

# Newsroom of the Future

A Report  
The Spokesman-Review  
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## INTRODUCTION

Spokesman-Review Publisher William Stacey Cowles stood before a group of business professionals in September 2006 and declared, “We ain’t dead yet.”

With Mark Twain’s famous quote – “Rumors of my demise have been greatly exaggerated” – projected on the Power Point screen behind him, Cowles told the Dean’s Business Forum at Gonzaga University that newspapers will exist for years to come, but their shape and form may change.

“Things are changing, and changing dramatically,” he said. “But fundamentally, the newspaper is full of bright, very engaged, very committed people who’ll find a way to keep newspapers alive, if not on paper and ink, then at least on pixels with screens.”

His predictions are among dozens included in this report, which is the result of a three-month examination into the present and future of American newspaper journalism.

A lot of journalists are in the business of prognosticating these days, which may be the surest sign yet that the industry has finally acknowledged the inevitable: newspapers will need to reinvent themselves, not only to survive, but to remain relevant.

But if the ‘what’ of the problem is understood, the ‘how’ of getting there is not. There are as many prescriptions for what ails this industry as there are daily newspapers. Some might argue that the fact we are all talking about the future means it’s already too late.

The nature of the newspaper industry has been to talk endlessly about challenges and prototype projects for months before actually *doing* something. We tend to be technology adopters, not innovators. During the three months of this project, hundreds of new Web sites, citizen blogs, virtual worlds, videos, niche publications and technical gizmos and gadgets have come into the marketplace, further diffusing an already fragmented message.

And as further evidence of this massive social shift, Time magazine has named You – or anyone “using or creating on the World Wide Web” – as its Person of the Year. The magazine cover simply reads: “You. Yes, you. You control the Information Age.”

We’re already behind, but certainly not out of the game.

Newspapers still enjoy tremendous advantages that include audience reach, brand recognition, customer loyalty, staff expertise – and most significantly, a profitable business model (averaging 19.2 percent in 2005 compared with an average 8.3 percent for other U.S. industries) that can underwrite a range of experiments in content, structure and technology.

“The irony, of course, is that newspapers, the world’s chroniclers of change, are themselves frightened to death of change, and that fear can often impede vital

experimentation.,” said Michael Riley, editor of The Roanoke (Va.) Times in the Spring 2006 Nieman Reports.

In September 2006, The American Press Institute released the results of its year-long Newspaper Next project, and admonished the industry to seize the moment.

“Like a devoted parent with a child heading off to college, the industry has reached a moment of self-examination. The public is migrating away from us, happily discovering new freedoms, opportunities and choices in a new world of infinite information. Will we cling to our old perceived roles and sink into irrelevance? Or will we commit to finding new roles that the public will welcome in their lives, even if these are unfamiliar and challenging to us?”

In his address to GU’s business forum, Cowles acknowledged the challenges facing the industry as citizens look for faster, cheaper and fresher pipelines of information.

“Anyone now can distribute news and advertising,” he said. “All kinds of people want to get to the consumers. There’s a lot of clutter. Newspapers want to break through.”

The key for The Spokesman-Review, he said, will be to maintain core strengths (the newspaper still has the largest reach and most frequency of any medium in the market); develop new and targeted content; leverage Web technology, and control costs.

While this report contains recommendations for change in content and structure that can be adopted as soon as tomorrow, its main function is to start a ‘conversation’ that I suspect will be ongoing for years to come at The Spokesman-Review.

In the spirit of the Internet, I viewed myself as an aggregator in compiling this report. Although it contains original interviews, data and anecdotes from newsroom site visits around the country, a significant portion of the information presented here is original to others. If there is a model for this report it is the American Journalism Review article by Rachel Smolkin from the June/July 2006 issue. Titled “Adapt or Die,” Smolkin interviewed dozens of newspaper editors, publishers, reporters, consultants and industry critics.

She opened with this statement:

“For years, newspapers have treated innovation like a trip to the dentist – a torture to be endured, not encouraged. True, newspapers finally got around to adding color. They shrank stories, hoping that pithier, flashier fare would help attract young people who don’t like to read. They spruced up the front page by sprinkling uplifting, maudlin or otherwise titillating features amid the news. But bold new thinking about the newspaper and a world of opportunities beyond it? Please. Tell the dentist to add a veneer and leave the rotting core alone. Now that’s all changing, of necessity.”

The danger of using statistics to help present an overview of the issues facing the industry is that they were outdated when I compiled them and are most assuredly outdated as you read them.

But there are tremendous pressures at play against the newspaper franchise.

- ❖ Despite protests that they “don’t have enough time” to read the newspaper, consumers are actually spending more time with media than ever before – an average of about 7 ½ hours a day, according to **Newspaper Next** research. This year, Americans are projected to spend more than 9 ½ hours a day, according to the Census Bureau’s annual **Statistical Abstract**. Unfortunately, the saturation is coming from cable TV, satellite radio, the Internet, cell phones, DVDs, and music players. Daily newspaper readership has dropped from 201 hours a year to 175. The result is the end of the ‘mass audience’ as information becomes more and more defused.
- ❖ **Scarborough Research** reported in the October 2006 issue of Editor & Publisher that the number of newspaper readers aged 18-24 slipped about 5 percentage points over a seven-year period, about the same rate of decline for readers 55 and older. And among adults 35-54, readership dropped the most, more than 9 percentage points.
- ❖ The advent of the Internet has eroded our business model. An August survey by **Classified Intelligence** found that 51 percent of real estate agents surveyed were advertising on free classified sites and many plan to trim newspaper advertising because “it’s no longer necessary.” According to marketing consultant and author **Paul Gillin**, Craigslist.org is the 5<sup>th</sup> most popular site on the Internet, “with global reach and an estimated 4 billion page views a month.”
- ❖ The number of people employed in the newspaper industry fell by 18 percent between 1990 and 2004 \_ the loss coming mostly out of newsrooms, according to the **Newspaper Association of America**.
- ❖ MySpace surpassed Yahoo’s Web traffic in November 2006 for the first time. MySpace recorded 38.7 billion U.S. page views compared with 38.1 billion for Yahoo, according to **comScore Media Metrix**. The numbers underscore the rising popularity of social-networking sites that offer messaging, photo sharing, and personal profiles.
- ❖ The **American Press Institute**, the oldest and largest center devoted solely to news industry training, launched “Newspaper Next: The Transformation Project,” and warned that the industry must develop new ways of doing business if it is to survive. Newspapers must move from a fixed, monolithic business model to a portfolio approach of various products and services.
- ❖ **Vin Crosbie**, president and managing partner of Digital Deliverance, a new-media consulting firm, predicted, “There will always be a need for journalism, but the question is whether there will be an industry in which journalists can work.”
- ❖ **The Knight Foundation** in the fall of 2006 offered a total of \$5 million for community news experiments that would help lead the newspaper industry into the future.

- ❖ In his book, “The Vanishing Newspaper: Saving Journalism in the Information Age,” **Philip Meyer** calculated that the first quarter of 2043 will be the moment when newspapers run out of readers.
- ❖ And perhaps the gloomiest prediction of all comes, again, from Gillin, author of “**The New Influencers: A Marketer’s Guide to Social Media.**” “In 10 years, probably a third of metropolitan daily print newspapers will be gone. Some will go entirely online, while others will merge with regional competitors.” In their place will be a new kind of online journalism that will include more aggregation and organization, reporting that is faster and iterative, and a willingness to publish rumor, speculation and incomplete information on the assumption that errors can be corrected. Reporting will become a community process.

This report is not a prescription for The Spokesman-Review or a model for any other newspaper. While there are a number of innovative initiatives being tested in newsrooms around the country, each is unique. Although it might be easier for the industry if there *was* a single answer, each newsroom must make its own way based on its own news values, the tolerance of its readers, the tolerance of its owners, and perhaps its own sense of fearlessness.

The value of this report rests in the questions it raises. The success of this three-month project will be determined by The Spokesman-Review’s collective ability to keep a conversation about innovation going.

If there is a single recommendation to bring forward, it is this: whatever The Spokesman-Review chooses to do, it should be within the framework and spirit of civic journalism, which we’ve always tried to practice here. If newspapers exist, in the words of former Knight Ridder editor Davis Merritt, to “help set the agenda of a community and hold governments to account,” then technology must be the slave to our journalism and not the reverse.

We should not rush to experiment out of panic or curiosity, but we also cannot afford to drag our heels out of fear of failure or humiliation.

“There’s a good reason journalists are so wary of innovation,” Smolkin argued in the AJR “Adapt or Die” piece: “Daring new experiments intended to save newspapers must not destroy their souls. They must not turn print journalists into spinning tops, whirling from podcasts to vodcasts to radio appearances to online chats to blogging, then clutching their video cameras as they rush to an assignment and, if they get a free second, trying to squeeze in a little reporting. If newspapers abandon the relentless reporting that makes them special, then their future won’t be worth protecting, in any form.”

## METHODOLOGY

The Newsroom of the Future Project was designed to explore three concepts:

1) continuous news/multiplatform publishing/convergence; 2) citizen-generated content, and 3) multimedia technology.

The practical goal was to conclude three months of research, travel and leadership training with a series of proposals for transformational newsroom change. This report, therefore, contains proposals for initiatives that can be reasonably initiated in a year's time or less and more involved recommendations that will require more conversation. The proposals are grouped together within each of the three categories noted above.

In addition, there are miscellaneous ideas gleaned from a variety of sources and newspapers that The Spokesman-Review might want to consider. (Section IV)

While this report contains a significant amount of research, it does not reflect all of the information, conversation and idea generation of the last three months. I'm hopeful that some of *those* ideas can be shared as the newsroom begins the process of change, and I have included some thoughts on how to keep the conversation going. (Section V)

The first component of the project was research. In addition to numerous trade articles, blogs and columns, I read several books that provided either provocative industry commentary or leadership advice:

- ❖ **“The Six Fundamentals of Success,”** Stuart R. Levine
- ❖ **“The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People,”** Stephen R. Covey
- ❖ **“Knightfall,”** Davis Merritt
- ❖ **“The Vanishing Newspaper,”** Philip Meyer
- ❖ **“The Influentials,”** Ed Keller and Jon Berry

Secondly, the project was designed to provide ‘real world experience’ through newsroom site visits. Newspapers were selected based on the opportunity to see ‘working’ environments where the three key concepts of the project were integrated into everyday journalism.

As a result, the following newsrooms hosted The Spokesman-Review and were beyond gracious with their time, staffs, and on a number of occasions – proprietary information and research:

- ❖ **The Lawrence Journal-World**, Lawrence, Kan. (continuous news/multiplatform publishing/convergence)
- ❖ **The Bakersfield Californian**, Bakersfield, Calif. (continuous news, citizen-generated content)
- ❖ **The Tampa Tribune**, Tampa, Fla. (continuous news/multiplatform publishing/convergence)

❖ **WashingtonPost.com**, Arlington, Va. (continuous news, multimedia technology)

In addition, I talked with numerous editors who attended APME's 2006 national conference, which was held in New Orleans and contained a full day's worth of multimedia sessions including "The Digital Divide: The New Gap in Our Newsrooms," "When Cultures Collide: Combining Web/Print Newsrooms," and "Creating the Newsroom of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

Following APME, I attended Poynter's "Online Leadership" seminar, which proved invaluable in terms of idea-sharing. As a result, The Spokesman-Review is now part of a fairly active listserv in which editors are talking about innovation.

I also interviewed several people by phone when it became clear there wasn't going to be enough time to visit in person:

- ❖ **Dana Robbins**, editor of The Hamilton Spectator, Hamilton, Ontario (innovation)
- ❖ **John Robinson**, editor of The News & Record, Greensboro, N.C. (innovation, blogging)
- ❖ **Kate Marymont**, The News-Press, Fort Myers, Fla. (MoJo reporters, crowd-sourcing, citizen-generated content)
- ❖ **Dan Gillmor**, director of the Center for Citizen Media, affiliated with UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism and The Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University Law School (citizen-generated content)
- ❖ **John Dodge**, senior editor, CBS2 News, Chicago, Ill. (convergence)

The final component of the project was designed to be futuristic, but in many ways ended up being the most practical (Section VI). My visits to the **Media Lab** at MIT and **The Berkman Center for Internet & Society** at Harvard made one point clear: the newspaper industry should spend more time strategizing and less time worrying. Researchers are already working on communication and information-sharing concepts that will render obsolete the very technology we're now struggling to integrate.

To fall back on a cliché: change is inevitable. Newspapers that want to survive must adopt a more nimble approach to change and seek out and reward innovation.

## I. Continuous News/Multiplatform Publishing/Convergence

### PROPOSAL: A Continuous News Desk

There is no greater challenge facing newspapers today than the consumer appetite for continuous news, information and entertainment. With the advent of cable news, newspaper Web sites, the blogosphere, and the rapidly growing culture of social connectivity, we've moved from the notion of a static mass media to a dynamic *multi* media society. In order to remain competitive and relevant, newspapers must give up the old notion of one deadline a day, and instead build a portfolio of platforms that deliver news via print, the Web, TV, mobile devices and niche publications.

In response, newspapers of all sizes have embraced the imperative of 'continuous news,' from small operations like The Lawrence Journal-World to large-scale multimedia empires like The Tampa Tribune.

In the June/July 2006 issue of AJR, Miami Herald Executive Editor Tom Fiedler acknowledged that he was working to change the culture of his newsroom toward "delivering news when journalists have it, not toward delivering a morning newspaper. We're way too comfortable thinking of ourselves as newspaper people," he told AJR. "We've got to take a step back and shake ourselves loose of that."

There is no single model for continuous news.

Some examples:

- ❖ **The Lawrence Journal-World** has been a forerunner in the continuous news/convergence realm. The World Company created its converged News Center in 2001, but jumped into cable programming in the early 1970s and Web publishing in 1995. The operation remains an industry darling. Editor & Publisher named the paper "One of 10 That Do it Right" in July 2004, and The New York Times in 2005 called it a small-town newspaper that is "hardly restrained by a small-town mentality." The media empire in Lawrence includes a 20,000-circulation daily newspaper, a Web site that gets about 40,000 unique page views a day, a cable TV station with two broadcasts at 6 and 10 p.m., broadband service, and a handful of weeklies. Instead of a continuous news desk, they run a 'convergence desk' with a universal intranet story budget that tracks all assignments across all platforms. A Managing Editor for Convergence is the uber gatekeeper who constantly thinks about how to layer content and technology. Print reporters sit next to their TV counterparts and willingly collaborate. Everyone continuously feeds the Web. It is fairly close to a 24/7 operation.
- ❖ **The Tampa Tribune** – a converged media empire on the other end of the size spectrum – is in the process of building-out a continuous news desk. In preparation, a team of reporters and editors surveyed several newsrooms around

- the country with continuous news operations and concluded that Tampa's market requires a staff of 20 to drive fresh content to the TBO.com Web site 17 hours a day Monday-Friday, and eight hours a day on weekends. The research team said the proposal would allow the newsroom to provide content "when today's viewers want it" and to make maximum use of all online tools such as video, still photography, graphics and text.
- ❖ For its research, The Tampa Tribune looked at 24/7 operations at **The New York Times**, **The Washington Post** and **The Chicago Tribune**. The Times operates a 12-person desk that ultimately reports to the newspaper. The Washington Post has five reporters, two editors and a copy editor on its continuous news desk, which is in the main Washington, D.C., newsroom. The Post's Web operation is housed separately in Arlington, Va. The 24/7 desk works with both newsrooms, which makes effective communication an imperative. The Chicago Tribune operates a 10-person desk which is considered a "rapid response team." To augment the operation, The Tribune recently announced that an associate managing editor for innovation will oversee a restructured editorial department that merges the multimedia staff and the continuous news desk.
  - ❖ **Gannett** recently rechristened its newsrooms "information centers" in an effort to blow up the traditional newsroom model. Departments such as City, Business and Sports have been reorganized into desks that focus on method of delivery: digital, data and community conversation. The initiative emphasizes four tenets: local news over wire; more user-generated content; 24/7 news operations that emphasize "more on the Web and less in the paper," and the use of readers as watchdogs and whistleblowers. Gannett editors refer to the information center concept as the newsroom of the future because it creates a broader approach to the information-gathering process.

Dolph C. Simons Jr., patriarch of the World Company in Lawrence, perhaps provides the most compelling argument for continuous news and multiplatform publishing: "We're in the information business." Technology is the means to continuously 'do journalism,' and it no longer matters which platform is 'doing' the doing.

Where the adoption of continuous news operations has succeeded, they were preceded by a formal training and education process. A cultural change this profound can not be dictated to staff in a memo.

Although most newsrooms have been up on the Web for several years now, print roots run deep. Reporters and editors in many newsrooms are still reluctant to give up the convention of putting breaking news at the top of the fold on A1. In our own newsroom, we continue to debate the wisdom and strategy of "scooping ourselves" by putting a story online.

To help promote a new Web culture at The Bakersfield Californian, Executive Editor Mike Jenner developed a series of "business literacy" sessions for his staff. He invited the publisher, CEO and managers from the paper's circulation and advertising departments to

the newsroom to talk about their business challenges and to answer the question, ‘What keeps you up at night?’

In addition, the company’s CEO narrated a Power Point about the daughter of one of the newspaper’s columnists. The 20-something woman found her apartment on Craigslist, her furniture on eBay and her job on Monster.com. She gets her news and entertainment from online sites. She doesn’t read a newspaper, yet her father is in the business.

In effect, Jenner didn’t just tell his staff what they were competing against, he showed them. And according to reporters and editors, that made a difference. The result is fairly unanimous support for the direction of The Californian. In the first six months of 2006, 56 out of 76 reporters, photographers and editors either created or participated in some form of multimedia. Almost all reporters on staff use portable video cameras, post stories to the Web, and do on-air reports and promos with a local ABC TV affiliate, which the paper does not own. The Californian also has a dedicated breaking news reporter and the model that reporter follows is the inspiration for the proposal offered here.

#### **A desk structure for The Spokesman-Review:**

The newsroom’s existing Assignment Desk, which is print-centric in focus, must transform into a Continuous News Desk responsible for local Metro, Business and Feature content in the newspaper and on the Web. To succeed, the newsroom must embrace the Continuous News Desk as a fully-integrated operation that begins the day publishing on the Web and ends it publishing in print.

While we don’t have the staff to operate a desk 24 hours a day, we can reasonably provide support from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday-Friday. The bulk of our online coverage will be produced by a ‘breaking news reporter’ during the peak traffic hours of 8 a.m. to noon weekdays, although we will continue to post stories throughout the day and evening as they occur.

Shifts on Saturday and Sunday would remain unchanged for now.

In the future, if staffing and equipment resources were to expand – and Web traffic were to grow – we would add a second breaking news reporter to cover the afternoon commute and early-evening news cycle, and then expand into weekend coverage.

#### **Staffing:**

In order to provide news and information to users when they want it we need to shift City Desk resources from the print edition to the Web. The following staffers would comprise a team who, while fully part of the overall news operation and contributors to the newspaper, would focus primarily on Web content. They would sit on the Continuous News Desk and report to the City Editor.

1. A “**breaking news reporter**” who works 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday-Friday.
2. An **Assistant City Editor/Multimedia** who works 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Although part of the City Desk operation, they will work with two other departments that share multimedia duties: the Online Department, which is responsible for management of the Web site, programming, and multimedia production, and the Photo Department, which produces slide shows and Video Journals.

Critical, but unfilled, positions include:

3. An **Interactive editor** to help develop hyper-local Web sites with citizen-generated content for our existing neighborhood weeklies. This editor would help manage the citizen content on the sites, provide community outreach, and mentor anyone interested in providing The Spokesman-Review with stories, blogs, photos or videos.
4. A second full-time **online producer** who would share Web-management duties and also be able to shoot and edit video from the field. An additional online producer would help with any eventual live newscast and/or PDF afternoon newspaper.
5. Another full-time **computer programmer** to help build Web infrastructure for all current and future online initiatives.

Job descriptions:

1. The breaking news reporter is essentially a general assignment reporter who writes primarily for the Web, although stories will be updated and repurposed as warranted for the newspaper. The breaking news reporter can be expected to cover a variety of topics including but not limited to crime, weather, transportation/drive-time traffic, schools and government. A key function of this reporter is to provide information to commuters and readers at the start of their work day. The breaking news reporter will be expected to be completely mobile and able to shoot video and file stories from the field. When not covering breaking news, this reporter will be working on enterprise stories with multimedia elements for both the Web and the newspaper.
2. The multimedia ACE is the primary editor for all breaking news stories and will supervise the breaking news reporter. Additionally, this editor will work with all local news departments to plan and generate multimedia enterprise stories and projects.

## **PROPOSAL: Restructure Morning News Meetings**

The focus of our 10 a.m. news meeting must change as we adopt a continuous news philosophy. The current process is print-centric. The meeting begins with a critique of the morning paper followed by a brief overview of the day's working stories from section editors. There is a brief "stand-up" meeting at 2 p.m. to check status, and a 4:30 p.m. meeting to finalize A1 and B1 lineups for all three editions of the newspaper.

Instead, the morning meeting should start earlier (9 or 9:30 a.m.) with a critique of the Web site and a status report by the Assistant City Editor for Multimedia on the stories that have already been posted and those that are still being reported. Starting the meeting even a half-hour earlier gives us a better chance of generating story ideas and deploying resources in time to capture our peak traffic on the site.

A morning Web report should also help editors who are planning the next day's paper; either by identifying stories that will be repurposed for print, or stories that will need additional reporting and second-day leads.

A goal of the morning meeting should be to identify two or three stories every day that can be packaged across platforms by adding or subtracting layers of information.

For example, an early-morning traffic accident that causes commuter delays on the interstate will only be of interest to people until the traffic is cleared. We'd most likely want to get video and detour information up on the Web immediately. By the next morning's paper, the accident will merit only a brief mention.

But by using the morning meeting to plan across platforms, print editors might decide to write a contextual story about the number of preventable accidents on that stretch of interstate, or to explore the lack of alternative routes. Editors might choose to put a color graphic with the story, or a box listing the worst accidents in the last five years. Photographers might decide to go back out and shoot different images for the print version. A sentence in the Web version would tell readers to look for an expanded story in 'tomorrow's paper.' A sentence in the print version would remind readers that news about the accident was "first reported on spokesmanreview.com."

Current planning meetings for weekend coverage should also expand to include the Web, and we should develop a weekly meeting dedicated to online coverage and multimedia. More often than not, special graphic or design elements are requested late in the planning or editing process, and multimedia projects show up on the site with very little advance notice.

Until we fully integrate our planning, we will not be able to achieve our online goals.

Such integrated thinking is a way of life in the Lawrence Journal-World newsroom. Rather than building a story one platform at a time, they build the story once by adding as many layers of information as possible from the beginning such as video, audio, still photography, graphics, links to Web sites and online chats. A managing editor for convergence makes sure the story reaches the right platform. Just because they can package a story three ways – for print, TV or the Web – doesn't mean they do. Editors respect the unique properties and audience of each platform and try to be strategic about storytelling. Some stories work better on TV than they do in print. But the reality is that far more stories are packaged across platforms than not, which makes smart use of their resources.

The key to the system in Lawrence is a fully-integrated morning news meeting where editors from all platforms work in unison. The Web is no more or no less important than the newspaper or the cable channel.

The same is true for The Bakersfield Californian. Editors there use the morning news meeting to plan for both the Web and the newspaper. The Web has become such an important initiative for them that they not only start their morning news meeting with a critique of the Web site, but editors are willing to adjust coverage plans for the paper based on the stories getting the most traction on the site.

At The News-Press in Fort Myers, Fla., integrated planning allows editors to tailor print stories for online readers. In a recent example, a comprehensive Sunday print story on a plan to consolidate 17 local fire districts was split apart and repackaged for specific micro-Web sites. Editors were able to target neighborhoods that would be impacted by the consolidation proposal.

One practical, even mundane, note: both Bakersfield and Lawrence have created story-budgeting tools that include multimedia and Web categories, which further legitimizes their multiplatform philosophies.

The Spokesman-Review's story-budgeting tool doesn't currently include those categories, nor does it allow editors to see across departments horizontally. The result is a somewhat hard to navigate vertical system that segregates news department-by-department. In newsrooms like Lawrence and Bakersfield where multiplatform planning is flourishing, editors have the ability to monitor in-progress stories across all departments simultaneously, which enables them to easily package stories and add layers of multimedia.

## **PROPOSAL: Enterprise Stories/Second-day Leads**

Fundamentally, breaking news stories that have been on the Web all day cannot be considered breaking news in the following morning's paper, which means we have to reinvent our print journalism.

Alan Jacobson, a newspaper designer, recently declared in a piece called "New Rules for Newspapers" that all news should go on the Web. "The Internet is for breaking news. The newspaper is for stories that provide context and meaning about the news."

Miami Herald Executive Editor Tom Fiedler seemed to be saying as much in his AJR interview with Smolkin: by creating a continuous news desk, he said, the Miami Herald can dispatch reporters to cover news live like TV, and the newspaper will "take on a more historic feel" with for-the-record coverage and context.

At the News-Press, editors restructured their Metro Desk to help distinguish between online news and print news. Rather than one Metro Editor, there are now two – one for online and one for print.

"They sit side-by-side working with the same pool of information, but the online editor is working toward short, direct, urgent information online while the print editor is thinking in terms of giving added value for the next day's paper," said Executive Editor Kate Marymont.

The editors manage reporters who still cover traditional beats but who now work across platforms in almost a continuous loop. The police reporter, for example, writes for the Web, the newspaper and the weekly neighborhood sections. The neighborhood reporters do the reverse, also writing for the daily paper and the Web.

The flow of a work day depends on the nature of news. If a dynamic breaking news story requires a reporter to spend all day writing Web updates, then another reporter will jump in and write a second-day story for the paper.

By designating a more formal "breaking news team" for The Spokesman-Review, the hope is to elevate the Web's importance without diminishing our print journalism.

A more fluid approach likely works for The News-Press because their multiplatform sensibility is fairly advanced. For some time now the News-Press has been operating as an incubator of innovation for corporate parent Gannett, which recently unveiled its own newsroom of the future strategy. The News-Press has been focused on continuous news, hyper-local citizen content and mobile reporters. Other Gannett papers have been testing different initiatives such as changing the mix of local and wire news.

Until The Spokesman-Review gets comfortable and proficient with the concept of multiplatform continuous news, a more structured system seems best.

Knowing how to integrate the Web and the newspaper – while respecting the unique aspects of each – is a vexing problem, even for experienced newsrooms. Several editors acknowledged that they understand the importance of the Web, but then that “really big story comes along” and it’s hard not to want to save it for a big banner headline across A1.

Some days we’re better at managing the two platforms than others. A recent Spokesman-Review story about Joseph Duncan pleading guilty to killing a North Idaho family – a story that has received national attention – is a good example of textbook journalism and a packaging miscue.

We broke the story on our Web site and updated it at least once. We also had a fresh photo of Duncan on the site well before the local TV stations. In short, we exploited the Web exactly the way we should have for such an important local and national story.

Yet, 24 hours later, in the next morning’s paper, we ran a bold headline across A1 that read “Duncan admits guilt” as if that was the first time we were reporting the news. By the time the paper came out, there were arguably very few people who hadn’t already heard the news from either our Web site or local TV. Instead, we might have emphasized the ‘what’s next’ aspects of the case earlier in the story than we did. In this instance, it wasn’t a matter of fixing fundamental reporting problems – the story was well-done – but designing the package with a second-day focus.

If the breaking news team had been in place at the time, the outcome might have been different. The breaking news reporter would have been focused on updating the Duncan story on the Web as details emerged throughout the day; the multimedia editor and content producers would have been simultaneously working on enhancements (links to documents, audio, video, graphics) for both the Web and the newspaper; and the beat reporters would have been free to focus on telling a much more contextual story for the next morning’s paper.

## **PROPOSAL: ‘Hit Teams’ for Enterprise**

The Spokesman-Review should consider bringing back the ‘hit team’ concept but tweaking it with a multimedia sensibility.

In previous years, the City Desk successfully generated a steady stream of enterprise news and feature stories by creating rotating teams of reporters and photographers who worked together for two or three months at a time with the goal of producing several packages per month and as many dailies as possible. The concept increased the number of good stories we were able to tell, but it also offered staffers a chance to step back from their regular beats to stretch their interests and abilities.

Although the staff was much larger at the time, careful planning might allow us to try it again, especially if it leads to news and feature stories that can be told both on the Web and in print.

The creation of an Assistant City Editor for Multimedia is meant to help facilitate the planning that will lead to these kinds of ‘hit team’ enterprise packages. Although our first priority is real-time breaking news on the Web, we should also strive for bringing something unique and surprising to our online journalism.

It’s almost a certainty that The Spokesman-Review will excel at covering breaking news online; our reporting expertise far exceeds that of our TV competitors. It’s merely a matter of mastering the technology and changing our workflow and focus.

But where the newsroom can really make a meaningful contribution on the Web is with our tradition of high-quality enterprise reporting and storytelling. That kind of journalism is virtually non-existent in the local market at this time. Through the use of database reporting and other multimedia initiatives, we have an opportunity to bring a level of quality to the Web that will ultimately generate page views and revenue.

Although the breaking news reporter will be asked to generate as much enterprise news and feature work as possible, that is expected to be difficult to do consistently because of the unpredictability of breaking news. And while other reporters also are expected to write enterprise stories off their beats, their output is dependent on the run of news.

Therefore, adding a ‘hit team’ might be one more way to ensure that good stories don’t fall through the cracks.

The Tampa Tribune, one of the largest converged news operations in the country, excels at multimedia enterprise. Reporter Julie Pace and photographer Crystal Lauderdale develop both breaking news and enterprise packages for TBO.com, the newspaper and TV.

For a recent package on senior citizens and the rising cost of living, Pace wrote a traditional trend story for the Tribune that defined the problem and focused on a local company that hires elderly workers.

For TV Channel 8, the largest station in Florida, she reported and wrote a 2-3 minute segment about a man who works at a local sports stadium for spending money. Lauderdale shot the video.

For the TBO.com Web site, Pace wrote an entirely different story with links to local agencies, the results of a reader poll, a slide show of Lauderdale's photographs and a snippet of audio.

They started work on the package on a Monday at 5 p.m. A story was online the next day by 1 p.m. and on the TV broadcast by 5:30 p.m. The print package came out in the Wednesday paper.

Pace, who is in her early 20s, believes multiplatform publishing is the key to the industry's future. "We need to think of the Web as a supplement. If you just repurpose (print content onto the Web), you're handing people a reason not to buy your paper. If you see a story unfold online, then as a reader you know that paper is working the story and you'll pick up that paper to read more the next day. If breaking news is not on the Web, how do readers know you're working it?"

## II. CITIZEN-GENERATED CONTENT

David Mindich, a former CNN assignment editor, came to The Spokesman-Review in September 2006 to talk about his book, “Tuned Out: Why Americans Under 40 Don’t Follow The News.”

He told reporters and editors that the newspaper industry is in a “time of crisis.” In 1972, half of college-age students read a newspaper every day. Today, it’s about 20 percent. But “that’s not the most alarming thing I found,” Mindich said. “It’s not just the college-age students, but the 20-somethings and the 30-somethings. In 1972, 75 percent of people in their mid-30s read a newspaper every day. And now, it’s about a third.”

Newspapers can certainly look to their own circulation declines and reader surveys to know that Mindich is right about the decline of the daily reading habit. And the fact that Mindich, now a professor of journalism and mass communication at St. Michael’s College in Vermont, has been traveling the country talking to newsrooms of all sizes certainly indicates that editors are taking his research seriously.

But there are a number of provocative thinkers both within and outside the newspaper industry who argue that people aren’t tuned out at all; they’re just listening to different messages, and increasingly, newspapers aren’t part of the conversation.

One only has to look at the explosion of YouTube, MySpace and the entire blog phenomenon to conclude that people are more engaged than ever in creating and disseminating information. The difference between the present and 1972 is that mass-media newspapers no longer control the pipeline. It is out of this new social order that citizen-generated content springs and perhaps represents an even greater challenge for tradition-bound newsrooms than continuous news or multiplatform publishing.

Here is what others are saying about citizen-generated content:

- ❖ **John Robinson**, editor of The News & Record in Greensboro, N.C., believes that citizen content is here to stay. “It’s an historic development that will only grow. Once the power has shifted, does it ever shift back? I’m no historian, but I’d suggest that once everyone has the ability and the freedom to create their news, opinion and information report, there’s no going back.”
- ❖ **Dan Gillmor**, director of the Center for Citizen Media, not only believes citizen-generated content is here to stay, he criticizes the newspaper industry for failing to embrace the concept and for failing to strike a more conversational tone with readers. Newspapers “haven’t tried the part that I think is crucial for them, which is to deliberately cede some control to the readers and to the community, and so it’s a little bizarre to dismiss as a fad something they haven’t even tried.”
- ❖ **Jan Schaffer**, executive director of the J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism at the University of Maryland, argues that the current wave of citizen-generated content is partly a reaction to mass media’s failure to provide meaning.

Mainstream news coverage reduces issues to “bi-polar pieces” that are either black or white, liberal or conservative. “The conventions of journalism are meant to safeguard journalism but in some cases they force us into a posture that’s not very fair or true and it’s not serving readers.” By focusing, in most cases, on only the extremes of an issue, we’re missing “the conflicted middle” where most people reside, she said. “Our conventions no longer give room for outrage or rage. We usually think people who are outraged are wacky.” It is out of that need to be heard, and to read stories that reflect their viewpoints, that citizen-generated content is blossoming.

- ❖ **Dana Robbins**, editor of The Hamilton Spectator in Ontario, has been quoted before as saying the newspaper industry “doesn’t have the intestinal fortitude to reinvent itself at the speed that’s needed to survive.” Robbins, who radically redesigned his newspaper to focus on Baby Boomers, said his paper’s experimentation has never been about the ‘right’ content. “It’s all about building a culture that was reader-centric, that looks outside ourselves when we make decisions in stories and design.”
- ❖ **Mary Lou Fulton**, vice president of audience development for The Bakersfield Californian, thinks traditional newsrooms dismiss a lot of citizen-generated content because it is not event-driven. “We need to understand why people behave the way they do in terms of the larger macro trends of psychographic behavior that transcend traditional demographic categories such as gender, age and geography. For example, a major trend today is distrust of institutions such as government and media and centralized authority. That would suggest that we need to invest more in consumer-driven comments and recommendations that offer a wider range of opinions and thoughts. I think this has played a big role in what drives the popularity of blogging.”
- ❖ **Colin Maclay**, managing director of The Berkman Center for Internet & Society, believes that the evolution and availability of technology is responsible, in part, for the desire to interact, which is not just an American phenomenon. Maclay, who studies international development and information technology issues, points out that cell-phone use in India has exploded. In many cases, citizens in India have gone from having no land-line phone at all to suddenly owning a cell phone. The Indian version of American Idol generates 50-60 million SMS votes every week. There is a period for each media when people shift from doing “their own thing to allowing technology to do it for them,” said Maclay. “But now technology has caught up with our creativity and the barriers have dropped. Society has entered into a state of “do-it-yourselfness” where we strive to create meaning. Meaning has taken the form of citizen-generated news, information and entertainment.
- ❖ **Jay Rosen**, a professor of journalism at New York University, author of PressThink, a blog about journalism, and creator of NewAssignment.Net, an experiment in professional/amateur open-source journalism, told Slashdot in an October 2006 Q&A: “Here are the things that stand out for me: Amateurs have joined professionals and they own a part of ‘the press.’ An audience that was once connected ‘up’ to Big Media but not across to each other is now connected both ways. The cost for like-minded people to locate each other and collaborate has

fallen dramatically. The tools of media production have been widely distributed, and broad distribution of content is no longer impossible for small, upstart producers or professionals, they're not required to affiliate with Big Media in order to operate...The people formerly known as the audience (as I call them) are now a productive force to be reckoned with, and Big Media has just started that reckoning."

- ❖ **Steven Johnson**, in his "It's All About Us" piece for Time's Person of the Year coverage, wrote: "If Web 1.0 was organized around pages, Web 2.0 is organized around people. And not just those special people who appear on TV screens and in Op-Ed columns. Web 2.0 is made up of ordinary people: hobbyists, diarists, armchair pundits, people adding their voice to the Web's great evolving conversation for the sheer love of it. Amateurs, in other words. And to a certain extent, how you feel about the broader cultural implications of the Web revolves around the response this permanent amateur hour triggers in you. For some, it has power-to-the people authenticity. For others, it signals the end of quality and professionalism, as though the history of electronic media turned out to be one long battle between Edward R. Murrow and America's Funniest Home Videos, and Home Videos won."

The key for newspapers is to decide how much engagement they want with their communities. With such a large pipeline of information coming at consumers endlessly, the need for gatekeepers and editors will surely remain, but Maclay suggests that newspapers are in competition with other gatekeepers for that coveted role.

In the not too distant future, information gatekeepers could be robots who sense our emotions or comprehension. Or, gatekeepers could be the top echelon of bloggers whose opinions and information we trust. There is no guarantee, however, that newspaper will retain that role.

In their book "The Influentials," Ed Keller and Jon Berry write that "when Americans make decisions today, it's a conversation." Magazines, newspapers and television are still important, but "people get ideas from more sources, one of the side products of a more educated society. In turn, the role of media has changed, more toward supporting the conversation than directing people to a decision."

Even a traditionalist like Davis Merritt, a former Knight Ridder editor, acknowledges that newspapers must pay attention to citizen blogs. In his book "Knightfall," Merritt admitted that "on occasion" blogs come up with important information; that they are a way to listen to at least a portion of the public, and that they are a part of a public conversation that often has immediacy and authenticity. "They reflect better than any other medium the rich diversity of humankind."

In the last few years, dozens of citizen-generated initiatives have been developed, many that are hosted or branded by newspapers, and others that are purely amateur efforts. Rather than dismiss the phenomenon, two veteran editors of citizen-generated content suggested at a recent Poynter seminar that it should be embraced for practical reasons. In

fact, Lea Donosky, interactive editor of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, and Leigh Behrens, online director for the Santa Rosa, Calif., Press Democrat, suggested that the technology is creating a new generation – the “remix generation” – that takes pieces of news and entertainment and puts them together using social networks.

Donosky and Behrens’ five reasons newspapers should embrace citizen-generated content:

- ❖ It’s an authentic reflection of community life
- ❖ It surfaces fresh story ideas for professional journalists
- ❖ It allows newspapers to compete
- ❖ It stretches resources and adds revenue
- ❖ There’s no other choice. “The conversations will happen with or without you.”

Some examples of citizen-generated content:

- ❖ **OhMyNews.com** - a Korean site among the pioneers of the movement
- ❖ **BlufftonToday.com** – a home-delivered free paper in the fast-growing area of Beaufort, S.C., that offers a mix of national, international and hyper-local news.
- ❖ **Wickedlocal.com** - three smaller combined markets in Massachusetts.
- ❖ **Dallasnews.com/neighbors** - live news pages for different cities that allow readers to submit news
- ❖ **NorthwestVoice.com** and **SouthwestVoice.com** – reverse-publication products in Bakersfield, Calif.
- ❖ **Backfence.com**
- ❖ **Milwaukeeemoms.com** - a community of interest loosely branded by The Milwaukee Sentinel
- ❖ **Metromix.chicagotribune.com** - online reader reviews and offline reader review teams
- ❖ **Pressdemo.com** – users can comment on every story, and there are now more than 65,000 on this evolving New York Times-owned site
- ❖ **Arguscourier.com** – Blogtown USA is part of the community journalism hub strategy in Petaluma, Calif., a New York Times venture

## **PROPOSAL: Citizen Content in Our Weekly Voices**

The Spokesman-Review has published neighborhood-specific weekly sections for nearly 15 years. Having a structure like the Voices in place is a tremendous advantage, because it provides us a successful framework on which to add citizen-generated content. In fact, our neighborhood Voices already include several elements of reader-submitted information from photos to letters to the editor.

But to expand the Voices to the next level will require a new organizational structure, additional resources, and a computer program that allows readers to upload their own stories and photos.

Although numerous newspapers are now working with citizen-generated content, there is arguably no better model than The Bakersfield Californian. A pioneer in the field, the newspaper launched its Northwest Voice in May 2004, and has since added the Southwest Voice. Both Voices are free community newspapers with companion Web sites that are delivered to more than 30,000 homes every other week. Most of the content is submitted by readers, community organizations, churches and schools. (Since the launch of the Voices, The Bakersfield Californian has developed Mas, a weekly magazine focused on the style, culture and issues of Hispanics, and a social-networking site called “Bakotopia.com.”)

A key to the success of the Bakersfield operation is its independence from the main newsroom. The Voices, Mas and Bakotopia are all produced by Mercado Nuevo (New Market), a subsidiary of the newspaper. The Mercado Nuevo offices are located a block from the main newsroom, and Mas and Voice editors believe it has to be that way.

Even Executive Editor Mike Jenner agrees that the autonomy has been beneficial for Mas and the Voices because the traditional newsroom culture “would have added layers” to the content that didn’t belong there.

And that may be the greatest lesson for tradition-bound editors and reporters. With the utmost professional respect, Voice and Mas editors believe there is resistance to change in the main Bakersfield newsroom. Rather than “leading a conversation” in the community, Mas and Voice editors “listen to what the community is saying.”

The Spokesman-Review has certainly established itself as a news organization that listens to the community, evidenced in part by our early adoption of civic journalism and Interactive Editors, the long-running success of our neighborhood sections, and the wildly popular Huckleberries Online blog by Dave Oliveria out of our North Idaho bureau. However, to add citizen-generated content in a meaningful way, our newsroom must make some cultural shifts in the way it edits the Voices and works with our neighborhoods.

Until recently, the Voices operation reported to the City Editor and was considered part of local news. It has since been designated its own department with a direct report to the managing editor. It's been given a mandate to launch a new weekly section in the bedroom community of Post Falls, Idaho, and to develop a new reporting and editing structure.

The framework now in place will bring the Voices a measure of autonomy that has worked so successfully in Bakersfield. Still outstanding is the development of micro-local Web sites for each neighborhood Voice and a software program that will enable readers to upload their own content.

The rest of the change will be cultural.

Reporters and editors must be helped to understand that citizen-generated content doesn't have to threaten professional journalists and that news consumers have the ability to discern between what Jan Schaffer at the J-Lab calls Big-J journalism and small-j journalism.

While Bakersfield has developed weekly sections of exclusive citizen-generated content, that is not the only option. The Spokesman-Review can decide the Voices should be hybrids of professional and amateur content, with each labeled clearly, or leave the existing sections alone and experiment with only new sections like Post Falls.

Citizen-generated content takes other forms as well and can also be integrated into traditional newspaper coverage.

The News-Press is experimenting with a concept called "crowd-sourcing," which is a mixture of professional and amateur reporters. For a recent investigation into a sewer controversy, the paper asked citizens to "help us investigate."

Within 12 hours, 68 people responded to a forum set up on the paper's Web site. Within 24 hours, a reader in another country offered up a key confidential document that helped the paper 'break' the story. The citizen contributors were liberally credited for their help in subsequent stories on the Web and in the newspaper.

In addition, the News-Press arranged a town hall meeting on the controversy and then got out of the way. Local residents, not reporters, posed questions to officials at the meeting, but the paper's professional reporters covered the event, posting stories and photos to the Web every few minutes and writing a traditional story for the next day's paper.

In all, more than 6,000 citizens contributed in some way to the project through e-mails, phone calls, and interaction on a specially-created forum site.

By working *with* the community, the newspaper was able to improve its journalism. And perhaps more importantly, the newspaper was able to increase its goodwill by using its

power to convene a town hall meeting that citizens on their own may not have been able to arrange.

Although the paper hasn't tried "crowd sourcing" since, it was considered a great success and Executive Editor Kate Marymont is eager to try it again. She expects there *will* be another opportunity because the relationship between newspapers and readers has changed – not only in Fort Myers, but industry-wide.

"There's a growing public expectation that they be allowed at the table. They have knowledge and insight and are increasingly comfortable in taking part in all that is defined as media," said Marymont. "But I also think that we shouldn't just do it because they want us to. It adds value. They do have knowledge. They do have documents. They ask smart questions."

The southeast New Hampshire "Forum" is a sobering example of what can happen when newspapers fail to serve their readers. The Forum is an online newspaper created by a group of nonjournalists who weren't getting what they wanted from the four local papers that served their community.

There is one paid staffer – an advertising rep. Most everyone has a regular job. They occasionally meet face-to-face to plan and manage content, but mostly communicate via e-mail. The Forum Web site features 30 original stories per week from among 130 community contributors. In addition, they publish three print newspapers a year; two are political in nature (candidate profiles, interviews) and the third is a summer events issue. They consider the print products supplements to the Web site.

Either newspapers must find a way to host content like The Forum or link to it. Otherwise, entire community conversations – some at a very high level of engagement – are going to go on without us.

## **PROPOSAL: Spanish-language Web Site**

Our region's Hispanic population is growing steadily and The Spokesman-Review should take a leadership role in bringing these new voices into the community conversation.

We have a rich tradition to build upon. As part of our values-driven coverage, we've already made a commitment to cover the region "in all its wholeness and complexity." We've consistently assigned reporters to cover such beats as "cultures," "minority affairs" and "religion" – not necessarily common at newspapers of our size. We've translated into Spanish several staff-written stories on key issues such as immigration, and we've spread our reach into the northcentral Washington community of Brewster, which experienced a national-level civil rights debate with its Hispanic students.

The next step is to create consistent, relevant and timely content for our Hispanic neighbors.

The inspiration for this proposal comes from Lisa Warren, editor of the JournalNews and the Middletown Journal in Ohio, both Cox newspapers. This model could easily be applied to other demographic groups in our region.

Like our region, Hamilton, Ohio, has a growing Hispanic population. In response, Warren has published a handful of Spanish-language stories in the JournalNews, which has a circulation of 24,000. The Spokesman-Review has done the same. Unfortunately, both papers have received reader criticism for it. In fact, Warren has received threatening letters from her traditional print subscribers for not publishing an "English paper."

Based on that experience, Warren went another direction and created a weekly Spanish-language Web site called Nuestra Vida.

To build the site, Warren recruited bloggers who were considered respected leaders in the Hispanic community: a priest, a minister and a soccer enthusiast. They contribute new content directly to the site once a week. Their photos and biographies are prominently displayed.

Secondly, Warren asked professors and graduate students from a local university to work as translators. Each week she e-mails them stories from the newspaper that she thinks would be pertinent to Hispanic readers. The stories are translated from English to Spanish and e-mailed back to Warren. She pays \$10 per item, including photo captions. The effort costs her about \$50 per week. Her costs are paid for by the site's sole advertiser, a local Hispanic mini-market.

In addition, she established the e-mail address [Spanish@coxohio.com](mailto:Spanish@coxohio.com) and asked agencies and community leaders in the Hispanic community to send news and calendar listings to the address. She visited schools with ESL programs, welfare departments, hospitals, "anyone who had news to disseminate to the Spanish community." As a result, the Web

site is able to offer a fairly rich Spanish-language calendar of information that ranges from notices about parent-teacher conferences to childbirth classes.

Each week Nuestra Vida ([www.journal-news.com/nuestra](http://www.journal-news.com/nuestra)) includes a feature photo and story that anchors the page, local blogs, and three or four additional stories with topical relevance. Warren is able to pick up at no cost national and international content from three of Cox's Spanish-language papers in Texas, Florida and Georgia. She also uses a package of puzzles and games that includes the popular Sudoku. As a result, "Nuestra Vida feels fleshed out and that's nice," Warren said.

There is no required registration on the site, which was important to Warren who didn't want any barriers for first-time readers. The site is part of a larger portfolio of micro-local Web sites hosted by the JournalNews including five weekly community sites and a local social-networking site.

Nuestra Vida was built by a staff producer who doesn't speak Spanish, so Warren had to also provide translation for all the headlines and labels. "It's not a huge undertaking," she said. "You just have to keep feeding it once a week." The secret, she said, is to invest time building relationships. Once trust is established, community leaders are willing to do much of the work themselves.

In addition to being the right thing to do, Warren said it is serving an apparent appetite for news. Page views have been increasing steadily, and are now about 1,700 per week.

The Spokesman-Review could likely produce a similar Web site fairly easily. We know the Hispanic population is growing here. We know there are community leaders who would work with us because they've worked with us as sources in previous stories. We know there is a growing business community in the region that might support the site with advertising, and we know there is a wealth of news and information that isn't getting into the newspaper, and dozens of wire and local stories that are relevant to this demographic group.

What has been difficult to do in print has been made easier by technology. The most meaningful part of the experiment, Warren said, is that it provides fully-developed content that promotes ownership and builds readership.

## **PROPOSAL: Niche publications**

In his October 2006 address to Gonzaga University's Dean's Business Forum, Spokesman-Review Publisher Stacey Cowles said the newspaper must develop new targeted content and leverage Web technology if it is to remain competitive and profitable.

Newsrooms nationwide have been given the same mandate. And there is evidence, according to the August 2006 edition of *The Economist*, that the industry is finally beginning to take the risks necessary to drive innovation.

"The danger for newspapers is that all their efforts on the Internet may only slow their decline. Doing the obvious – having excellent Web sites and selling ad space on them – may not be enough. The papers with the best chance of seeing their revenues grow are those experimenting with entirely new businesses online and off."

It's arguable whether any *single* idea can be the salvation for the newspaper industry. That kind of transformative thinking has so far come from outside the business, leading to the life-changing development of eBay, MySpace, YouTube, Craigslist and so on.

But there are examples of niche products and projects from newsrooms around the country that *are* succeeding in driving readership, from The Tampa Tribune's "Front Pages for Busy Readers" to "Her Times," a 36-page Sunday magazine and companion Web site devoted to women age 25-55 from the Erie Times-News.

The Spokesman-Review has a history of developing innovative content; recent examples include 7, the weekly entertainment guide; Home, the weekly better living guide; 360, an alternative sports tab, and Vox, a student-produced newspaper for Spokane-area high schoolers.

The opportunity is *now* to build on our success with targeted products online or in the paper that deliver news and advertising to key segments of our market:

- ❖ **Transplants.** Washington and Idaho have become popular retirement destinations for affluent Baby Boomers. In fact, a recent story in our Business pages noted that Potlatch Corp. is selling off its timberland to cash in on rising real estate prices. The market is being driven by boomers who want second homes and recreation properties. While these part-time residents or retirees may not be interested in a local daily newspaper, they may want stories about lifestyle and recreation. There also may be a market for Welcome Wagon information that helps them locate essential services or plan outings for when family and grandchildren visit. In fact, if we created an Inland Northwest-specific social-networking site, we could help transplants stay connected to family in other states.

- ❖ **Immigrants.** Our region's population is diversifying. Demographic-specific Web sites such as Nuestra Vida are one approach, but there may also be a market for data-rich special sections that provide practical information on how to apply for a job, find a day-care center, study for the citizenship test, or connect with the rest of the community.
- ❖ **High-enders.** We spend a fair amount of time in print talking about the working poor in our region, but we also have a lot of wealthy residents whose lives aren't necessarily reflected in our coverage. This group tends to show up in our trend stories, but not really as individuals. There could be significant advertising opportunity attached to journalism that captures their lives and issues.
- ❖ **Women.** Newspapers are going after women. There are dozens of examples of niche products aimed at women, who make 80 percent of all household purchases and who are the head of 27 percent of all households. At an October APME panel on "Winning Back Women Readers," Cynthia Miller of the Newsroom Leadership Group argued that covering the women's market isn't the right thing to do; it's the bottom-line thing to do. It's smart business. In Hamilton, Ontario, Editor Dana Robbins completely reconfigured The Spectator to target women baby boomers. The Spectator is now a two-section newspaper. The A-section is a "newspaper within a newspaper" and contains all the day's news, from snippets of top national and international news to local news and business. There is heavy emphasis on context and non-traditional story forms such as graphics, maps and transcripts. The second section is called GO; it's a "magazine within a newspaper" and is targeted at women. Robbins is blunt about the goal: "When we started, we said, 'We're not going to look at young people at all.' The biggest thing to encourage youth readership is to make sure their parents have a paper coming into the house. But a funny thing happened, a lot of the changes we made for boomers seemed to resonate with young people like the Go section. The gap between adult consumption habits and young consumption habits is disappearing. Grazing, news customization. They're traits of all consumers." Robbins said The Spectator decided to target boomers because "they have a predisposition to newspaper reading, even those who have left. Even those who don't consume newspapers believe they're important. We can wring our hands about young people all we want, but the boomers control all the money in the world."
- ❖ **Light readers.** The Bakersfield Californian and several other papers are developing editions for light readers who want their news prioritized and condensed.

### **III. Multimedia Technology**

The Spokesman-Review is heading into the technological future with several advantages: our Web site is rich with original content; we invest in training and equipment to support high-quality multimedia journalism; several of our staff blogs draw phenomenal Web traffic, and we've created a culture that values not just innovation but quality.

While many other papers are racing to catch up, The Spokesman-Review can afford a certain measure of thoughtfulness – although the luxury will not last long. It's all but certain that once we achieve a level of comfort with a continuous news operation, technology will require us to change again.

For several years now we've excelled at high-quality, documentary-style video journalism and slide shows. We've created podcasts, hosted live chats, posted supplemental materials to the Web, and developed what is likely the only live webcast of a news meeting in the country.

The adoption of a Continuous News Desk should allow us to add multimedia content at the other end of the spectrum: real-time breaking news. Much like our print journalism, which runs the gamut from briefs to multi-day investigative packages, our online journalism must evolve across a wider spectrum, from video taken by reporters in the field to rich enterprise packages.

And no matter where we are on the spectrum, the technology must serve to improve and enhance our journalism.

Jim Brady, executive editor of WashingtonPost.com, challenges newspapers to use the Web in the way it was conceived – as a platform for original content. Too many newspapers are still just repurposing their print content. “Don't be on the Web,” Brady said, “be *of* the Web.”

#### **PROPOSAL: Training**

A systematic and on-going training program will be crucial to the success of the Continuous News Desk and other multimedia initiatives.

Some training is already under way.

- ❖ We've subscribed to Lynda.com, an online tutorial that provides hands-on experience for various multimedia applications.
- ❖ We plan to send a second staff photographer to the Platypus camp for videography in 2007.
- ❖ And our current videographer, Colin Mulvany, continues to work with reporters and other photographers interested in producing Video Journal pieces and slide shows. Through his efforts, we've informally managed to

spread a fair amount of training around the room while maintaining our standards and values.

But in 2007, as we work toward producing more breaking news online, our training efforts need to be defined and prioritized. We will not be able to accomplish our online goals without it.

Even more importantly, editors and managers must decide who will be responsible for both initial and ongoing training. Currently, our high-end video journalism comes out of the Photo Department, while the Online Department manages training for the Web site and content producers.

As more and more reporters request video training, the potential for burdening the Photo Department and hampering its productivity increases. For ease and consistency, it might be preferable to devise a tiered approach where both Photo and Online share training depending on how much expertise a user requires.

For example, our breaking news reporter should be fully trained to shoot and edit video from the field. It seems appropriate to devise a training/mentoring program with our videographer for this position. But for other reporters who may only shoot seconds worth of video to be edited back in the newsroom, streamlined tutorials should be sufficient.

The key must be to develop training programs that expand as our online journalism expands. As more reporters become mobile and more photographers use video, our training needs will surely change.

For now, the immediate goal should be to complete training for the new Breaking News Reporter and Assistant City Editor for Multimedia by the end of January 2007. We should strive to complete refresher courses and training for the rest of the room by the end of the first quarter of 2007.

In addition, editors and managers should consider several newsroom-wide literacy programs (described previously) that would provide context about the business pressures leading us toward so many online initiatives.

As part of a literacy program, managers should consider providing a tutorial of both the current Web site and the redesigned one, which is expected to come online by the summer of 2007. Reporters and editors know how to locate blogs and slide shows, but it's arguable whether everyone is familiar with basic functionality. And it's almost a certainty that few in the newsroom understand any of the advertising and classified elements of the site.

As we drive more local content to the Web with our Continuous News Desk, more and more readers are going to have questions about our site in general and our journalism in particular. Newsroom representatives should be as conversant with this platform as they are the newspaper.

While the newsroom has increasingly looked for in-house professional development opportunities, there are a number of multimedia training programs worth considering for 2007:

Poynter:

- ❖ Reporting & Writing for Multiplatform Newsrooms, March 11-16
- ❖ Media Consumption: Reaching New Audiences, April 30-May 3
- ❖ Leadership for Newsroom Editors, April 30-May 4
- ❖ Leadership for Online Editors, May 29-June 1
- ❖ Multimedia Reporting in Teams: Tools & Techniques, Sept. 23-28
- ❖ Online Fundamentals for Newsroom Leaders, Oct. 30-Nov. 1
- ❖ Informational Graphics: Planning and Presenting, Nov. 11-16

American Press Institute:

- ❖ The Design Seminar: Visual Storytelling for Print and Web, March 5-8
- ❖ Storytelling Innovations, March 5-8
- ❖ Interactive Community News: Online and Print, March 19-21

### **PROPOSAL: Equipment for MoJos and Backpack Reporters**

The immediate goal for The Spokesman-Review should be to equip our breaking news reporter with the tools necessary to operate completely independently from the main newsroom. In today's technical lexicon, these independent reporters are called Mobile Journalists or Backpack Reporters.

The News-Press has a team of 12 "MoJos" who work out of their cars with Treos, digital audio recorders, wireless laptops, digital still and video cameras. They work in eight "micro-communities" around the greater Fort Myers area, reporting and writing intensely local neighborhood news for micro-Web sites and the main newspaper. The goal is to provide a constant stream of fresh content.

According to their job description, "Mo-Jos will not write narrative, linear stories in the traditional newspaper sense. Rather, they will construct an ongoing, always-developing report in bits and pieces. The sum of these bits and pieces should reflect the real, honest-to-goodness life experiences of the ordinary people who shop, study, commute, work, play and live in the designated coverage area. The Mo-Jos, by design, will have a live, direct and unfiltered line to readers. They will post directly to the Web using their mobile publishing kit. This format will underscore the aliveness of the report, which in turn will blend well with the contributions of readers."

Kate Marymont, executive editor of The News-Press, said MoJos are one way the paper fulfills the high-demand for hyper-local news and information, which is often easier to do

on the Web than in print. Some of the micro sites are small; there may not even be hundreds of people who regularly visit them. It wouldn't make sense to put that kind of limited and selective content into the traditional mass-market newspaper. But it does make sense to put it online where space is endless and news is continuous. Because the reporters essentially live within the communities they cover, they become ambassadors for the newspaper and are provided enough training to be able to answer questions about circulation or advertising.

There is a range of equipment available for such field work, from mini- almost toylike cameras (we have several in the newsroom currently) to still-small but professional-grade systems that range from \$300 to \$1,000.

Newsrooms that have outfitted reporters for field work have almost universally selected equipment that is easy to use, low-profile and portable. Several editors acknowledged that one of the biggest hurdles to overcome for print-centric reporters is the 'embarrassment factor' that comes from 'looking like a TV reporter.' Translation: discreet equipment that fits inside a backpack or a purse.

The Washington Post has trained about 40 print reporters to use Panasonic PVGS29's with tripods that cost about \$300 each. Although video quality is good, Deputy Multimedia Editor Chet Rhodes said he likes the camera because it's simple to use. Actual training on the camera takes one hour, but Rhodes and his staff use another three hours for "eating, meeting and brainwashing."

Although the first 40 were volunteers, the Post hopes to eventually train all its print reporters.

The biggest obstacle is fear and Rhodes is sensitive to it: "We're not asking them to replace their journalism, but to add spice and flavor to what they do. The equipment is scary. Treat them with respect. They'll be great print reporters, but if I can make them OK short-form videographers, then that's OK."

Newspapers can't lose sight of their print values, said Rhodes, but we do need to do a better job of branding so readers don't replace us with someone else. Television anchors are better at branding than print reporters, said Rhodes, who has a TV background.

Video can help level the playing field. Video helps reporters become part of their communities rather than above them, he said. Video brings a little "personality" to print reporters.

Mackenzie Warren, managing editor for information distribution in Fort Myers, has assembled an equipment Starter Kit for MoJos.

## **HARDWARE**

- ❖ Lightweight IBM ThinkPads or Mac PowerBook G4's.
- ❖ High-speed wireless card.
- ❖ Built-in WiFi card in case cell network is shaky.
- ❖ A digital camera. (Some use a higher-end 35 mm camera that can also capture video and retails for about \$250; others use a Nikon D50 SLR for \$650.
- ❖ A \$99 Olympus digital sound recorder, which is likely to change to either a video camera for sound-only or an iPod Nano with a \$20 microphone add-on.
- ❖ On the horizon: new video cameras to replace current point-and-shoots. They'll use the Mac platform to edit video in iMovie and sound in GarageBand, but may upgrade to commercial video-editing software like Adobe Premiere or Apple Final Cut Pro 5.

## **SOFTWARE**

- ❖ Sprint or Alltel software for dialing in to the cell network
- ❖ A Web browser (Mozilla for best performance with Saxotech Online/Publicus content management system over the Mac OS X Tiger operating system).
- ❖ VPN (Virtual Private Network) software for getting behind the office network from outside the office.
- ❖ Olympus DSS sound-editing software.
- ❖ Some use freeware image-editing software, including iPhoto on the Macs; others have PhotoShop Elements.

Because The News-Press MoJos are completely mobile, they do not have an office desk or a land-line phone. Our breaking news reporter will have both in case working from the office is necessary or practical.

Another recommendation comes from Brian Immel, online editor for Washington State University's student newspaper The Daily Evergreen. Immel uses a Sony DCR-100, the company's first hard drive (HDD) camera. The camera has both video and still modes and includes a Bluetooth microphone. The camera retails for about \$900 and comes with a button marked "EASY," which automates everything except the decision on what to shoot.

"I've given my camera to writers before to have them shoot something when I couldn't, telling them to press the easy button if they every get confused," Immel said.

## **PROPOSAL: Multiple home pages**

Technology now gives us the ability to target readers online.

WashingtonPost.com began offering two home pages about a year and a half ago. One is national/international in focus and the other is local and built around Washington, D.C., news. They are sorted by zip code.

Similarly, The Arizona Daily Star targets readers with 48 unique online sections that correspond to the ZIP codes in its primary circulation area. Reporters and editors 'tag' stories with up to three ZIP codes depending on content and the interests of specific neighborhoods.

The Spokesman-Review should consider the advantages of building different sections and home pages in our market. A very practical advantage of the Web is that it allows newspapers to go back into communities that were abandoned over circulation and delivery challenges.

A site tailored to regional and state news might help mitigate the loss of home-delivery in some of our more far-flung communities that relied on us for overview coverage of government, natural resources, military and health care.

Likewise, our core urban customers might prefer a home page that emphasizes local news and features over general stories about statewide issues.

The proximity of Washington and Idaho – and the increasing number of commuters who cross the state line to work and play – also presents us an opportunity to target Web delivery. Some readers might prefer a home page that reflects the community in which they live; others might want news from the community in which they work.

## **PROPOSAL: Noon Newscast**

Although The Spokesman-Review owns the local NBC affiliate, convergence with KHQ-TV is not a corporate priority at this time. There likely is not enough audience differentiation between the two platforms to significantly increase revenue opportunities. In addition, recent multimillion remodeling projects for both newsrooms – which are housed in separate buildings – make convergence impractical.

While there are examples of successful converged operations such as The Lawrence Journal-World and The Tampa Tribune, there are other models.

The Bakersfield Californian has a partnership agreement with a local station it does not own. Reporters promote their stories on the air from a camera inside the newsroom. The arrangement helps drive readers to the newspaper and provides the station with ready-

made content. Reporters are paid a flat fee for each appearance, which the paper and the station split.

The Spokesman-Review could consider a promotional partnership with another local TV station, or it could take the opportunity to *converge with itself*.

As we build the infrastructure for a Continuous News Desk, invest in training and equipment, and redesign the utility of spokesmanreview.com, we move into better position to produce a daily video newscast, or “vodcast.” A 15-minute segment at noon Monday through Friday would enhance our Web coverage and create a “loop of promotion” between the newspaper and our online journalism.

An often-cited example of a successful “vodcast” is Studio 55 out of Naples, Fla. While the slick production values and high-energy segments may not be a perfect fit for the more conservative Spokane-Coeur d’Alene market, Studio 55 is a textbook example of the benefit of convergence: the show’s hosts continually promote naplesnews.com and the Naples Daily News.

Rob Curley, one of the architects of Studio 55, narrated a Power Point about the vodcast at the October APME conference. (Curley is now at WashingtonPost.Newsweek Interactive). Curley called Studio 55 the “anti-TV newscast” and there is a certain entertainment sensibility to the program, but it does deliver the latest news from Naples, expanded stories and features with longer-than-typical video segments, plus sports, calendar information and opinion pieces.

In Rachel Smolkin’s “Adapt or Die” piece for AJR, Studio 55 was proclaimed a winner by President and Publisher John Fish: “Potentially we have greater reach with the vodcast than any other product we’ve ever done. The vodcast, from the advertisers’ standpoint, is the best multimedia buy in our area.”

The newscast is posted on naplesnews.com each weekday at 4 p.m. and updated at 6 p.m.; it also airs on a local Comcast channel. Thirty-second sponsor spots appear in both formats.

In addition to Studio 55, the paper has launched a morning podcast that listeners can access via computer or iPod.

As part of the paper’s multimedia frenzy, Fish told AJR he tripled the new-media team to 30 people, including four videographers who produce news and commercials.

“I think that the competitive environment that we all find ourselves in, combined with the economic challenges that we all face, requires that we look at our business in different ways than we have in the past,” said Fish, who predicted revenue from the new-media ventures would quadruple from the end of 2004.

The Spokesman-Review takes some advantages into this arena. We already have some experience with the live webcast of our 10 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. news meetings. And there currently is only one TV competitor offering a weekday noon broadcast, KREM-2.

A 15-minute Spokesman-Review program would give consumers another choice, would be a promotional boon to the newspaper, and would present a revenue opportunity for advertising.

### **PROPOSAL: PDF Edition**

The Spokesman-Review ended publication of the afternoon Chronicle in 1992. Web technology gives us an opportunity to bring it back.

And as previously noted, the development of a Continuous News Desk operation and additional training makes it possible for the newsroom to develop an online bulldog edition as a self-contained newsroom initiative.

The Bakersfield Californian is also developing a similar online edition.

## IV. More Ideas

In the course of this three-month project, I discovered more creative ideas for improving our journalism than there was room to include in this report. Some of the best ideas are included here. The list shows that newspapers of all sizes are willing to experiment, to engage their readers, and to acknowledge that we need a new way of doing things.

Industry critics argue that it will take a seismic innovation like Craigslist or YouTube – not niche products and hyper-local Web sites – to improve the business fortunes of newspapers. But the value of some of these initiatives should not be discounted, especially if they tap into what the J-Lab’s Jan Schaffer calls “an architecture of participation being constructed around the country.”

### ❖ **60 Ideas in 60 Minutes** – Poynter’s Idea O’Matic, 2006 Edition:

1. Answer all reader e-mail within three hours
2. Wayback Machine: Offer a tool that allows users to view news from any day in the last two weeks including important moments in local history. (St. Petersburg Times: [www.sptimes.com](http://www.sptimes.com))
3. Create a reader guide for requesting newspaper or Web coverage. (The Providence Journal has a PDF version: [www.projo.com](http://www.projo.com))
4. Create a photo gallery (online or in the paper) for reader-submitted summer vacation photos and hold a contest to honor the best submissions.
5. Build dedicated Web pages for every neighborhood in your market with links to other sites, including news and photo galleries, and links to homes for sale (San Francisco Chronicle: <http://www.sfgate.com/traveler/guide/sf/neighborhoods/>)
6. Use a contest to reward users for keeping registration information current. (Northern Voice: [www.northernvoice.ca](http://www.northernvoice.ca))
7. Add a form to the end of breaking news stories that invites readers to send in comments or report errors. Make sure you can verify the information. (Washington Post: [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com); Orlando Sentinel: [www.orlandosentinel.com](http://www.orlandosentinel.com))
8. Link names of major community newsmakers to biographies and recent story pages.
9. Offer an e-mail service that alerts users any time a story they’re interested in is updated or corrected.
10. Start an Internet radio station devoted to streaming local music 24 hours a day. Include weekly “weekend preview” shows. Stream your podcasts. (San Diego Tribune: [www.amplifysd.com](http://www.amplifysd.com))
11. Create celebratory Web pages for weddings, anniversaries, births. (The Savannah Morning News offers multimedia Flash-based wedding announcements: [www.savannahnow.com/celebrations/](http://www.savannahnow.com/celebrations/))

12. Create combo online/print pet pages (Chicago Tribune: <http://www.chicagotribune.com>)
13. Offer multiple payment options for content such as paid subscriptions of varying duration or day passes in exchange for viewing media-rich ads. (Salon: [www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com))
14. Create an “animation off” switch to turn off ads that are adjacent to certain stories or special sections (Weather Underground: [www.weatherunderground.com](http://www.weatherunderground.com))
15. Enable reader comment BEFORE publication (Chicago Tribune/Wisconsin State Journal)
16. Develop a cell phone Web site with a text message contest to kick it off. (Jacksonville Times Union: <http://www.jacksonville.com/Jax2Go/>)
17. Develop topic-specific photo galleries. (Cincinnati Enquirer: [www.cincinnati.com/freetime/pets/pets\\_album1.html](http://www.cincinnati.com/freetime/pets/pets_album1.html))
18. Adopt “spotted” concept to enable reader-contributed photos. (Lubbock Avalanche-Journal: <http://spotted.lubbockonline.com/>)
19. Put a Web camera on a taxi, bus, tow truck. (Los Angeles Avenue: <http://www.laavenue.com>)
20. Create a special site for travel/tourism content. Sell directories. Create MP3 tours of local museums and sites. (Arizona Republic: [www.azcentral.com/travel/hiking/hikingindex.html](http://www.azcentral.com/travel/hiking/hikingindex.html))
21. Sell digital copies of historic photos and front pages
22. Create multimedia family tributes (both The Spokesman-Review and Legacy.com: [www.legacy.com](http://www.legacy.com))
23. Hire students to make semi-pro YouTube videos. They want to do something that someone will see and they need clips. (Tacoma News Tribune: <http://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/story/5725729p-5125878c.html>)
24. Offer subscribers free access to story archives. (New York Times Select)
25. Link a database on school quality with your real estate section. Add crime stats if you have them (Tampa Tribune: <http://relocation.tbo.com/>)
26. Buy an interactive crossword puzzle. Create online games section. Offer game reviews by users. Sell puzzle hints (Seattle Times: <http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/comicgames/>)
27. Create local “exclusive” puzzle ([www.sudoku.com](http://www.sudoku.com))
28. Launch a public service project. Get a problem fixed. Connect volunteers (San Francisco Chronicle: <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2004/05/23/BAGI96QFE91.DTL>)
29. Create a “redirect” management system to simplify URLs
30. Set up a “panic button” that lets you temporarily drop bandwidth-heavy graphics from the site when traffic exceeds capacity.
31. Turn off registration for new users when important news breaks. Saves on bandwidth and prevents new users from going elsewhere
32. Make training a priority: brown bags, half-day local seminars, learning projects with time off to study and report, e-learning

33. Create local serial narrative for print, online, broadcast and as an MP3 audio file (Atlanta Journal Constitution: <http://www.ajc.com/blogs/content/shared-blogs/ajc/twohospitals/index.html>)
34. Use GPS or printed directions to help readers follow along while they listen to a story via MP3 file (Atlanta Journal Constitution: <http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/metro/Atlanta/aquarium/index.htm>)
35. Use Google maps to link datelines on all stories to pages with maps and information about locations.
36. Don't know how to handle that other site? Use a tab and do both. (Austin Statesman American and Austin 360 sites)
37. Is it supposed to look like that? Look at your site with different browsers (Firefox/Safari/Opera)
38. Turn your online content into print. Create and sell books with services such as My Publisher, which has a 6x9-inch format book for \$10 with 80 photos across 20 pages for events such as big sporting events (My Publisher: [www.mypublisher.com](http://www.mypublisher.com))
39. Offer weather alerts and personal forecasts via e-mail and cell phone. Bonus: Turn your users into weather spotters and have them turn weather information into your site (<http://www.weathercenter.com/personalforecast/> or <http://www.myweather>)
40. Buy and customize a traffic alert service for your commuters. Send them e-mails and cell phone alerts to the latest crashes ([www.traffic.com](http://www.traffic.com))
41. Give readers access to real estate ads a day or two early in exchange for a special charge.
42. Create e-mail reminder service, send alerts when tickets to big events become available (Lawrence Journal-World: <http://calendars.lawrence.com/events/search/>)
43. Help readers send e-mail directly to elected officials (Los Angeles Times: <http://capwiz.com/latimes/officials/congress/?azip=90803&submit.x=5&submit.y=6>)
44. Develop online corrections policy and make it visible.
45. Create pages that provide biographical information on reporters and editors. Put a face to bylines, highlight unsung producers. Link Web bylines to an e-mail form.
46. Use Google maps to create local database-driven maps
47. Create a local Yahoo alert with an 'ad hoc' e-mail list based on topics or stories that will play out over a long period. Don't forget to kill it when the story is done.
48. Provide easy way for readers to buy photos (The Spokesman-Review and Orange County Register: <http://www.ocregister.com/photos/>)
49. Print a couple thousand copies of your home page in color and leave them where people hang out. Helpful for online sites that don't have a print partner
50. Send e-mail blasts in the afternoon. Promote columns and features as well as news (Wall Street Journal's Tomorrow's Columns Today)
51. Use the subject line in e-mail alerts effectively with specific information.
52. Supersize That: Make a style sheet button that increases/decreases text size

53. Tell readers what's hot, what's being searched, what's getting the buzz (The New York Times shows search terms)
54. Offer readers a way to save interesting stories to read later (International Herald Tribune: <http://www.ihf.com>)
55. Wow, that's a home page! Make your design work with and for the audience. (El Pais' site for young Spanish readers: [www.ep3.es](http://www.ep3.es))
56. If you read only one thing today: Highlight the best story or stories for those busy readers
57. Spend 30 minutes on a competitor's site and find one feature worth stealing. Have every staffer look at one site per month
58. Create your own free classified site. (Gainesville Sun: [www.gainesvillelist.com](http://www.gainesvillelist.com))
59. Create a free WiFi hot spot near your office and brand it. (Cost can be as little as \$70 per month)
60. Pointy-Haired Boss Shift: If you are the boss (or close to it), work the worst shift in the department. Do it four times a year.

❖ **Starting Today:** Quick Ideas for The Spokesman-Review

**Use the Web to promote the paper.** Instead of static in-paper promos to upcoming content, use eye-catching multimedia: video clips of reporters and editors talking about 'how they got the story,' or slide shows with voice-overs. Our redesigned home page should include a prominent standing element that promotes the paper.

**Create a promotional loop.** Newspaper stories that start online should include the phrase, 'First reported on spokesmanreview.com.' Online stories that will be enhanced for the newspaper should include the phrase, 'Read tomorrow's Spokesman-Review for more.'

**Regularly solicit reader photos** of breaking news events and post them on the Web. We did this recently with a massive winter storm that toppled trees and caused power outages. This gives us timely content and gives readers a reason to come to the site.

**"You Be the Editor."** The Beacon News in suburban Chicago invites readers to help select front-page stories. Interested citizen-editors must say in 120 words or less why they want to test their news judgment. The Wisconsin State Journal started a similar program in January. This is a natural extension of our Transparent Newsroom initiative.

**Adopt a conversational tone.** Start with our headlines; they don't all need to be ponderous. Readers want to be part of a conversation and they want information that helps them manage their lives. Here's an example from The Minneapolis Star Tribune's recent redesign. Old headline: "Identity theft costs consumers billions." New headline: "How to protect yourself from identity theft."

**Bring back "Action Corner."** The trend toward "do-it-yourselfness" and the rise in citizen-generated content indicates that people want to participate, especially Baby Boomers who want to make their own decisions about consumer products,

health care, travel and leisure. Now might be the time to revive a consumer column in the spirit of Royce Gorseth's former Action Corner.

**Start with a question.** Encourage innovative thinking by asking Tim Porter's question: "If you could rebuild your newsroom from scratch, with the same full-time equivalent of employees and budget numbers, and with the only requirement that you must make a print and an electronic product, what would you change?" Porter, a former San Francisco Examiner editor, is a consultant with First Draft Productions and author of the blog First Draft.

❖ **Starting Tomorrow:** Ideas that may take more time

**Local version of NewAssignment.Net.** In Jay Rosen's experiment with open-source reporting, citizens are able to fund projects they want published. Could we bypass the financial component and devise a way for local readers to generate investigative projects they want us to complete? This is a way to incorporate elements of "crowd-sourcing," which uses readers as watchdogs, whistleblowers and citizen-reporters, and is another natural extension of our Transparent Newsroom.

**Move stocks and sports agate to the Web.** Putting the content online is the easy part; handling reader complaints is hard. It won't be long, however, before most newspapers make the switch. The limitless nature of the Web makes it a natural home for lists and data that consume so much valuable news hole.

## V. Keeping the Conversation Going

As noted previously, the value of this report rests in the questions it raises and our collective ability to keep a conversation about innovation going. The pace of change will be relentless as new technologies come online and alter the way we consume and process information. It will not be enough to tinker with our practices and revert back to a print-centric comfort zone. Newsrooms that want to flourish must create a culture where change is expected and creativity and risk-taking is valued.

How innovation is nurtured varies, of course, from newspaper to newspaper.

In Fort Myers, Fla., editors hire for traits of creativity in the same way they hire for writing and reporting ability. While there are still some innovation skeptics in the room, Executive Editor Kate Marymont said most of them have left the paper. “We’ve put such a pronounced emphasis on the need to transform ourselves that the people who are here now have signed on for the ride,” she said.

In Hamilton, Ontario, Editor Dana Robbins has worked to build a culture in which it is OK to try and fail. “Newsrooms are unforgiving of failure,” said Robbins. “You almost get no innovation. I’d rather be embarrassed than bored. We try to move on and learn from the experience so people aren’t afraid to put up their hands and do unusual things. We spend too much time thinking we’re a dying industry and not enough time thinking we’re an evolving industry. We’re not making good strategic decisions.”

In Portland, Ore., editors at The Oregonian created an Innovation/Niche Publications and Special Sections Team to focus on ways to make innovation continuous rather than sporadic.

Even at a paper like The Tampa Tribune – which is so well-known for its continuous news desk that Pentagon officials recently visited for tips on building one of their own – innovation requires nurturing.

To mitigate the fear, Executive Editor Janet Weaver builds at least an hour into every day to walk around the newsroom and talk to people.

“We’re not dying,” she said, “but we’ll have to change in ways that make us uncomfortable and that feels like we’re dying.”

Weaver said she still hears variations on the sentiment, ‘I didn’t sign on to do a package for TV. I didn’t sign on to have it be about data instead of stories. Where’s the romance in that?’

The fear reminds her of a line from an Eagles song: ‘sometimes the brightest light is from the burning bridge.’

“We talk about serving the readers, but most of us got into the business because we love the craft,” she said. “Some of the things we love aren’t going to make it over the bridge, but our values will.”

For The Spokesman-Review, 2007 will be dominated by the development of a continuous news desk, a shift toward multiplatform publishing, and the creation of niche products and citizen-generated content.

The changes – in workflow and culture – will be profound. Newsrooms that have navigated the minefields have done so with a combination of information and technical training. From brownbag lunches to “business literacy” sessions to more frequent staff meetings, newsrooms that have sought to explain the reasons for change have fared the best.

Many of those newsrooms also worked as collaboratively as possible with staff; encouraged ‘no-risk’ feedback; consistently and publicly praised good work, and were willing to devote serious time every day to risk-taking and idea-generation.

## VI. The Future

Jack Driscoll, editor-in-residence at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, says that predicting the future beyond 20 years is too inexact to be useful. But Driscoll, former editor of The Boston Globe, *does* believe that newspapers will continue to occupy an important role in society for years to come.

What he and researchers at MIT's Media Lab are unable to say is *in what form*.

Almost assuredly newspapers will transform from paper and ink to – in the words of Spokesman-Review Publisher Stacey Cowles – “pixels with screens.”

Already ‘delivery’ has shifted from once a day to around-the-clock as newspapers build continuous news operations to drive content not just to the Web but to mobile devices like cell phones and iPods. Newsrooms are using more and more multimedia technology. Photojournalists have become videographers. Readers are becoming partners in the reporting process.

What remains is a viable business model. And there is no shortage of experts willing to weigh in on what that model should look like:

Tom Mohr, former president of Knight Ridder Digital, said in a September 2006 Editor & Publisher article titled “Winning Online – A Manifesto,” that newspapers must adopt “two key objectives: the migration to common platforms, and the acquisition of the ability to sell top-quality online product to our advertisers.”

Neither will occur unless independent newspaper companies aggregate into an industry-wide network where “each company must cede some control over its digital future into a Switzerland organization that manages the network.”

Mohr acknowledged that his proposition will require rare cooperation, trust and visionary leadership from “the industry’s captains.” But he also suggested the upside is \$4 billion in revenue for the industry by 2010.

Craigslist founder Craig Newmark told AJR his prescription for the industry includes making the online versions of newspapers more compelling. “I would be engaging the community more; I would be investigating delivery of news to mobile devices, particularly cell phones, and paying a lot of attention to, let’s call them electronic ink technologies, including the scrollable displays from companies like Philips and HP. I love the use of paper, but it’s expensive to buy, it’s expensive to print, and it’s expensive to deliver.”

In the same AJR piece, Philip Meyer, author of “The Vanishing Newspaper: Saving Journalism in the Information Age,” said the Internet offers a chance “to trade the high

costs of ink on paper for a free distribution system. I think the newspaper will survive in some form, possibly less than daily. I think people will still want a print product to carry around with them, but it might be a weekend product.”

Consultant Paul Gillin, author of “The New Influencers: A Marketer’s Guide to Social Media,” is perhaps the most direct of all. Writing for B to B magazine, Gillin said, “the near-total collapse of the American newspaper industry as we know it is inevitable.”

Newspapers missed the chance to save themselves years ago, he said. “Over the next decade, there will be agonizing rounds of layoffs, consolidation and bankruptcies. It will be painful to watch, but it will be a necessary process for the industry to reinvent itself.”

It is the logical demise of a broken business model, he said, that uses an outdated delivery method and expensive editorial staffs. The model will be replaced by the “vastly superior economics” of the Web.

Back at MIT’s Media Lab, researchers are working with technology that will profoundly change the way we communicate with one another, but it is unknown how *that* will affect the role of newspapers in society.

Barbara Barry, a postdoctoral associate at the Media Lab, is developing a camera – “an intelligent computational partner” – that provides suggestions on what to photograph or record based on what has been previously shot and what is going on in the present moment. Eventually, a camera could be programmed with certain profiles or traits that could be used as cues. In the practical journalism world, the camera might ask a photographer, “have you thought about shooting a panoramic in this particular situation?”

Although Barry’s work in the field of content management – considered the Holy Grail of current research – is certain to change the way journalists react to and record events, she is optimistic about the future of newspapers. Both she and Driscoll views newspapers as part of a continuum – from the Revolutionary War pamphleteers to the continuous news on our computers today.

“I wouldn’t be in favor of preserving (newspapers) just to preserve them,” she said. “But the need to be informed isn’t going to go away. It’ll be more important.”

Barry cautions that RSS feeds, multimedia video and audio aren’t necessarily the answer to improving newspapers or replacing them. She’s also not sure society is quite at the point of being an Internet Nation. There is a “cult” of content creation going on – podcasters, bloggers – but she doesn’t know how widespread the culture really is, or if they’re just serving their own interests.

For the majority then, newspapers are still a vital source of information and there is still opportunity to improve the economics.

While Barry is not a futurist, there are those who do forecast trends, and what they see on the horizon has the potential to impact greatly those of us in the information business.

In its annual Outlook list for The Futurist magazine, The World Future Society offers these “glimpses of what may happen.” The list is divided among issues such as Security, Transportation, Health and Medicine and Habitats.

- ❖ We’ll incorporate wireless technology into our thought processing by 2030.
- ❖ Within the next three decades, people will begin experimenting more freely and recklessly with nano-electronic personal enhancement.
- ❖ We will soon be able to build computer models of our preferences, opinions and mental associations.
- ❖ Computers will be 1,000 times more powerful in a decade, one million times more powerful in 20 years, and one billion times more powerful in 30 years.
- ❖ Education will be portable and learning will be “on-demand.”
- ❖ The Internet will drastically change living patterns and urban populations.
- ❖ Computers may soon have artificial empathy for their users.
- ❖ The Internet will increase need for social connections.
- ❖ Text will be instantly translated into multimedia presentations.
- ❖ Future potential occupations include: bioaesthetic coach, experience designer, health-enhancement mentor, intercommunity farmer, personal genome optimizer, chief innovation officer, vice president of experiences, corporate historian.

Ed Keller and Jon Berry are not futurists but researchers and consultants for RoperASW, which has been tracking consumer trends since 1923. Based on their work with consumers and Fortune 500 companies, they predict an increasingly PC-centered world where consumers value information, the ability to connect globally, and a desire to manage more of their own daily lives.

Those values, they said, will lead to consumer demand for portable language translation software so people can speak in real-time with anyone; car satellite systems; computerized kitchens and household robots; medical identification cards and computers that monitor health; electronic handheld tablets for reading newspapers and magazines; parity between people and institutions in the currency of information, and convenience, but not at the expense of quality.

According to Keller and Berry, one American in 10 tells the other nine how to vote, where to eat, and what to buy. They are “the influentials” and their power is growing, perhaps to the extent that they are in competition with one of society’s historic influencers – newspapers.

“The fact is, business, government, and other traditional structures can’t control the conversation the way they could in the past,” they said. “According to our research, the key period in the change was 1992-1995, the same time, not coincidentally, that people started turning inward and looking more to themselves and their personal networks for

solutions to their problems. As elsewhere in American life, a transfer of power seemed to be going on.”

In detailing a strategy for “getting in on the conversation,” Keller and Berry urge businesses, governments and other community stakeholders to *listen* – listen to ideas, listen to criticism, listen for the reasons why people are moving toward other avenues of information.

“Specifically, you should make sure you are reaching the decision-makers who are influential in others’ decisions. To succeed today, you need to connect with the people who are at the center of the conversation.” For newspapers, that clearly means providing readers the information they want.

Given the pace of technological change, the explosion of the World Wide Web, and the seismic shift in the way we communicate, it seems clear, then, that the **newsroom of the future must be interactive.**

Newspapers must see their readers as information partners who share story ideas and feedback. The popularity of citizen-generated content – and the ease of producing it – means that consumers will no longer allow newspapers to stand above their communities; we’ll have to work from within them.

Newspapers that cede some ground to readers will be rewarded with richer pipelines of information that can be applied back toward our journalism. We do not have to sacrifice our quality, independence or values in order to be more collaborative.

Newspapers must accept that there are more issues of interest to our readers than we cover with our outdated beat structures; that our readers often know more than we do, and that the conventions of our craft often prevent us from covering “the conflicted middle” where most people reside – the place where our analytical skills can do the most good.

The newsroom of the future must place as much value on being a portal and an aggregator as it does on being a righter of wrongs.

And the newsroom of the future must see technology for what it is, a powerful tool for doing good journalism. The lure of multimedia technology is potent. The chance to prove that video-based journalism can rise above the standards of most local TV stations is reason enough most of us are willing to dip our toe in the water. But newspapers should not “do” technology just because it’s there. All multimedia – from podcasts to vodcasts, from slide shows to flash graphics – must serve the journalism.

In the end, consumers will default to quality. They’ll want to preserve the chance to produce their own video on YouTube but when it comes to making sense of rising local taxes, they’ll revert to professionals.

Finally, the newsroom of the future must embrace change and recruit innovation.

