

Print Journalism: A New Media Leader?

Traditionally, journalism has been split into three main categories: radio, television and print newspapers. With the inception of the Internet, however, each medium has taken new shape. Radio news stations, for example, have started to incorporate elements of podcasting and even video on-demand onto their websites. Television news websites often add even more functions, giving users recent newscasts and full-length videos. However, one of the most evolving forms of journalism lately has been found in print newspaper websites despite their steady decline in print readership. Current studies show that the most visited local website in almost every major market is run by a newspaper (Potter 2007). In many ways, print journalists are paving the way for how online journalism is done. Originally telling stories through text and pictures, newspaper journalists can now use online advancements to give more up-to-date and local coverage than many television and radio news web pages with just as many, if not more, functions as competing the mediums' sites.

Continuing their roles as print publishers of news, most newspaper reporters also convert their stories to an online format. Newspapers usually train journalists to translate these stories instead of using webmasters so they can save money and increase skills in the workplace. While the stories are similar, Web writing is often more casual and categorized by topic; therefore, print journalists often have to create Web packages that add color, sound, animation, and interactivity to target their generally younger Web audience – incorporating elements previously reserved for television and radio. Not only are newspapers adding style unavailable on paper, most newspapers offer news feeds,

updating a user multiple times daily to offer the latest information available – something that would be very costly and nearly impossible in “real life”. In addition, more local newspaper websites tend to have RSS feeds available than the television or radio station websites. Most local broadcast websites rarely utilize these features. For example, most television websites just allow users to download or stream the same exact story that ran for the evening newscast. Television and radio news websites seem to have put new media devices like webcasts, video podcasts or other novel techniques tailored specifically to the Internet audience on the back burner and are beginning to suffer for it.

Besides rewriting their printed stories, most journalists also write blogs online. Blogs supplement their stories by providing readers with news or details not reported in the hard copy due to possible space limitations or editor gatekeeping. Though they may be more opinionated than typical print articles, blogs can provide a reader with a more interesting or complete story. Print news reporters are much more frequent in their writing of blogs and receive more feedback due to their higher traffic than other media sites. Nielson ratings show that the average number of monthly visitors to U.S. newspaper websites rose by nearly a third in the first half of 2006 – arguably due to this interactivity. Blogs allow readers to take an active role in the story, providing new information, public opinion (sometimes showing views not expressed the story) and possible new ideas for investigation. Outsourcing or “crowdsourcing” stories to their readers is becoming extremely popular with print newspapers like *USA Today* to get the most local, timely, and detailed information that most broadcast journalists can’t get (Wired, 2006). Television and radio websites have not been incorporating this nearly as much, most frequently in small towns where newspapers often have a monopoly on local

media. Usually the stories that get the most feedback or cause the most online discussion prompt journalists to follow them and report personalized stories.

Newspaper websites are looking more and more like television websites, creating sites that embrace sound and the moving picture. By incorporating downloadable or streaming video relating to the printed or online stories they run, newspapers can provide a more sensual, vivid story than simple words or a picture. However, these videos are not always coming from the photographers; more and more newspapers are turning their journalists into videographers and reporters. Sometimes, these reporters create full packages and voice-overs online. While these stories are currently more amateur than professional television packages, the more casual online atmosphere lends itself to simpler reports. Besides, most visitors are not looking for video; they come for the news. Sometimes, they can even be more innovative than television broadcasts. For example, the Austin American Statesman links its multimedia to a website called www.austin360.com which features local, documentary-style stories with elements that are inconsistent with traditional television news. According to washingtonpost.com's Travis Fox, "The possibility to replace television is in sight" (Potter 2007). Television and radio news websites may lose their visitors if they don't create the same web-specific coverage of their print counterparts.

Granted, print newspapers can't give the live coverage of a television newscast or the performance of a radio telecast. However, their versatility on the web is enough to keep researchers watching as they continue to provide quality print publications. With their print readership at all time lows, newspapers may have found their niche online.

Local stations generally have a cleaner and more organized Web presence, more stories and more accessible options.

As print journalists seem to be the forerunners of online journalism for the new media market. Newspapers are continuing to transform and show the least resistance to change. Perhaps their constant decline in readership since the inception of the television has given “the powers that be” time to consider new circulation ideas and use this new media to their advantage. While its counterparts may have been on cruise control (or asleep at the wheel), print newspapers have begun to move past the roadblocks and onto new, creative techniques in an often trial-and-error environment.