

Future of News

Looking at the news business today can be cause for alarm — and pride. What trends cause heartburn and which ones are encouraging? How fast is this handbasket hurtling toward hell? Any chance for a detour?

Ben Bradlee

The spotlight is on newspapers now, and the press generally, in a way that it never was.

Neal Shapiro

We are going to be in an age where we shoot digitally. We can even shoot a story in our hand-held camera, pick up the phone, send it in and it's there. We are going to be able to shape a story faster and quicker, and maybe it will take fewer people to shape that ... story.

The pressure is going to be on the gatekeepers, on the producers and the senior producers and the editors who look at all this stuff and say, "When we get it fast, let's not lose context."

Lou Boccardi

Generations to come are going to be challenged even more than we have been with technology, with business concerns. So if you want to rise toward the top of a media company, you're going to have a pretty good business understanding acquired either on the job or in school, whether with an MBA or in some other ways.

[You'll need] expertise in some facet of what we do. Technology is vital. So much of what we do is technology-driven now. Less than 10 years ago, it took 30 minutes for AP to distribute a color photograph. ... Today that's happening in 10 or 15 seconds. Words moved, when I joined AP in 1967, at 66 words a minute. Now 9,600 words is the standard — and it's beyond that.

So there is a technological dimension to what we do. The Internet is embedded in the business of news and information. And I think long-term it will be a [strong] medium. The economic model still isn't there, but it's going to develop.

Tom Johnson

I cannot think of a profession that is still as filled with as much interest, with different people, with incredibly new topics, with new technology, with such a changing world — particularly now as so many nations of the world that were previously closed, having only government-controlled media, are opening up.

I have my list of great concerns. I have my list of reasons for optimism. I am deeply troubled by the absence of support for quality journalism that I think existed in the past — and the temptation for us to follow whatever will give us higher ratings or circulation.

Sandy Rowe

Newspapers, particularly, have suffered in the last two decades from being pulled along by television too much. And what newspapers need to do is accentuate our differences in order to exist in this very crowded, raucous media world.

Nancy Maynard

The last newspaper or program created by young people is *USA TODAY*. The founder was smart enough to allow a bunch of 30-year-olds to develop their vision of the news. Today there is very little industry planning for the future that involves young people. I don't know anyone in a pivotal place who's under 40 years old. Most policy meetings feature all "gray hairs" like us.

Tim McGuire

The news cycle is our artificial creation. We're the only ones who believe in a 24-hour newspaper cycle. It is our little fairy tale.

The news cycle is now immediate. It is a half hour or less. The world is moving and breaking around us. That says a lot about how we have to position our newspaper, why we do have to be sophisticated, thoughtful and full of explanation and full of relevance of how this matters to you. Recently, Dan Rather pointed out that newspapers were the place to look for stem-cell research information. He was right. That is a story that we excel at far more than any other media can.

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The online world and the television world are certainly changing the way that we look at news cycles. What we need to do isn't consider them the enemy, but consider them our helpmates. We have to use whatever media we can to take advantage of news-gathering resources. We can't be hung up on the fact that we are printing a newspaper that gets delivered at 6 in the morning. We have to look at new ways of delivering our information.

I think that's going to be a huge challenge for newsrooms in the next two to five years. That's not a long-distance thought. That's an immediate thought.

Mark Whitaker

The fact that we have maintained a bureau system around the world (and) that we have almost a dozen correspondents with experience at one time or another in their careers covering the Middle East may not have seemed all that [important]. It was something that was not necessarily being reflected in the pages of the magazine week after week. If we did not have that in place, we would not have been able to do what we have done the last couple of months. So I think part of being farsighted in this business is understanding that history, and the news, does not go away. You have to be ready for it when it happens.

Jack Fuller

What's going on now is going to continue to go on for a long time. The capacity to deliver messages to people is increasing exponentially. There's no end in sight. That being the case, we're in an era of radical fragmentation [with growing] bandwidth. Under those circumstances, the economic basis of all media will be under pressure. It can't be otherwise. There will be winners and there will be losers, but everybody will be under pressure.

One of the reasons to do multimedia is that it's a way of re-aggregating audiences. You're in multiple-distribution systems, selling multiple packages, with multiple (advertising) methodologies of reaching people. From the journalistic side, you're taking your work and you're availing people of it in a number of ways, any one of which may be ... their preferred way of getting information. It's one way of combating fragmentation.

Karen Jurgensen

If you factor in the question about the young folks and whether they are going to read newspapers or get their news from the Internet, I don't know the answer to that. Most of the research I've seen leans more toward the Internet than to newspapers. So it is conceivable that someday *USA TODAY*, the newspaper, will be the niche product and *USA TODAY*, the Web site, will be the dominant vehicle. Now, I'm not necessarily eager for that to happen, but I respect the fact that it could well happen — and that's OK. The main thing is that *USA TODAY*, the institution, the *USA TODAY* approach to the news, survives and flourishes and meets readers' needs in whatever format they want it.

Dick Wald

Everybody gets caught up in these monomaniacal pursuits of one story. There are now three major 24-hour cable news channels plus all-news radio plus 1,500-and-something daily papers plus three major networks plus the Internet. When all of that stuff concentrates on one story, the noise level of the one story creates a kind of reverberation. Everybody gets very annoyed with the news. No individual piece is playing the trumpet louder than anybody can listen. But all those trumpets together make one hell of a racket. The cure is not within anyone's power.