculty at Ball State University, has created a model for newspapers to help improve their use of the Internet and attract more, specifically younger, readers. The model emphasizes creating a conversation between the print newspaper and the online version in order to gain more readers and improve the quality of journalism. With the WebFirst model, newspapers with limited resources and small staffs can take advantage the power of the Internet, even on a daily deadline news cycle. Although the WebFirst Project ideas have not yet been implemented at a newspaper, Ball State University is working on forming a partnership with a small newspaper to test this model in a professional news environment.

Newspapers need to find and embrace a Web-based model such as WebFirst to avoid being left behind as the news industry moves forward.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To better understand the need and importance of the WebFirst Project, a deeper look must be taken into the state of the newspaper industry. Researching the decline in readership, the popularity of the Internet and the news-consumption habits of the younger demographic will help emphasize the necessity of the WebFirst Project.

Decline in Readership

Although print newspaper readership may be ailing, it is far from dead. About 51 million people buy a newspaper each day, and about 124 million people read one. Circulation for 2005, however, fell by 2.8 percent daily and 3.4 percent on Sundays compared to the same period a year earlier. "Circulation has been falling in absolute
numbers since roughly 1990, and as a percentage of households since the 1920s. Yet much of that history could be attributed to the waning popularity and ultimate closing of evening papers. As recently as 2003, morning circulation was as high as it had ever been. The perception that newspaper readers are disappearing isn’t completely true, though. The readers aren’t vanishing into thin air; many are simply turning to a new source for their information: the Internet.

Newspapers shouldn’t consider the Internet competition, though, because the Web can help them grow their audience. The trend of going to the Internet for news has increased from one-in-fifty Americans about ten years ago to one-in-three Americans today. In 2006, news Web sites saw about 57.3 million visitors a month, which is a 15 percent increase from the same period of time the year before.

In the Editor and Publisher article “Dispelling the Myth of Readership Decline,” Jennifer Saba writes that newspapers should include Web readership in their total audience count. If they did, it would show that newspaper readership is actually higher than ever. A study by Media Audit, a ratings service for more than 80 markets, shows that some Web sites increase the market penetration of the newspaper to more than 60, 70 or 80 percent of the adult population. Almost 50 papers had a market penetration of more

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3 Project for Excellence in Journalism (accessed)
than 70 percent, according to the report. Newspaper Web sites increase the reach of the product by an average of 12 percent in the top 100 newspapers nationally.

This “new definition of mass” gives the newspaper industry an opportunity to put a more positive spin on its own story: Newspapers are not dinosaurs. The world is changing but newspapers are changing with it, and now they are growing thanks to their Internet audiences.

Newspapers are facing competition online, however, from alternative news sources such as Google, Yahoo and bloggers. “Forecast 2005: For Newspapers, Competition Too Big To Ignore” by Rick Edmonds, a media business analyst, pointed out three reasons why Google and Yahoo are big competition for newspapers: they have lots of money to invest, they have strong existing news products already and there revenue base is advertising, which is the most important income for newspapers. Unlike Google and Yahoo, newspaper Web sites have not been taking risks and trying to personalize the news, which is what the consumers want.

Blogs attract readers and encourage community interaction, which is why they are so threatening to newspapers. Many newspapers are trying to take advantage of this, however, by starting blogs of their own. Small- and medium-sized newspapers in particular are using blogs as their “innovation of choice.”

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9 Scarborough Research. “A New Lead Story for the Newspaper Industry: Newspapers are Successfully Extending Their Online Audience.” August 23, 2006.
Popularity of the Internet

According to a study by Pew Research Center, 88 percent of Internet users say it plays a role in their daily routine for things such as communicating with relatives, shopping online or finding information. Many Americans feel the Internet is a useful tool for completing daily activities more efficiently, and 30 percent say it plays a major role in their lives.¹²

Consumers from many markets, not just newspapers, are turning to the Internet. With the advent of online shopping, entertainment and news, many industries have found themselves struggling to catch up with technology. The music industry, for example, went through a tremendous fight against online music downloading sites such as Napster, and the movie industry is dealing with the same piracy and copyright issues as well. One study shows that the music industry suffered so much because they were inflexible, depended on a single source of revenue, behaved like a monopoly and were out of touch with users. The author says the newspaper industry is in this same position with these same problems, and if newspapers don’t change, they will suffer as the music industry did. If newspapers don’t prepare themselves, they will make the problems they have to face harder to overcome.¹³

Consumers turn to the Internet because it is convenient, fast and interactive. Although convenience does matter to print newspaper and television news consumers as well, they tend to be more concerned with the subject matter and quality of content than the Web users. The immediacy of the Web, which attracts many people, also makes

online news last when ranking time dedicated to news sources. Americans spend less
time with online news sites than any other form of media. In 2006, consumers spent an
average of six minutes a day getting online news, compared with 30 minutes watching
TV news, 15 minutes reading the print paper and 16 minutes listening to news on the
radio. Finally, the popularity of networking and other interactive sites such as
Facebook, MySpace and YouTube show that people flock to the Internet to connect with
one another.

According to the Middletown Media Studies, which did observational research on
how much people use technology, showed that although the TV still dominates people’s
lives, computers and the Internet aren’t far behind. The study shows that people spend an
average of 135.8 minutes on computers, and 93.4 minutes of that time is also spent
online. Media consumers, however, only spend an average of 12.2 minutes a day reading
a newspaper.

News-Consumption Habits of Youth

About 46 percent of people who say they don’t get enjoyment from being
informed about the news are under the age of 40. Almost half of people who check the
news sporadically rather than regularly are under 40 years old as well.

These opinions and news habits, which are largely unchanged from past surveys,
are strongly associated with less usage of all types of news sources, with an
important exception. People who like to check in on the news go online for news
about as often as do people who like to read or tune in at set times of the day.

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14 Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (accessed)
16 Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (accessed)
The youth market is one of the most important elements in helping stop the declining circulation in newspapers and analysts say newspapers that don’t attract this group are putting themselves at risk.17 Some newspapers have begun producing special sections directed toward younger readers, such as the Chicago Tribune’s Red Eye. According to a study by the Readership Institute at Northwestern University, publications like this can be successful at attracting the younger readers if the content is intentionally chosen and designed for that specific audience.18

The theory is that if newspaper can hook readers at a young age, they will stay loyal to the newspaper. Considering that 78 percent of middle and high school students, or about 17 million youths, go online, the better route for hooking these readers might be the Internet. According to Merrill Brown’s “Abandoning the News,” the 18-to 34-year-old demographic will continue to increase its use of the Internet as a source for news, and young news consumers rank the Internet, by a 41-to-15 percent margin over TV, as “the most useful way to learn.”19

WEBFIRST PROJECT

The WebFirst Project began when two Ball State University faculty members told eight students to dream big. The professors selected the students for the project because they had excelled in their disciplines. Six of the students were journalism graphics majors and two were news-editorial majors. The group partnered with Richmond’s daily

19 Brown (2005)
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newspaper, the *Palladium-Item*, to study how a small newspaper can create a conversation between the print paper and Web site.

The group participated in many brainstorming sessions, some including professional mentor Tony Majeri, a member of the *Chicago Tribune*’s innovation team and a fellow for Ball State’s Center for Media Design. Students studied the *Palladium-Item*’s Web site and proposed projects to work on that could help improve the paper’s site. The group decided on three projects: the events calendar, the nonlinear story tree and interactive graphic templates.

**Events Calendar**

The Richmond paper displays a section on its site called What’s Happening, a community calendar that lists local events. Members of the WebFirst project team decided to do a makeover of this calendar to make it more user-friendly and interactive. The original calendar was simple and straightforward, with just a text-heavy list of local events. The team saw an opportunity for a redesign that would make the calendar easier to read, more clearly organized and focused on community interaction.

The writers on the WebFirst team also wanted to strengthen the writing on the events calendar by adding vigor to attract a younger audience. Instead of just listing time, date and place of the events, the students wrote summaries of the events in a fun, energetic style. They also choose a couple events that were bigger or more interesting to be featured in more prominent stories on the page.

To help with the organization aspect, the group wanted to split the events into topical sections instead of just one long list. The calendar also needed a better way for
users to search for events, so the group took the chance to make a searchable database
where users could more easily find exactly what they were looking for.

Another important aspect the students wanted to highlight was community
interaction. The *Palladium-Item* has an account on MySpace.com, a networking Web site
popular with young people. The newspaper’s MySpace page attracted a young group of
underground artists who discussed events that weren’t mentioned on the What’s
Happening calendar. The WebFirst team thought this group was a good example of why
the calendar needed more community input. The group focused on this interaction by
creating a space for community members to submit their own events to the calendar. This
increases the chance for smaller, less-known events to make an appearance on the site.
To spark even more interaction, the group included a space for users to submit comments
on events so they could share feedback and extra information.

**Nonlinear Story Tree**

Writing stories for the Web and writing stories for the print publication cannot be
the same. Each requires reporters to have a specific set of guidelines and skills. Because
writing for the Web is an emerging idea, though, newspapers have not yet adopted an
updated style of writing for the Web. The WebFirst project team wanted to examine and
expand the idea of writing for a Web by creating a specific writing style and guidelines
for that style. The group called this style chunking stories or a story tree.

A story tree divides a story into smaller chunks of information. A chunk is not just
text but anything that can help tell the story: graphics, photos, audio or video. These
chunks of information should not be treated as sidebars, but rather as their own stories
that work together and complement each other to tell an in-depth story. Each chunk should be able to stand on its own, which might mean reintroducing sources in each chunk. Doing this makes the story nonlinear, so readers can view the chunks in whatever order they want. The story should, however, be introduced by a small introductory chunk of information, which will help the readers determine whether they are interested in the story. The navigation of a story tree can be on the side or bottom of the chunk, and each chunk should have a button in the navigation.

The story tree is important because it gives readers the control. As newspapers use their Web sites more and more, they must evolve to the culture of the Internet. The Web-savvy readers will not tolerate a static environment like those of a print newspaper or TV broadcast. They want interaction, they want to click buttons and they want to be involved. The story becomes nonlinear in the story tree format, which allows for more reader control. After reading the introductory chunk, a reader can choose whichever chunk they want next. Because the chunks are written to stand alone, the reader isn’t required to read the story in a certain order.

For example, if a newspaper reports on the passage of a city budget, it would usually cover this as a simple, linear story. Using the WebFirst model, though, this type of story has more context and depth. The budget story could be broken up into chunks of information:

- Introduction chunk with a few paragraphs about the budget
- A chunk for each of the major effects the budget passing will have
- Video/audio: interviews with members of the city council and people the budget will affect the most
Interactive Graphics: timeline describing process from when budget began to its passing, chart showing where the money will go

Putting all this information into one story would probably discourage readers because it would be long and cumbersome. Breaking the information up makes it easier for readers to go to what they need right away instead of sifting through a long story.

Interactive Graphic Templates

Small newspapers don’t have a lot of time to spend working on interactive graphics for their Web sites, and usually few members of their staffs know complicated programs, such as Flash, to produce these graphics. The WebFirst team, however, felt it was important that the audience of these small newspapers experience the interaction and information graphics such as these can bring to a story. To get around the problem of limited time and resources, the project team came up with the idea of creating interactive graphic templates.

An interactive graphic template is a Flash document created to fulfill the needs of basic interactive graphics. A person with a limited knowledge of Flash could input information into this document to create an interactive graphic on deadline. One of the templates the WebFirst team made was of the human body. The major designs and coding has already been completed for the graphic, so it can be used for any story relating to how something affects the human body. All newspaper staff member has to do is input the correct textual information and make minor changes for it to fit the purpose.

Obviously, time is the major reason to use a graphic template. Having most of the work done already will save time and resources. Graphic templates also allow
WebFirst Project
Emily Ortman

newspapers to have graphics for breaking news stories. The faster the graphic is completed, the sooner it can go online for readers to view. Graphics are an important story-telling element, but many times smaller newspapers cannot afford to put staff members on the task of creating a graphic because it is so time consuming. With the graphic template, the WebFirst team hopes this will change.

FUTURE OF WEBFIRST

As the newspaper industry changes and more readers go online to get their news, the WebFirst Project wanted to help papers embrace this evolution, instead of fearing it. The projects the group chose all focus on increasing community involvement and interaction between the newspaper and the audience. Projects like WebFirst are needed for the successful transition of newspapers into this era of the Internet.

The projects created by WebFirst team have not yet been implemented in a real newspaper setting because of setbacks faced in trying to work with the Palladium-Item and Muncie Star Press. Despite these problems, Ball State University’s Department of Journalism is looking to partner with a small newspaper in the near future. Now that students have completed the dreaming and creating stages of the project, it’s up to the industry professionals to pick up the WebFirst ideas and put them into action.
**Bibliography**


WebFirst Project:
Writing for a Web site

By Emily Ortman
**Web Site Map**

This shows the layout of the WebFirst Project Web site. It shows where the content I have written will fit in once the journalism department creates the Web site.

Home Page →
Links to About Us, The Industry, The Project, Downloads

About Us →
Ball State University, The Project Team

The Industry →
Info about decline in readership, competition with Internet

The Project →
Project Background, Story Tree, Interactive Graphics

Downloads →
Free and members-only graphics
ABOUT US

This section on the Web site will tell a little background about the project and contain links to the bios written below about the WebFirst Project team members.

The WebFirst Project started when Ball State University faculty members Lori Demo and Jennifer George-Palilonis selected eight students to participate in an independent study class in the Spring of 2006.

The group partnered with the Palladium-Item, the daily paper in Richmond, Ind., to discover how newspapers with a small staff and limited resources can use the Internet to create in-depth, interactive packages on daily deadlines.

The professors thought students would be key in the project because most of the readers turning away from the print newspaper and to the Internet are the members of the younger generation. The best way to attract young people to a Websites is to let young people design the Web site.

The professors encouraged the students to dream big and not limit themselves, and the results of the WebFirst Project is what they came up with.

MEET THE PROJECT TEAM

Lori Demo teaches editing, newswriting and convergence practices at Ball State University. She has 17 years of professional experience working as a reporter and editor. She has worked at Florida Today, USA Today, The Binghamton (NY) Evening Press and Clearwater (FL) Sun. She taught at the University of Kansas and Ohio University as well. She is an author of research on newsroom convergence and routines. In the future, she hopes to continue research on what changing media and audiences will mean for journalistic storytelling routines.

Jennifer George-Palilonis teaches classes on multimedia storytelling and newspaper design at Ball State University. She served as a design consultant on the newspaper redesign. She worked as a news designer for the Detroit Free Press and as deputy news design editor at the Chicago Sun-Times. She is the author of “A Practical Guide to

Sarah Anderson is a Ball State University digital-storytelling graduate student. Her undergraduate degree from Ball State is in journalism, with an emphasis in graphics. She served as managing and design editors for Ball Bearings, Ball State’s student-run Web site. After finishing her master’s degree, she plans to pursue a career in Web site interactivity.

Nolen Young manages and operates Geisler Young, an advertising and marketing firm with offices in Jackson, Tenn.; Charlottesville, Va.; and Indianapolis. Several clients include Tennergy Corporation, Jackson Energy Authority, Gaffney Homes, J. Andretti Motors and the American Art Therapy Association. Nolen graduated from Ball State University in December 2006 with a degree in journalism, with an emphasis in graphics.

Brandon Stuck works at LINK, a tab publication of the Virginian-Pilot, as a designer/illustrator. He worked at the Times-Union in Jacksonville, Fla., in the summer of 2006 for about three months. He graduated from Ball State University in 2006 with a degree in journalism, with an emphasis in graphics.

Miranda Mulligan works in the art department at the Virginian-Pilot. Since starting at the paper in October, she was asked to participate with four others in the newsroom on an "innovation committee." The members are evaluating both what the newspaper is producing as well as how it is delivering the news. She worked at the Sun-Sentinel in Florida for six months before that. She graduated from Ball State University in 2006.

Jennifer Noland is working as a page and multimedia designer at The Tennessean in Nashville. She graduated from Ball State University in December of 2006.
Teresa Auch is the government reporter for the Marion Chronicle-Tribune in Grant County, Ind. She graduated from Ball State University in May of 2006 with a degree in journalism.

Emily Ortman is a senior at Ball State University and will graduate cum laude in May 2007 with a degree in journalism and a minor in political science. She interned for the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette as a copy editor in the summer of 2006 and will begin working there as a full-time copy editor in May 2007.

Katie Higley works for the Northwest Indiana Times designing local news pages and some features pages. Before starting at the Times, Katie had an internship at the Colorado Springs Gazette. She graduated from Ball State University in May 2006 with a degree in journalism, with an emphasis in graphics.
STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

This section on the Web site describes the state of the news industry, which will give context to the WebFirst project and help people understand why it matters.

Experts have been reporting the approaching death of the newspaper for years. The decline in readership that newspapers are experiencing and the competition from the Internet are prompting these evaluations of this traditional media.

Newspapers aren’t dying, though. They are evolving.

According to The State of the Media 2007, an annual report on the state of journalism by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, print newspapers are “unquestionably ailing.” Circulation and advertising are suffering, and the industry is struggling to find a new approach to the business.

About 51 million people buy a newspaper and 124 million read a newspaper each day, the annual report said. Circulation decreased 2.8 percent daily in 2006, which was worse than the 2.6 percent daily circulation drop suffered during the same period in 2005.

When combining the number of readers for print and online newspapers, however, the readership is higher than ever.

The 2007 Newspaper Audience Database report shows that newspaper Web sites had about 57.3 million visitors a month in 2006, which is about one-third of all Internet users. This is up 15 percent from last year’s numbers.

Readers are not disappearing; they are simply using a new medium. Newspapers need to adapt to the Internet to take advantage of the Web-savvy audience.

Many newspapers see the Internet as a necessary evil. They must have a Web site because everyone else does, but the Web site takes away from the paper’s print readership.

Newspapers, particularly ones with small staffs and limited resources, need to embrace the Internet and the evolution of news.
Below are links to resources with more in-depth information about the state of the newspaper industry.

Newspaper Association of America

The State of the News Media 2007

Readership Institute at Northwestern University

Center for Media Design at Ball State University
THE PROJECT

This section will give information about the WebFirst Project and its goals. It will have links to the written information on the story tree and interactive graphics, two of the WebFirst Project ideas.

With dropping circulation numbers and sluggish advertising sales, newspapers are searching for solutions in this changing industry. The WebFirst project was created to help newspapers better understand the Internet and how to use it to their advantage.

The Internet is teaching people to take control. Readers no longer want to wait for information; they go online to get it. The news cycle has changed to a 24-hour process that never ends.

If newspapers don’t embrace this change and find ways to work it to their advantage, they will continue to suffer.

The WebFirst team wanted to prove that small newspapers with limited resources and limited staff could create interactive, in-depth stories on deadline.

The project team designed two major initiatives to help newspapers harness the power of the Internet: the story tree and interactive graphic templates.

STORY TREE

What is a story tree?

A story tree divides a story into smaller chunks of information. A chunk is not just writing, but anything that can help tell the story:

- graphics
- photos
- audio
- video

These pieces should not be treated as sidebars, but rather as their own story. Each chunk should be able to stand on its own, which might mean reintroducing sources in each chunk. Doing this makes the story nonlinear, so readers can view the chunks in whatever order they want.
The story should, however, be introduced by a small introductory chunk of information, which will help the readers determine whether they are interested in the story.

The navigation of a story tree can be on the side or bottom of the chunk, and each chunk should have a button in the navigation.

**Why use a story tree?**

A story tree gives readers the control. As newspapers use their Web sites more and more, they must evolve to the culture of the Internet. The Web-savvy readers will not tolerate a static environment like those of a print newspaper or TV broadcast. They want interaction, they want to click buttons and they want to be involved.

The story becomes nonlinear in the story tree format, which allows for more reader control. After reading the introductory chunk, a reader can choose whichever chunk they want next. Because the chunks are written to stand alone, the reader isn’t required to read the story in a certain order.

Putting lots of information into one story would probably discourage readers because it would be long and cumbersome. Breaking the information up makes it easier for readers to go to what they need right away instead of sifting through a long story.

**Example**

A huge blizzard hits the city, so the newspaper needs to continuously update online to keep its readers informed. This type of story that has multiple elements works well in story-tree format. The story could be broken up into elements like this:

- Introduction → a few paragraphs about the storm and its general effects
- Closings → simply list of all school, business, etc. closing in the area
- Photo slideshow or video → pictures from around the city showing residents shoveling snow, stuck in snow, playing in snow, etc.
- Weather Report → story about when the storm might end, future forecast
- Weather Kit → information on what gear you should have in your home or car that might help during a storm
INTERACTIVE GRAPHIC TEMPLATES

What is an interactive graphic template?

An interactive graphic template is a Flash document created to fulfill the needs of basic interactive graphics. A person with a limited knowledge of Flash could input information into this document to create an interactive graphic on deadline.

Example

One of the templates the WebFirst team made was of the human body. The major designs and coding has already been completed for the graphic, so it can be used for any story relating to how something affects the human body. All a staff member has to do is input the correct textual information and make minor changes for it to fit the purpose.

Why use an interactive graphic template?

Obviously, time is the major reason to use a graphic template. Having most of the work done already will save time and resources.

Graphic templates also allow newspapers to have graphics for breaking news stories. The faster the graphic is completed, the sooner it can go online for readers to view.

Graphics are an important story-telling element, but many times smaller newspapers cannot afford to put staff members on the task of creating a graphic because it is so time consuming. With the graphic template, the WebFirst team hopes this will change.
WebFirst Project:
Writing guidelines for the Project

By Emily Ortman
WRITING IN CHUNKS

Guidelines for writing Web versions of breaking news stories:

The main goal of writing for the Web is to help break up the story for readers. Throwing the story as it appeared in the newspaper, word for word, online does not make use of the Internet as a tool and can become hard to read when it appears in one long column.

The idea of chunking is to help break up a story into smaller sections that help organize it and gives the reader more control by creating true non-linear format. This format works best for non-narrative.

IDENTIFY ALL THE POINTS OR ANGLES OF A STORY.

For example, if it's a crime story, group the basic information together: when, where, why, etc. If you talked to witnesses or the people who were victimized, that could be a separate section. Is there a history of this kind of crime happening or is it increasing? Again, a separate section.

For a meeting story, simply divide up each issue that was discussed. The issues in turn can be broken down.

WRITE AN INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH.

Every story needs an anchor. The introductory paragraph is essential because it should contain all the basic information and any information that would be needed in multiple sections. The point of putting that information here is so you do not have to continually repeat it and bog down your other sections.

Example: If a house burns down, this is where you would say what happened, where, when and anything else you can find out. This way, you will not have to repeat the information in other sections.

WRITE A SECTION FOR EVERY ANGLE OR POINT YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED. (CHUNKING THE STORY)

Each section, including the anchor, should be concise and should not involve much scrolling to read. A good, although arbitrary, rule is to keep it no longer than 250 words. This can be experimented with, depending on the story, but do not go too much longer. Studies show readers like to get their information in quick hits.

Breaking up the story does not mean leaving out parts of the story, though. The point of the sections is give the readers their quick hits without hurting the integrity of the story. The full story and all the information that appeared in the newspaper should still appear online - just in a different format.

The sections become a story within a story. They should be written with a lede, a main point and a closing idea. This is non-linear storytelling, so a reader should be able to read them in any order he chooses to and still understand the story. (This is why we suggest you do not use this for a narrative story.)

This is true rewriting. Do not think the organization you used for the print story will work for online. In the non-linear format, you do not need to worry about the transitions and flow from one section to the next. Therefore, information that appeared in one place in a print story might appear in another section online.
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Here is the tentative list of guidelines for what’s happening.

OVERALL TONE

People go out to have fun, so why should the listings of events be droll and boring? Have fun.

• Sassify your writing.
• Stay away from general description terms like fun, entertaining, etc.
• Be specific and provide details. This helps the reader better understand what the event is about, singles it out from other events and lightens the mood overall.
• Do some research on the events to find out more information if necessary.
• Make references to current events and pop culture - people like American Idol, so if you make a reference to that show in an entry for karaoke, they have an added benefit to go (although be careful about using the references too much; in fact, American Idol is probably already overused.)
• Don’t be afraid to bend, or even break, the rules. The writing should be conversational, so if that means you use questions and slang, fine.
• Feel free to refer to other newspaper’s reviews of an event to provide detail.
• Don’t command a person to do something.

FEATURED EVENTS

• The main priority should be focusing on local events. Play to the strength of this Web site in that no one else will cover Richmond events.

• Events in outside areas can be used if they are big enough (i.e. the Super Bowl is going to be in Indianapolis) or if no local events are worth featuring (for example, if the only events going on are repeat ones like a jazzercise class that have already been featured.) This gives room for writers to play around with so they don’t have to make an event out of nothing.
• Keep them short - about four to five sentences, or a paragraph.

ENTRY

• Events are organized by category, place and then time.
• Categories include divisions such as Night Out, Arts, Multicultural, Wellness, Sports, etc. While categories do not directly specify an age group, they were created with certain age groups in mind.
• The event title is the first line on an entry and should be in bold.
• Have a one- or two-sentence description that uses the guidelines for tone.
• Bullet the time, place, cost and contact information
• Include links to the message board where people can view and leave feedback.
WebFirst Project:
Creating an Informative CD

By Emily Ortman