

J W T

WORK IN PROGRESS
FUTURE OF PRINT

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There's an old saying in the publishing industry, "Don't argue with the man who buys ink by the barrel." Uttered by many an editor with a thrust of the chest and a tug at the suspenders, it's a more elegant way of saying "Don't mess with me, bub, I can make your name as black as the ink its printed in."

These days though, the price of ink, along with the print industry's prestige, is plummeting along with daily circulation. First cable programming and now the Web are siphoning off readers and advertisers. Technology is changing the way we share information—through blogs, e-mail and mobile media—and print is struggling to keep up.

The numbers tell a disheartening story. Through the first half of 2007, according to the *American Journalism Review*, total revenue at national newspapers was down nearly 5 percent and operating profit was off more than 14 percent, numbers nearly as poor as those the newspaper industry posted during the 2001 recession. And while the economy is not in recession today, it's clear the print industry is—particularly the newspaper industry.

News of publications cutting staff on the print side has dominated media headlines over the past couple of years. Time Inc. cut roughly 800 jobs between 2006-2007—and made major investments in online and new media. Indeed, advertisers are shifting their dollars online, seeking the niche audiences that some Web sites deliver. Why should an automaker, for example, buy a full-page spread in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* when an ad buy on Jalopnik.com or Edmunds.com reaches a more targeted audience? (Jalopnik, for example, has

the eyeballs of the hard-to-reach young adult male, claiming that 98 percent of its audience is male and 84 percent is aged 18-34.) Trickle down a bit and you'll find Joe Public unloading his 10-speed bike via a free Craigslist ad versus a paid classified in his local paper.

It's not just that print's bottom line is eroding—the medium's reputation is getting tarnished too. Reporters Jayson Blair (2003) and Stephen Glass (1998) fabricated stories for standard bearers *The New York Times* and *The New Republic* in two high-profile scandals, ushering in a credibility crisis for print journalists. And with Web 2.0 at their fingertips, readers have begun to wonder whether they can do it just as well themselves.

Bloggers are outstripping established journalists and columnists when it comes to sheer buzz, skipping hard time on the city desk for an opening slot as a self-made brand. Gossip doyenne Liz Smith, for example, is hardly a match for Perez Hilton, who works out of a coffee shop but peppers his blog with celebrity dirt at Mach 2 speed. And citizen journalists, Web 2.0's poster children, are lauded for first-hand accounts delivered without the encumbrances of pesky editors or, frequently, spell-checkers.

So just what does the future hold for the by-the-barrel ink men? Are they destined to trade black ink for red, or (perish the thought) will the Sulzbergers be saved by the likes of Rupert Murdoch? It's clear that today's media consumers want more than to just consume—they want to contribute, comment and create media. Print hasn't traditionally offered that kind of interaction, but today reporters are doing double duty as bloggers, and readers e-mail stories, then contribute commentary. In a Wiki world where open platform is the name of the game, we all have a stake in finding out if the print industry can keep up.

BLACK, WHITE AND READ ALL OVER?

Yes, newspapers used to be the punch line, but print professionals (and media buyers) aren't laughing so hard now that it seems newspapers are far from read all over. The circulation of major American dailies like the *Washington Post* and *Chicago Tribune* fell in the six months to September in 2007. And in the top 25 American markets, average daily paid circulation dropped 2 percent, while Sunday circulation fell 5 percent. This isn't too surprising, considering that the newspaper industry has been seeing declines in readership for decades, resulting in years of slow growth. Now, competition for ad revenue from the Internet has transformed limited growth into slipping revenue.

There's no doubt that apocalyptic headlines predicting the death of print have purists and journalism professionals on edge. Many old-school media vets are feeling more than a little shaky after watching broadsheets like *The New York*

Times, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Los Angeles Times* get narrower (all were trimmed in size as a way to cut costs) and jobs move across the digital divide. To help prop up circulation numbers, ad revenues and editorial budgets, Poynter Institute scholar Roy Peter Clark offered this mandate to his fellow journalists: "It is your duty as a journalist and a citizen to read the newspaper—emphasis on paper, not pixels."

But is the future—and, for that matter, the present—really so bleak? Overall, newspapers' ad revenue is down. But that dip has taken place across media. According to a July *Wall Street Journal* report, the 4.8 percent drop to \$10.6 billion in the first quarter of 2007 includes both online and print ad revenue; the slump was due more to softness across a variety of sectors than a disregard for ink on paper. Retail ad revenue, for example, dropped mainly due to cuts in advertising by troubled national department store and home furnishing chains. Classified ads slipped too—in part because of competition from the Web, but also because of weakness in the real estate and automotive sectors.

Not all papers are suffering. *The New York Times*, a banner brand, reported an increase in revenue in September. *Editor and Publisher* noted that the paper "benefited from a strong growth in national advertising," which rose 18.9 percent and included gains in both print and online ads, according to a press release. And the magazine industry, despite enduring flat ad revenue in 2006, showed a gross revenue gain of 3.1 percent, according to an *Advertising Age* survey.

Overseas, the picture is a bit rosier. Free newspapers in Europe are flourishing: Circulation has shot from 1 million to about 5 million in the last five years, according to the World Association of Newspapers. By using wire material and skeletal editing staffs, they keep overhead low while luring advertisers with high circulation estimates. While European readership has been affected by the same confluence of online, television and mobile media that has distracted U.S. readers, free papers have the unique distinction of converting non-readers to readers. Such papers have done so well that at least one company has been optimistic enough to start a paid-circulation daily. *Publico*, a small full-color daily that costs €0.50, hopes to attract young, left-leaning readers overlooked by other Spanish newspapers, *The New York Times* reported.

Furthermore, European papers have been getting a lift as more readers make the switch to pixilated news. News aggregators like Google and Yahoo! News have drawn eyeballs to newspapers not normally available without a trip to an international newsstand. A quick survey of Google's international news link includes stories from major U.S. outlets like *Time* magazine and the Associated Press but also from *The New Zealand Herald*, India's *Economic Times*, the *International Herald Tribune* and a smattering of British papers, including *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian*.

In fact, *The Guardian's* stories have been in high enough demand across the pond to support a U.S. brand expansion. A full one-third of the paper's readership lives in the U.S., most drawn by the Web. The latest audited ABCe figures, for August, show that Guardian Unlimited had 15.9 million unique users, of which the company estimates 5.1 million came from the U.S., according to a

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Guardian report. The U.K. paper launched GuardianAmerica.com in October, anchored by a team of eight Washington-based journalists.

The paper's leap across the Atlantic is evidence that the Web might just be the tonic for boosting print's anemic circulation and revenue figures, exposing new readers to the brands. *The Guardian's* site has drawn readers to the paper, raised brand awareness and inspired a new business model focused on multimedia storytelling. Publishers might remember that it's the message, not the medium that is the key to their livelihoods. The question is, "Who's listening?"

Just a decade and a half ago, mainstream media giants—think Tom Wolfe and Gay Talese—were bona fide media personalities. It was a class often aspired to but rarely reached. That was before anyone with a blog and a Flickr account could publish and, if all went well, come out with a bit of Internet fame. The days when a writer actually had to have a body of significant work in print to be famous are over. Now Tom Wolfe may be less broadly known than ... Perez Hilton?

Then again, there has been tumultuous change in the years between Tom and Perez. A number of print journalism scandals (involving *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair, *New Republic* writer Stephen Glass and *Boston Globe* columnist Patricia Smith, among others) have shaken public trust in the media; the mudslinging directed toward the "liberal media" by politicians and commentators hasn't helped. Turnabout is fair play, right? Add to that the dawn of Web 2.0, which allows any Tom, Dick or Harriet with a Web connection and keyboard to wrap themselves in the authenticity of the (virtually) printed word. Chief among them are the bloggerati, a new class of media personality that has become a go-to source for celebrity, political and media gossip.

Bloggers, unfettered by journalistic standards such as fact-checking and second-sourcing, can deliver purported scoops with a heaping dose of opinion. And their casual tone—sincere or snarky—can come off as a refreshing alternative to starchy print pubs and their old-school columnists. Consider the rise of Matt Drudge, who was the first to report the fact that *Newsweek* had killed a story about President Clinton's involvement with a White House intern, then broke the name Monica Lewinsky a day later. The Drudge Report is now the seventh most-visited news Web site in the U.S., ahead of *The New York Times*, Fox News and the *Washington Post*, according to an August article in *New York* magazine. Drudge ushered in a generation of bloggers that have left print journalists looking slow and irrelevant—yet they cater to him in order to gain links on his site, hoping a deluge of public mentions and e-mails will follow.

Even so-called "gossip rags" are feeling the pinch. On-the-street and in-the-club celebrity sightings are e-mailed to blogs like Gawker, Jossip and Defamer. Paparazzi photos are posted, and embellished, by Perez Hilton. "It doesn't

matter that *US Weekly* is more thorough and official,” CollegeHumor editor-in-chief Ricky Van Veen observed at JWT’s recent Digitivity Deep Dive forum. “People go where they feel comfortable.”

And advertisers, naturally, go where the people go. Established blogs have been drawing national advertisers for years, allowing marketers to capture deep niches, sometimes at a fraction of the cost they would pay for broader outlets. Want to advertise the new Mustang Bullitt to car nuts? Try Jalopnik. Looking to sell your navigation system to an inveterate traveler? Buy on Gridskipper. The list goes on and on and around the world. Hemp clothing to eco-warriors? Check out the U.K.’s EcoStreet. Cookbooks to foodies? Head to the Chocolate & Zucchini blog, written by a food-loving Parisian.

For marketers, blogs also serve as a new front on which to advance their PR agendas. Well-placed releases and swag can generate buzz, hopefully positive and ideally of the sort that sets off a ripple effect as other blogs and the mainstream media pick up on the message.

As a reliable medium, however, blogs score pretty low. For one, they’re vulnerable to propaganda and deception, as critic Andrew Keen notes in his book *Cult of the Amateur*. In 2006, Keen writes, *The New York Times* reported on “a blogger whose laudatory postings [about a retailer] were ‘identical’ to press releases written by a senior account supervisor at ... PR company.” On the other side of the fence, when the fictitious finger-in-the-chili story broke in 2005, bloggers jumped on the supposed incident as an example of fast-food malfeasance.

Keen decries bloggers and citizen journalists (who post firsthand reports and content without any journalistic training) as “decimating of the ranks of our cultural gatekeepers. ... The real consequence of Web 2.0 revolution is less culture, less reliable news and a chaos of useless information.” They’re responsible for “shattering the world into a billion personalized truths,” he charges.

But will amateur hour really eclipse the nightly news and its brothers in print? It’s not likely. While their stars may rise through independent blogs, many name-brand bloggers still aspire to peak in more traditional outlets. Brian Stelter, founder of TVNewser, was recently tapped to write about digital media and television for *The New York Times* online. Wonkette founding editor Ana Marie Cox went on to become Washington editor of Time.com. And Gawker founding editor Elizabeth Spiers contributes to *Fast Company* and *The New York Times*, among other publications.

The May-December feud between blogs and old school publications certainly makes for dramatic headlines, but the two media are more compatible than they’d like to admit. Bloggers save their readers time and money by linking what is of specific interest to them. Manhattan media blog Gawker links to *New York* magazine and *The New York Observer*, Defamer refers to *Variety*, and Apartment Therapy links to the home sections of major papers. Likewise, as online content continues to mushroom, print publications help cut through the clutter by pointing to blogs that best serve their audiences. Let’s face it, as Keen argues in his book, there may be an infinite number of monkeys typing—but with so much to wade through, the general public will still look to the established press to tell us which have strummed out Shakespeare.

A CLOSER LOOK: BLOGGING IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

Each American president has his own version of how the global spread of democracy is supposed to unfurl. Bush's "We'll be greeted as liberators" model of 2003 is proving a difficult sale five years on. Clinton's version (subtler but no less upbeat) promised freedom via "cell phone and cable modem"; he envisioned a democratic groundswell taking place online. Over the wires, freedom of speech could never be stopped, he reasoned. As to China's efforts to do just this, "good luck," he said in 2000. "That's sort of like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall."

China, however, has proved somewhat successful at nailing Jell-O to the wall. The country's 162 million Internet users are monitored by 40,000 "Net police," according to reports. Material deemed questionable and sensitive is, for the most part, quickly identified and removed. The onus to shut down blogs and delete forum posts falls on the Internet providers, and less than vigilant IP managers are asked to step down.

The Chinese government is also helped by multinationals such as Yahoo! and Google that have tailored operations for the world's most populated country. This was highlighted in November, reports the *Financial Times*, by "U.S. congressional hearings at which Yahoo! ... has been strongly criticized for helping Chinese authorities track down local dissidents."

Not surprisingly, none of this has curtailed Chinese appetites for blogging. There are now an estimated 20.8 million bloggers in the People's Republic, and despite the political environment, they have managed to

make some social and political impact. Agence France Presse reports that Chinese bloggers "manage to evade the censors by posting their comments on Web sites and then linking the site to many other blogs and Web pages, allowing them to form a social network."

Earlier this year, headlines around the world carried the story of a woman who refused to sell her property to developers. The images of her forlorn house in the midst of a construction site first appeared on Chinese blogs. Such international attention forced the developers into a compromise.

While predictably behind Western levels, the business of blogging is finding its feet, too. Sina.com, one of the country's largest Internet portals, reported \$1 million in revenues from non-monetized blogs in the second quarter of 2007. And it recently invited 3,000 of its top bloggers to host advertising on a shared-revenue basis, reports *Media*.

In the West, stories that originate on blogs gain credibility when picked up by the mainstream media. In China, the opposite is true—the Chinese turn to blogs for the more convincing unofficial (read: unvetted) version of events. *The Star-Ledger* points to several examples of this: In January, journalist Lan Chengzhang was murdered while investigating an illegal coal mine. Wang Keqin's report on the murder was heavily censored when it went to print, but she posted the full version on her blog. "A few weeks later," says *The Star-Ledger*, "Gao Yaojie, an 80-year-old doctor who

uncovered the atrocious blood bank practices that led to the mass spread of AIDS in Henan province, wrote about her house arrest on her blog."

Stories such as these are certainly the exception rather than the rule, but they have prompted the government to consider stepping up Internet oversight another notch. Proposals currently under consideration would require all Chinese bloggers and visitors to online forums to register using their real name and identity card number. These proposals, if passed, would remove the reassuring cloak of anonymity—or lead to a spate of identity theft.

Amnesty International calls such filters and controls the newest virus on the Internet: "The virus of Internet repression is spreading. The 'Chinese model'—of an Internet that allows economic growth but not free speech or privacy—is growing in popularity, from a handful of countries five years ago to dozens of governments today who block sites and arrest bloggers."

But while controversial topics like the "three T's" (Taiwan, Tibet and Tiananmen Square) are strictly off-limits, most young Chinese online don't challenge the "official" version of these events anyway. It's due to what Professor Zhang Junhua of Zhejiang University calls a "collective memory" created by the Communist party. He told the *Financial Times*, "I would say that, consciously or unconsciously, Chinese bloggers have got used to the 'red line' drawn by the [Communist party]. This is exactly one of the reasons why China remains so stable regardless of immense problems."

INSTANT GRATIFICATION, GRATIS

In the late '90s, charging for Web content seemed like a viable business idea. "Our belief is that the medium will prove itself over time and people will pay for it," said John Williams, the founding publisher of Slate. As it turned out, Slate's paid-content model lasted only a year. "The experiment in paid content is over," wrote Nat Ives and Abbey Klaassen in *Advertising Age*. "No sale."

Free, it seems, is the business model that works best online: YouTube, free. Slate, free. MySpace, free. If you build it, post it or share it, they will come. The business model to support it will come later. And with so many free lunches out there, it's only natural that consumers would balk at paying for the majority of online services or content. That realization came as something of a shock for print publishers, who have been collecting their nickel, dime, quarter and more per copy for over a hundred years. Many a publisher has tried, and many relinquished, the pay-for-pixels model.

Last summer, *The Economist* demolished a 10-year-old pay wall around much of the content on its site. *The New York Times* also gave up the ghost recently when it abandoned TimesSelect, a two-year-old model in which only subscribers could access marquis columnists and other select content. Rupert Murdoch, who sent shivers down the spine of many a print professional when he added *The Wall Street Journal* to his empire, speculated to *Time* magazine about ending the *Journal's* print edition and making its online content free. It's a striking idea, considering that financial news seems to be the only journalism content that consumers are actually willing to pay for. An online-only subscription to the *WSJ* costs \$79, while the *Financial Times* charges \$109 for a standard online subscription and \$299 for a subscription that includes the mobile newsreader service.

While charging for content helps fight the Web's cannibalization of print editions and supplements online ad sales, making that content free creates a bigger audience for advertisers. In the race for revenue, it seems that ad dollars are gaining ground fast. Online ad spending in the United States grew from \$6 billion in 2002 to an estimated \$16.8 billion in 2006 and is likely to top \$35 billion by 2011 even as its growth rate slows, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers. By comparison, ad spending for U.S. consumer magazines grew from nearly \$11 billion in 2002 to an estimated \$13.4 billion in 2006—with a projected 2011 purse of \$16 billion.

As a growth model, advertising is hard to beat. Ad sales reps position print, online and mobile as delivering three tiers of premium audiences. For example, at *The Wall Street Journal*, mobile and online factor into premium "custom-built" ad solutions that could include audio sponsorships of Podcasts, placement on *WSJ* blogs, sponsorships of mobile sites and RSS news feeds that reach "a coveted audience of senior executives, affluent males and opinion leaders."

In an era where consumers are always on the go, sponsoring those feeds can be essential to staying relevant. Executives and college students alike treat their mobile devices as lifelines—repositories of contact information and favorite content, and portals to the world beyond. Not only are they connected

to friends and associates via e-mail and phone, RSS feeds put them in constant touch with developments on Wall Street's trading floors, Milan's fashion houses and Baghdad's hot zones. Having the latest information—be it football scores or celebrity gossip—is social currency. Marketers that invest in RSS sponsorships get a share of that currency.

Technology is expanding to allow for better integration of print with online and/or mobile advertising. In September, for example, *Vogue* bowed its backbreaking fall issue, featuring a record 727 advertising pages. "That 'extra-extra large!' size, as the cover proudly proclaims, is more than 100 pages fatter than last year and seems to provide evidence of a healthy appetite for print advertising in the fashion industry," *The New York Times* wrote. But most of those pages were sold with the added value of an online feature *Vogue* introduced along with the issue: a broadband channel designed to serve as both an entertainment destination and a shopping site. ShopVogue.TV offers links to purchase products advertised in the magazine while running footage of fashion shows and fashion ad campaigns. Each advertiser that buys a national ad page qualifies for inclusion on the site; buying a spread allows an advertiser to post additional content.

Print and mobile may also make profitable bedfellows, if companies like wireless commerce developer Scanbuy have their way. The company is angling to have two-dimensional barcodes, which hold about 10 times more data than the familiar barcodes, placed on magazine ads, billboards and other items. When scanned with a camera phone, the codes would link Internet and WAP-enabled mobile devices to Web sites offering the relevant products and services, all while providing marketers with valuable demographic information. Michael Zimbalist, vice president of research and development operations for The New York Times Company, expects the technology to break through in the U.S. in the next two to three years.

The technology is already in heavy use in Japan, where some consumers use barcodes to find everything from a Big Mac's calorie count to nearby stores selling the newest Kate Spade bags. According to a Sprint survey, 50 percent of Japanese mobile phone owners have used the codes. Sprint and Scanbuy have teamed up to test this "quick-response" advertising technology in the U.S. and will launch a trial in January.

So how do print publications go about keeping up with consumers who now move at a digital pace? No longer is a morning commute reserved for the thoughtful folding into quarters of a morning paper. In fact, with time moving so quickly, with so much that can get done with the click of a button, time has become far too precious to spend turning your thumbs black.

Remember Roy Peter Clark, the Poynter scholar who a few sections back urged his fellow journalists to read the paper? He admits that doing so has been a struggle even for him:

Day by day, week by week, I began to realize that I wasn't reading news, I was breathing it. Absorbing it. ... The first thing I touched in the morning and the last thing I touched at night was the TV remote. ... During the day, I checked my favorite Web sites and blogs, or scanned the cable news networks, or listened to NPR or sports radio. ... Oh, I forgot e-mail on my home and office computers, and now my BlackBerry. ... So where is there room, where is the time, for the St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times, The New York Times, the Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal?

Indeed, that time is hard to find. To accommodate busy readers, publications have responded with drastic changes—some in print, some in pixels. In October, for example, *BusinessWeek* unveiled a redesigned layout that aims to look more Web-like. “We’re seeing a reader who is much busier than ever,” the magazine’s editor-in-chief, Stephen J. Adler, told *The New York Times*. The redesign, by Modernista! in Boston, followed a study of reader preferences that found people wanted a format that was easier to navigate as well as information from a variety of sources—the news aggregator effect.

The magazine now features just two long-format articles a week and, borrowing a theme from the Web, puts “links” within stories that summarize related articles from other publications. From an advertising perspective, the new format provides advertisers with more opportunities to place ads near articles related to the product or service in question. Also the magazine is broken into chunks, with four separate tables of contents—and since readers are drawn to contents pages, the ads next to the start of each section can command a premium.

Other print publications have taken the Web’s mix of content and advertising as a green light for mixing the two on the front pages of their papers. In recent years, most Gannett Company newspapers have added front-page and section-front ads. In 2006, *The Wall Street Journal* did the same.

Online, publishers are offering their “readers” much more than the printed word. Over the past two years, publications’ Web sites have evolved into multimedia experiences, featuring videos, Podcasts and—to satisfy consumers’ Web 2.0 cravings—e-mail links, blogs and feedback strings. For advertisers, this means a chance to embed video ads and more elaborate campaigns online. And for consumers, this means the ability to watch video clips on everything from political strife in Pakistan to profiles of newlyweds, and the chance to read more content from senior reporters and seasoned critics.

More important, this gives readers an active role in the creation and dissemination of news. Where once a reader made note of an interesting article before throwing his paper in the trash bin, a 21st-century reader can rate the article with a Digg, pass it on to friends and family via e-mail or social bookmarking, and comment on the topic via the reporter’s related blog or a commentary stream.

For reporters and editors, this means even more work for today’s smaller staffs. Woe to the columnist or reporter who has a face for print. No longer able to hide behind his keyboard, he’s expected to record video segments for the Web

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE GETS MURKY

site. Add to that several posts to a daily blog, and star reporters, critics and columnists are more than earning their paychecks. *New York Times* technology critic David Pogue, for example, writes a weekly column for both the print and online versions; does a Podcast of the column; writes an “e-mail column” solely for his subscriber list; contributes video critiques of new gadgets; and posts to a *New York Times* blog daily. (The paper also offers readers a chance to engage in discussions on blogs by media critic Virginia Heffernan and book editor Dwight Garner, among others.)

This new state of affairs also means giving up the voice of authority journalists have worked years to achieve and publishers themselves have spent decades building. In a culture where consumers are now skeptical of authority and institutions even as they consume and participate in them, publishers have taken a road that allows them to remain relevant. Observes *BusinessWeek* editor Bruce Nussbaum:

When I was Editorial Page editor, I was “The Voice of Authority.” Now, as a blogger, editor of IN and contributor to the Innovation & Design channel, I am a curator of conversations that I have with smart people “out there” in the world. Actually, sometimes I lead the conversation, and sometimes I follow someone else. It’s about aggregating information and opinion. The very best blog thread is about aggregating a conversation. It’s a new form of journalism, and it’s terribly exciting.

What will this new form of journalism yield? More money to support print and online publications would be a good start. As publications further integrate their paper and Web components, it’s clear there will be more opportunities for advertisers and, consequently, more revenue streams. Let doomsday critics decry the fall of the church-and-state wall between advertising and editorial. The natural tension between the editorial department, which safeguards the public trust, and the business department, which safeguards the bottom line, isn’t going anywhere. In fact, if both sides are doing their jobs, both online and print will thrive. Print circulation will boost traffic to the online counterpart, raising revenue that will in turn support quality content and help build a better brand.

Buckle up, though, because it’s going to be a bumpy ride to media integration. Consumers are not only moving through life faster, they’re moving through media faster. With so much to sort through, they’re learning to process information much more rapidly, not always making the ever-more-subtle distinctions between content, sponsored content and advertising, as well as barely concealed PR maneuvers. It is the learning curve that gets dangerous for both media and commercial brands.

Publications dipping their toes in the blogosphere, for example, must draw a fine line between additional content and unvarnished opinion. While independent bloggers may assume a no-holds-barred tone, reporters who blog must continue adhering to the same standards of impartiality and credibility their publication stands for. Consumers may not yet understand the difference. Last summer, a JWT poll in which respondents cast the presidential candidates as characters from *Gilligan's Island*, was picked up as fodder for The Opinionator. The blog, written by two *New York Times* Op-Ed editors, does not so much publish the editors' opinions as guide readers through the many topics covered on opinion pages across the U.S. The distinction was lost on many readers, however, who bashed the *Times*' "coverage" of the poll as being imbalanced, particularly when it came to the poll's nomination for Gilligan—John Edwards.

In addition to experiments under their own banners, traditional print publications are dabbling in other online brands. These experiments have had mixed results, but they stand as proof of print's willingness to move beyond its own borders. In 2005, The New York Times Company bought About.com, through which it acquired Calorie-Count.com, UCompareHealthCare.com and ConsumerSearch.com within the past year and a half.

On the flip side, marketers must be careful when it comes to draping advertising in editorial clothing. In the Web 2.0 world, consumers demand nothing more than transparency. They want value added, not value subtracted, and nothing is a bigger loss than a waste of time. "Their BS detectors are so high, if it's disingenuous in any way, they won't want anything to do with it," MTV's Joshua Dern, VP of social media strategy and operations, told the JWT Digitivity Deep Dive audience. What counts as value subtracted? Fake bloggery, sock puppet identities in consumer feedback forums and the like. "It has to be by the people, for the people," Dern said.

WHAT IT MEANS

Technology is changing the way people interact with information. It's now absorbed through a variety of channels and processed faster than ever before. Publishers, long used to providing the subjects of water cooler conversation, now find that they must also create the water cooler online, via blogs, forums and real-time conversations with editors and writers.

For a profession accustomed to the one-way street of disseminating information out to readers, this can be a bit disconcerting. Lofty op-ed writers now find themselves weathering public potshots, thanks to feedback commentary online. Reporters who once enjoyed the access only a press pass could deliver now find themselves covering the news beside “citizen journalists” armed with video phones. They may find their authority under siege by the barbarians at the gate, but make no mistake—peace talks are under way online.

From advertisers’ perspective, the Web has shifted perceptions of ad placement and sponsored content in their favor, opening up new ways to reach customers online and in print, sometimes on the front page. Publications are turning their Web sites into a media nexus with print, video, audio, e-mail and blogs; with a creative media buy, marketers can own a space online and off, broadcast and narrow. And now that consumers can be reached on the move, marketers who go mobile can tap into the cultural currency of being up-to-the-minute, thanks to ad buys on RSS feeds and mobile-enhanced Web sites.

Digital media will never match the visceral nature of paper in the hand. Nor should it. Print has its place—as the hands-on brand experience consumers have come to expect, if taken a bit for granted. And positioned correctly, it can drive readers and advertisers online, where growth will be in the near future. So those ink men may be buying fewer barrels in the long term, but don’t look for ink to disappear. Just like that newsprint on your thumbs, print will be around for a while.



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