

Media Today

Analyzing how New Media has affected media outlets in New York and Washington D.C. and throughout the country.



New media makes an impact

“Journalism of all types is not yet a match for the complications of our age,” said Mike Hoyt, executive editor of the Columbia Journalism Review, quoting the first issue of CJR. This quote seems to encompass the state of media today, in spite of the fact that it was written in 1961.

A major theme of this newspaper, of the trip and of the media world itself is the state of flux in which journalists are finding themselves. They are, in fact, not alone. Almost everyone we spoke to, from book publishers to media critics, from public relations firms to advertising agencies, is feeling the impact of changing technolo-

gies and resulting changing ideas of what these outlets will look like. PBS president Paula Kerger spoke on how her company is adjusting to the changes.

“It’s an interesting time for media; every media organization is just trying to figure out its place,” she said.

Which begs the question, how do you find that place? Unfortunately, that place currently seems to be a moving target. While no one seems to know for sure exactly how things are going to work out, some are figuring out, through trial and error, instinct, and whatever other resources are available to them, what will keep them afloat.

First, there is the question of audience. WNET vice president Robert Cluaser described old media as a “lean back” experience. Readers have a newspaper, or a newscast, and they sit and read or watch. They allow the journalist to come to them, bringing whatever information they will, trusting them to be the so called gatekeepers of their news experience. New media, however, he described as a “lean in” experience. Audiences are their own gatekeepers. They seek their news in an environment where they are inundated with information and informants to choose from.

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Technological advances make innovation in news media essential

As technology advances, journalism faces often confusing changes. New media expert Sree Sreenivasen, who styles himself both a technology evangelist and skeptic, suggests that journalists be aware of what is going on and ready to adapt and at the same time not too willing to jump down a “technological rabbit hole.”

“I consider myself an early tester and a late adapter,” Sreenivasen said. Sreenivasen is also a professor and dean of the journalism school at Columbia University.

Sreenivasen suggests that there are two keys to success in the changing media environment. First, specializing in a specific subject area is becoming a much smarter option, as the number of sources of information available increase exponentially. Secondly, the ability to deliver the product produced in a digital format is integral.

Many traditional news outlets

are working to improve that ability, mainly in adapting their news product to be compatible with an online format and mobile devices.

Robert Naylor, director of career development at the Associated Press, said AP is working on producing content that is specially formatted for the iPod, tablets, and other mobile platforms.

These efforts are likely well worth the effort, according to statistics gathered by the Project for Excellence in Journalism. In their news consumption, 90 percent of people in the U.S. use multiple

platforms every day, PEJ director Tom Rosenstiel said.

Along with fitting content to the new devices, news organization are also creating content specifically to utilize the strengths those devices provide.

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Senior human resources administrator Xavier Williams shows Whitworth University students Sarah Gladys and Jessica Valencia the Associated Press newsroom floor. AP has adapted the layout to accommodate new media needs.

Investing in investigative journalism

As profits dropped and expenses were cut in the journalism industry, investigative journalism was often the first thing out of the door. But the art form is neither gone nor forgotten, it simply has a new face. Non-profit investigative journalism is on the rise with the advent of organizations that seek to utilize funds from outside sources to ensure the survival of this branch of journalism.

While the major journalistic values involved remain largely the same within this new model, the implementation is slightly different. ProPublica, a non-profit that has been publishing content since 2008, partners with established news organizations in order to distribute the information they find.

“Our focus is strictly on doing the journalism,” said Mike Webb, ProPublica’s director of communication.

Reporters from ProPublica pursue leads that they have generated or that have been brought to them in search of stories. Other than ProPublica’s website, they do not distribute the stories themselves. Instead, they provide the story free of charge to a news organization, which in return will pay the production costs and credit ProPublica.

The organization’s content operates under a creative commons license, which allows news sources to display the content as long as they reproduce it in full and credit ProPublica.

Unlike for-profit news organizations, ProPublica doesn’t have to worry about selling their publication. This affected the efforts of Webb, who is a lesion between ProPublica and news companies.

“They always made me focus on just getting it to the people who can fix the problem,” Webb said.

This meant that instead of trying to get the most possible readers, Webb worked to make sure that the decision makers in that situation would come into contact with the information their reporters had uncovered.

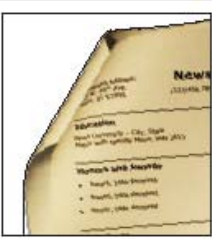
As with any news organization, there is concern over the impact that the people funding the news has on the content.

Herb and Mary Sandler launched one of the larger organizations of this kind, ProPublica, in 2007 under the leadership of Paul Steiger. While the Sandler foundation was originally the major source of funding for the organization, Steiger agreed to run the company only under the condition of the Sandler’s refraining from involvement in the day-to-day operation of the company, and they are currently working to diversify their revenue source.

“We’ll be less beholden to anyone,” Webb said. Winners of the first Pulitzer Prize to be awarded to an entirely Web-Based news organization, ProPublica has helped to pave the way for similar organizations.

“Our mission is to hold people accountable,” Webb said.

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