

September 11

The day of the terrorist attacks summoned extraordinary efforts from journalists — and intense public interests in the urgent, deadly serious reporting. How did the day unfold — and what will be the enduring aftermath?

Jack Fuller

Suddenly, death impinges — the Masque of the Red Death, when the guy with the plague walks in the door. The party stops at that point.

It becomes vitally important to know what happened yesterday, or what happened across the globe yesterday, because it might kill you. And certainly, it's going to shape the way you make your living, and how much you make.

So people are rushing to newspapers. Newspapers tend to be the places in which people have confidence at a time like this. I understand there have been some polls that just showed that, and with no disrespect to any other medium. It's just that in serious times, people want the comfort that newspapers give them.

Jay Harris

A few years ago at the Aspen Institute, Max Frankel (former executive editor of *The New York Times*) made the point that we lived in times where there was not a premium on serious news. But the time would come again, he said, when the American people turn to American news organizations for information. September 11 was a powerful reminder that the American people not only want, but need, what good journalistic organizations do.

Burl Osborne

There was a story watched on TV probably by more people in the world than ever watched a news event. Yet the next day the first thing people wanted to do was to get their newspaper early. And in some cases the same day. Circulation on Wednesday was double what it normally would be on that day. That is quite extraordinary for a business that, I keep reading, is dead. There is a need to have the newspaper give tangible evidence that what I saw, what I thought I saw, was really what I saw. That is

what newspapers do. That is among the reasons we have a future. I'm sorry we had to learn this the way we did.

Mark Whitaker

It was probably no later than 11 o'clock, I got a call from (Washington Post Co. Chairman) Don Graham in Washington. Don is the opposite of a meddlesome owner. He calls to give encouragement and so forth. Very rarely does he interfere in the editorial process at all. He was basically calling to say, "Look, Mark, this is one of the, if not perhaps the, most important story of our time. I do not want you to have to think about economic constraints. If you are thinking about putting out an extra issue, whatever you want to do, just do not hesitate." That was very meaningful. It was just a weight off my shoulders. I did not have to worry about how much money we were spending.

Now, I do not know if anyone in this business is going to have an open wallet and unlimited resources, particularly in a tough economic climate and tough advertising environment, to keep those spigots open forever. Certainly when it really counted, we had that support, and it was great.

Norman Pearlstine

September 11 changed a lot of our assumptions. The attacks on the World Trade Center ended our unconscious belief that it couldn't happen here, that we were somehow immune from such an attack on domestic soil. It will be interesting to see whether the attacks make us sober, more focused on geopolitics, religion, class and other cosmic issues, or whether celebrity journalism and niche publications focused on narrow interest continue to gain ground at the expense of general-interest news publications.

Nancy Maynard

The forces driving the future of the news are distribution first, content second. The third driving force is brand quality. What does it mean to have these franchises? We found out especially after the September 11 attacks that it means an awful lot to be known for integrity. Brand became number one that day, at least for a short time. It's necessary to invest in it when it seems unimportant. Then when it becomes important, the investment pays off.

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Alberto Ibargüen

It's a story in which everybody is involved in a common way — as opposed to the Elián González (story) that divided people, or even the (2000) election, which also divided people. And so the focus really had to be on hunkering down on getting that story out. The next day, we had some 20 pages in *The Miami Herald* that told the story.

Now this is not a formula for long-range business success, but it was important to tell the story. It was important to tell it fully. It was important to tell it graphically. ...

The reason why people are willing to pay so much money to advertise in the newspaper is its credibility, its completeness, its believability. And if you don't tell the full story on a major story like that, then you will lose credibility.

Lou Boccardi

The impact of September 11th enhanced a sense among a lot of people of the role of the media. In this all-news-all-the-time [world of] snippets, [with a] constant flow on the Internet — even in that, there's a place for edited, considered, shaped news that ... tries to help people cope with a really difficult problem.

Karen Jurgensen

We knew there was another plane, the plane [that later] went down in Shanksville, ... headed toward Washington. And our building had *USA TODAY* written on it. And stuck up like a sore thumb very near the Pentagon. Now, I don't mean to presume that we would be a target. But on the other hand, you never know. So we were having news meetings knowing that there was a plane heading toward Washington. ...

Ultimately, what happened was that the county asked people in Rosslyn, which was where the building is, to leave.

It wasn't "absolutely everything shuts down," but it was pretty much "we really want everybody to go home and leave the building." And our publisher said, "But we have a newspaper and a Web site to publish." And the county said, well, you can stay. So then (publisher) Tom Curley and I talked with staffers in each department. We told them that the county had shut down buildings, but they know we are staying.

[We told staffers:] There are F-16s patrolling the sky. But we don't want to ask you to do anything that you don't feel comfortable doing. If you feel that you need to get to your family, you need to go home, you need to not be in this building, we will respect that. We aren't going to take names. We are, however, going to put a paper out tomorrow. And we are, however, going to keep publishing the Web site.

One person left.

Everyone else sat down and put out one heck of a newspaper. ... I'm very proud of that effort.

But most of all, I'm proud of the people who put their fear aside, difficult though that was, and their confusion.

Steve Isenberg

Shame on any organization that does not see this as a moment in which its deepest institutional purposes and obligations must be fully honored, and I don't just mean news organizations. This is a moment of honor as well as corporate citizenship, and if you don't rise to it now, then when the hell will you rise to it?