

The Internet and News

The new world of the Internet has borne an extravaganza of hype, money and sudden shifts. But it has changed the news world in unexpected, still-evolving ways. Where next?

Matt Storin

As we approached the question of the Internet, we did ... not go into our newsroom and find some guy with a plastic pencil protector who was really into technology, who had been working at the newspaper for 20 years.

We went out and found a guy who had just graduated from Stanford Business School. He had never worked for a newspaper. He was an Internet guy, as few of them as there were at that time, who had an interest in newspapers. He had ideas that we never would have thought of.

For example, and I think this was one of the things that Bill Gates liked about our (Web) site, [we] not only put *The Boston Globe* newspaper on the site but made partnerships with the Museum of Fine Arts, with Channel 5, the leading ABC affiliate in the community, and many other community organizations. (We named the site) Boston.com, which wasn't Globe.com, it was Boston.com, a site where people would come for all kinds of information. And that's what made it successful.

Lou Boccardi

It is amusing for us to hear so many people now spellbound by this concept of "we are 24/7 now." Well, thank you, but we have been 24/7 for a century and a half. So we understand that.

Arthur Sulzberger Jr.

It's no longer about how far your trucks can drive, it's no longer about how many factories or printing facilities. It's about the quality of the information and the quality of the journalism. And the Internet has brought us that. That, to me, is very exciting, because that's where it ought to be.



The Net was different and there you really had the Clayton Christensen issue ... of the innovator's dilemma. And we really struggled with it. In fact, I think looking back on the last few years, certainly my last few years as chairman, that's been the single most difficult internal process ... as we tried to decide whether or not our Internet operation should be part of our company.

We've embraced the idea that you needed to pull it out (of normal management channels) to really allow it to blossom. And it is blossoming.

Norman Pearlstine

The Internet will change profoundly the way information is gathered and the ways in which it is disseminated. Beyond that, however, we don't know exactly where the technology is going to take us. Assuming the broadband becomes ubiquitous, it might lead to more use of video and less use of type. I think magazines will still play a useful role for decades to come because readers will still value our ability to synthesize, to make sense of information. The Internet now provides a valuable headline service, it is a very useful way to distribute niche information — it could prove the demise of newsletters fairly soon — and its ability to make the experience an interactive one in some sense democratizes the sources of information. Still, the surfeit of data makes recognized brands more important than ever.

Burl Osborne

Just before the Timothy McVeigh trial, on a Friday afternoon we obtained a jail-house interview, if you will, in which McVeigh not only acknowledged doing this (the Oklahoma City bombing), but was very proud and talked about collateral damage in terms of the people who were killed. We had that story ready to go on [that] Friday afternoon. We believed that his attorney would try to get a court order to exercise prior restraint. And we were not eager to have a courtroom battle that might last for months over whether or not we had the right to publish the story. So we published on the Web site before we published in the newspaper.

Nancy Maynard

When we started calling this the information superhighway, it wasn't a bad analogy. Remember when you were driving along the highway in the '50s or the '60s and then you get dumped off on a Main Street somewhere because that piece of the system hadn't been built yet? That's the way we are now with the development of the Internet.

Jack Fuller

Two basic forces (affecting news organizations) are the rapidly declining cost of computing power and the rapidly declining cost of transmission of information. The "explosion of bandwidth" is a way of describing the same thing. Those phenomena look durable for any reasonably foreseeable future. What it really tells you is that your organization has to be profoundly adaptive. It's going to have to be supple and adaptive. And many of the things that make editorial departments great run counter to that.

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Jay Harris

The Internet is a medium and a medium is not inherently bad or good — the question is the use to which it is put. Two challenges in the early days of the Internet, as it related to journalism: One was the inability of consumers of information on the Internet to distinguish between legitimate news organizations — reliable, trustworthy news organizations — and someone who was just spreading rumors. That led to loss of confidence in that emerging medium.

(Second,) many of the nation's major newspapers and news organizations actually went with stories that had not been fully vetted and placed them on the Internet. And regretted doing so. And had to pull back.

Heretofore, journalism has been a one-way process. We collect information and we share it with you.

Basically, it was not an interactive process. The Internet creates that opportunity ... and a wonderful expectation, if we are up to the challenge. That is, I will come to trust some source as my filter on this enormous flood of information. Whenever I need to know something, that source will be there with an answer. If we were to create that as the next big thing that news organizations of quality offered, it would be wonderful, indeed, and I think it would rejuvenate much of what we do.

Dick Wald

It all starts with Homer ... walking around in sandals, spouting poetry. You can see that in Greenwich Village today. And that was 3,000 to 4,000 years ago. Books are still here, handwriting is still here. Hand-crank presses are still here. Radio is still here. Television is still here. Movies are still here. They're all important. They occupy a smaller piece of the spectrum. What will make that smaller piece of the spectrum a little bit better are the benefits that will be conferred upon it by the ability of individuals working through the Internet. ... They will make a kind of competition for news, for intellectual content that will be enormously important. What happens is, the technology gets invented and some smart person figures out how to put news into it.