

**STOP THE PRESSES: CAN NEWSPAPERS SURVIVE IN THE  
DIGITAL AGE?**

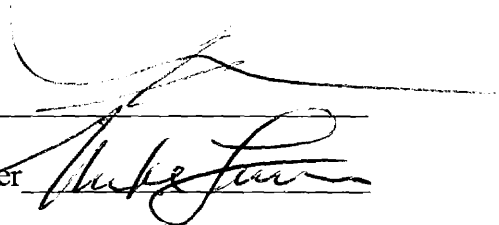
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First Reader

Second Reader

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature is written over a horizontal line and is quite stylized and cursive. The second signature is also written over a horizontal line and is more legible, appearing to read 'Mike Jones'.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Special thanks to my beautiful wife, Yvonne, my biggest booster and thankfully toughest critic. Thanks to my children Jane, Mike and Errin, Kim and Dave and Kevin for asking what I'm going to be when I finally grow up. Thanks to my grandkids Addison, Ella, Colin, Katie, Jordan and Britton for helping me stop and pay attention to them by just throwing a smile. Thanks to the faculty of the University of Michigan-Flint for the stimulating, thoughtful and fun experience for this student returning to college after thirty-six years. Finally, thanks to my dog Mac for patiently sitting by my side as I type away on the computer, wondering when I am going to finally stop and take him for a walk.

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## **INTRODUCTION: TRYING TO SURVIVE IN THE EYE OF A TECHNOLOGICAL STORM**

The first amendment to the U.S. Constitution is a powerful piece, giving Americans freedom of speech – and freedom of the press. Interpreting those freedoms and fighting for them in Washington and local and national courts has been a skirmish since the beginning of our country. There are those who just don't want you to know things you are entitled to know. Those who see too many abuses by the media have agreed with journalist A.J. Liebling, who said, "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one" (Aug. 25, 2004 Slate.com). But a new challenge – some would say more dangerous than any facing journalism in the past – is threatening our cherished freedom of press. It is called technology.

Newspapers are desperately trying to adapt to the explosion of the Internet and the high-tech devices that make communication more widespread and portable. In the balance is our right to freedom of the press. Some would argue with fewer gatekeepers we will have a flood of unfiltered information. Let us decide what is best and what we should know. Just look at 2010's big story: the release by the group WikiLeaks of classified and secret U.S. State Department documents that not only embarrassed our country and others, but proved to be enlightening on how the powerful do business. Internet activist Julian Assange, who runs the international non-profit organization, is in hot water on several fronts. But as Al Tompkins points out in his Poynter Institute piece,

“What 2011 holds for investigative reporting”: “Imagine a Julian Assange in every state and major city in the U.S.,” some investigative reporters see the controversial leaks as a turning point that will lead to “an increase in nonprofit investigative journalism organizations that partner with legacy newsrooms to produce meaningful work” (Jan. 3, 2011 Poynter.org).

But where is the money for all this digging coming from? Who will be providing this information? More than 15,000 journalists lost their jobs in 2009 alone as newspapers began to shrink (Feb. 7, 2010 Yahoo.com). The tried-and-true business model of print advertising providing financial support for news gathering is not only broken, it has been shattered. Nearly 90 percent of revenues for newspapers come from that print advertising. But younger people are skipping print and heading to the Internet. A 2010 Harris Poll revealed that 55 percent of people think that traditional media as we now know it will disappear in ten years. Although 67 percent still get their news from newspapers, 65 percent of those 18 to 35 get their news online only. (Advertising is not following to the Internet, at least not yet) (Feb.1, 2010 BizReport.com). Circulation is dropping as readers grow older. Because of the fewer numbers advertisers are paying less. It is the perfect storm and publishers have not yet figured out how to keep from being drowned by the technological tsunami. What does that mean for the reader? Many fear a reduction of journalism’s role as a watchdog of government. You can cover only so much with less. At a 2010 panel discussion at Flint’s Mott Community College entitled “How the *Flint Journal* and other local media are reinventing itself,” those in the audience, mostly older, said they missed their “old” *Journal* as it cuts back publication and coverage. They want to see and touch their newspaper, not scroll down an Internet

page. But those on the panel told them that newspapers have to reinvent themselves with website versions, all the while trying to keep the traditional older reader happy with sometimes fewer days of printing as in the case of the *Journal* or the reduction of home delivery as in the case of *The Detroit News* and *Free Press*. The *Ann Arbor News* has given up print altogether and gone strictly Internet. Analysts point to the next inevitable step: charging for web content. Papers in Minneapolis and Dallas are now charging for “premium” content, especially in sports. The *Wall Street Journal* has always charged for online news and the *New York Times* launched a partial pay site in March 2011. But are readers willing to pay for content that they are now getting for free? That is a huge question, one in which many publishers are afraid to tread on. For good reason. Among more than 2,000 online adults surveyed in a January 2010 Harris Poll, 77 percent said they wouldn't pay anything to read a newspaper's stories on the web. And among those willing to pay, 19 percent would give up between \$1 and \$10 a month; only 5 percent would spend more than \$10 each month (Jan. 13, 2010 cnet.com).

To make matters worse for local newspapers, huge media giants like *AOL*, *Yahoo*, and even *ESPN* are starting up hyperlocal sites to compete against newspapers – for free. *AOL*'s Patch.com is already circling the Flint market with meeting and high school sports coverage in Hartland and hiring away local talent. It is all part of another trend – citizen journalism in which untrained journalists write stories, blog and offer eyewitness pictures and video. But how reliable is the content? Who is holding these people to the same stringent ethics and codes journalists now abide by? Then you have burgeoning tools of technology: iPads, iPhones and three-dimensional web television.

Everything is happening so fast, many cannot predict what devices we will be using in five years. People can pick and chose their news, skipping some.

If newspapers give up print or become extinct, what will happen to the valuable and rich resource they provide as a reference work? As newspapers cut back on print editions, we will have to scour sometimes confusing websites for information. Will search engines be enough? And will we lose the context of papers as a historical and archeological tool we get now with ads from specific times wrapped around content? After all, pop-up blockers take care of those nasty ads online now.

Journalism has had a proud tradition with icons such as Joseph Pulitzer, Katharine Graham, the *New York Times*' Sulzberger family -- even yellow journalist William Randolph Hearst. These were bold people who helped forge American culture, thinking and policy through their editorial and news pages. Now we have new players lumped together under a new tagline called New Media: *Politico*, *Huffington Post*, the *Drudge Report*, *Slate*, *Gawker* and the *Daily Beast* (which in late 2010 announced that it will be joining with struggling mainstream journalistic legend *Newsweek*). Pundits are still scratching their heads trying to figure out where we are headed as the gigabytes of dust settle. Events are unfolding quickly. This thesis includes interviews conducted with newspaper analysts and executives, educators and journalism students. Ironically, nearly all the research is culled from the Internet since print cannot keep pace with the changes literally occurring daily. In five, ten years -- perhaps even shorter -- those searching the shelves of the Francis Willson Thompson Library at the University of Michigan - Flint will look at this thesis written in the eye of the storm and see a snapshot in time and

hopefully a true prognosis of the fate of newspapers. Can they not only survive but thrive in the digital age? Or will they wither as a new mobile delivery age overtakes them?

The press will always be free. The Constitution guarantees that. But all bets are off guaranteeing that the mainstream media we have known, cherished and even cursed will be around in the next (fill in the blank) years. This thesis aims to make the picture a little clearer for we the people – those seeking knowledge through an unfettered press, no matter what it looks like.



## CHAPTER ONE: WHAT WENT WRONG

The web version of *The Detroit News* was not really taken seriously back in 1995. After all, the Internet was only a decade old and laptops were still in their infancy. But then the stunning news event of 1995 happened on a hot July night: the first day of a five-year newspaper strike that devastated Detroit and the state of Michigan. On that day when newspapers could not get out as strikers clogged the entrances to the printing plant, the step-child of the newspaper, *detnews.com*, became a force, growing more popular each day. People sympathizing with strikers did not have to go to the convenience store or worry about newspapers being delivered to their door. They had the privacy of the Internet in their home to get their news. And it was free. The seeds were sown for lifestyle changes that would accelerate as quickly as computers got faster. But why didn't newspaper executives realize the power of the web? Despite circulation declines they were still making big money with print advertising. The web was not a blip on the advertising revenue bottom line; it was a red-ink proposition back in the 1990s.

But those same executives were ignoring – or at least putting off – a bigger problem. Fewer people were reading newspapers. Newspapers across the country reported falling circulation through the Audit Bureau of Circulations. In 2009 the rate was downright alarming. The *New York Times* reported in October 2010:

The Audit Bureau showed that average weekday circulation at 635 newspapers declined 5 percent compared with the same six months last year. The decline last year was more than twice that, 10.6 percent, as

newspapers struggled through the recession and more readers abandoned print copies for the Internet. Sunday circulation at 553 newspapers fell at a slightly slower pace, 4.5 percent, the figures showed. Last year, it declined 7.5 percent (Oct. 25, 2010) New York Times.com).

The fallout? Once mighty newspapers like the *Rocky Mountain News* and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* were forced to close. The stark reality in Detroit: *The Detroit News*' circulation in the 1980s was 750,000 and now is hovering around 140,000. In fact *Time* magazine in 2009 named the paper one of the 10 most endangered newspapers in America, saying:

*The Detroit News* is one of two daily papers in the big U.S. city badly hit by the economic downturn. It is unlikely that it can merge with the larger *Detroit Free Press*, which is owned by Gannett. It is hard to see what would be in it for Gannett. And with the fortunes of Detroit getting worse each day, cutting back the number of days the paper is delivered would not save enough money to keep the paper open" (March 9, 2009 Time.com).

The paper is still alive, but at a cost. *The News* and the *Detroit Free Press* cut home delivery days to two weekdays and Sunday (just the *Free Press*, with a page of editorial content from *The News*). Newsprint was saved; buyouts and layoffs slashed the bottom line. But the papers are still struggling with newsstand circulation because of the sour economy and are offering more days of home delivery but at a premium cost from independent carriers. Not surprisingly, the baby boomers unwilling to give up print are the ones being sucked in. Those younger weaned on the web are not biting. Newspaper reporters and editors trained to ferret out corruption and cover murders and disasters now are learning about something else affecting their lives: a broken business model. Despite their efforts average daily circulation of all U.S. newspapers has been in decline since 1987. Television and mail circulars have grabbed some of the advertising dollar. As the *Washington Post* pointed out in 2009:

Online, newspapers are still a success -- but only in readership, not in profit. Ads on newspaper Internet sites sell for pennies on the dollar compared with ads in their ink-on-paper cousins. In September, for instance, Nielsen reported that the *New York Times* was the Internet's most popular newspaper site, with an average of 21.5 million unique visitors per month, up 7 percent compared with a year earlier. Yet last week, the Times Co. reported a 27 percent drop in ad revenue for the quarter. At the *Washington Post*, which has lost \$143 million through the first six months of 2009, the number of monthly unique online users was down 29 percent, to 9.2 million, compared with September of last year, just before the presidential election (Oct. 27, 2009 WashingtonPost.com).

Papers like *The News* and *Free Press* have also lost some luster as “state newspapers” by stopping delivering papers to far-flung areas where circulation is sparse. They have also hiked prices, losing some disgruntled subscribers or forced them onto the free websites. The picture continues to get bleaker, says Alan D. Mutter, a former journalist who writes a blog aptly named “Reflections of a Newsosaur.” He told the *Washington Post*: “Newspapers have ceased to be a mass medium by any stretch of the imagination.” According to his analysis, which includes the circulation of all 1,400 daily U.S. newspapers, only 13 percent of Americans, or about 39 million, now buy a daily newspaper, down from 31 percent in 1940 (Oct. 27, 2009 WashingtonPost.com).

Even as website ads rise, newspapers get stung. When you buy an ad with the print version of *The News*, its staff handles it and the paper gets all the money. The Internet has middlemen like *Google* AdSense. Advertisers use *Google*, which then makes the buy with a newspaper. But *Google* makes sure that the link goes to the advertiser’s site or to its own site so papers only get part of the revenue. So in the end the newspaper owns its own website but loses control of the advertising stream (Feb. 7, 2010 Yahoo.com). Another problem is all those circulars you get in the Sunday paper. Newspapers cannot charge as much for them as they can in the actual pages of the print

product. Some big company staples such as Kroger have skipped newspapers altogether and gone to mail, direct advertising in-store, tube delivery or television and radio spots. Online shopping has taken a big chunk from papers. *Amazon* has become such a force that they are giving bookstore “brick and mortar” giants such as Borders and Barnes and Noble trouble. The two have been in discussion off and on talking merger to weather the onslaught of *Amazon*, which has even branched into electronics and computers.

Finally, the dagger in newspapers’ hearts is the loss of classified advertising. Help wanted, auto and real estate advertising has been the foundation of newspaper ad revenue. *Google*, *Craigslist* and *Careerbuilder.com* (which is ironically owned by newspaper and TV giant Gannett) are pillaging advertising. In fact, *Craigslist* has been given credit as directly hastening the death of newspapers. In his piece for *New York* magazine entitled: “The Rise of *Craigslist* and How It’s Killing Your Newspaper,” Philip Weiss called founder Craig Newmark the “Exploder of Journalism”:

In the past few months, I and countless others in the mainstream media have awakened to the fact that something we thought was benign and even modestly beneficial, if we happened to have a room to rent or something to sell was in fact a wild beast, loose in the orchards. *Craigslist.org* is changing everything. A simple and free online classified-ad service started by the gnomish Craig Newmark in San Francisco eleven years ago, *Craigslist* is (a) where young urban people conduct much of the traffic of their lives, including renting apartments, finding lost pets, and getting laid in the middle of the day, and is (b) thereby destroying classified revenues for big-city newspapers, which are already in crisis, and so it has become (c) the symbol of the transformation of the information industry. Rocked in a Bay Area cradle of left-wing values, *Craigslist* has built a huge national community by word of mouth. The site is free and without advertising (with the exception of help-wanted ads in three markets), and it gets more than 3 billion page views per month (10 million actual users a month), ranking it seventh on the Net, not so far behind *Google* and *eBay* (Jan. 8, 2008 *New York* magazine.com).

Weiss goes on to write some chilling words for journalists everywhere: “Craig is not content to merely eat away at the business model of newspapers by chewing up their classifieds, from back to front. He’s also begun issuing vague pronouncements about citizen journalism, the people — *his* people — taking the news into their own hands. ‘I’m working with some folks on technologies that promise to help people find the most trusted versions of the more important stories,’ Craig said on his blog, further spooking the old-media types.”

Loss of circulation, advertising and revenue: Three blows to the gut for newspapers. But is it three strikes and they are out? To make matters worse, new media upstarts are grabbing away web traffic and giant *AOL* is muscling in and stealing away print reporting stars. Ben Burns, director of the journalism program at Wayne State University and a longtime editor and publisher, said the good days are over for newspapers. “It will never see the profit margins that they were racking up during the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s – not going to happen because there were newspapers that were making 40 percent pre-tax profits.” Forty percent? Yes, he says, at the paper he was editor of: the *Lansing State Journal*. Now the storm is intensifying but newspapers are determined to fight for their survival. The question is: are they too late?

## CHAPTER TWO: FIGHTING BACK

Change is good, proclaims every self-help guru. Or you can say change is inevitable. For newspapers the mantra is change or you die. Newspaper executives will be the first to tell you that they arrived late for the online party, but they are trying to make up for it in a big way. Gannett renamed their newsrooms “information centers.” Online editors now tell managing editors that a story should go online before putting it in print. Unique visitors, hits, clicks, page views, returning visitors and time-on-site have replaced print circulation numbers (well, not totally – yet). Publishers talk about layers of multi-platforms to reach the most customers.

A group called The Newspaper Project launched in 2009 has some fighting words of encouragement:

OK, newspaper folks. It’s time to pick ourselves off the ground and fight back. There is plenty of time left on the clock, and our fans — more than 100 million loyal readers — are pulling for us to win. So here’s how we rally. First and foremost, we have to ignore those self-proclaimed pundits and cynics who believe that newspapers are dead. They are dead wrong. Sure, newspaper companies face serious challenges. But we also have serious opportunities to re-engineer ourselves as quality content creators for local print and online audiences that advertisers still desire. As we are seeing during this punishing recession, overhauling the economics of newspapering while experimenting with new business models is a daunting task, but it’s starting to happen in cities and towns all over the country, especially where executives and editors possess the requisite vision, confidence, creativity and entrepreneurial drive to succeed. The truth is that right now every media company is hurting and under tremendous pressure to innovate and grow, including *Google*, *Yahoo*,

Microsoft, the broadcast networks, cable giants and radio conglomerates. No one -- not even *MySpace* (Jan. 27, 2009 Newspaper Project.org).

The words come from Donna Barrett and Randy Siegel, founders of the small group of newspaper executives who want to exchange ideas about the future of papers. Just how do you fight back? First, make your newsroom a 24/7 operation. Newspapers that wrote with second-day or analytical leads are going back to the breaking hard news format of the pre-TV days of yesteryear. Papers try to beat each other with timestamps instead of those blaring print headlines when stories such as the firing of University of Michigan coach Rich Rodriguez break. The Detroit papers during the Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick scandal had staffs working online exclusively to get the latest news on the sites while other reporters were digging for deeper scandals. Unfortunately, newspapers did not have the resources or staffing to do all of it. So newsrooms were reorganized and some beats or areas of coverage eliminated or ratcheted back. Most newsrooms used to have one cop reporter during the 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. shift when the papers were already printed and sent to homes and newsstands. Now many have an overnight online team putting all the content from the print product on the site or updating news and sports stories all morning long. Online knows no deadline and the hungry beast must be constantly fed. Staffing has now shifted at *The Detroit News* and many other papers so each department from sports to features has an online editor constantly updating the web. Artists create mind-goggling colorful graphics to keep people on the site longer (*The News* even has a site of all the dead musicians buried in city cemeteries at detnews.com). Photographers – and reporters – must learn videography and editing. Columnists do podcasts and weekly online chats with readers. The buzz word is interactive – unlike their print brethren web users want to feel part of the action.

Newspapers are obliging with reader polls, allowing commentary at the bottom of stories and politics and sports forums. The longer you keep someone online the more you can charge an advertiser.

It was not easy getting grizzled print journalists on board to filing for online first, recalls former *News* managing editor Sue Burzynski Bullard, now a journalism professor: “Well before I became managing editor, the newspaper was online but initially it was seen as simply a way to post stories that had already appeared in print. The online staff also was considered separate from the print staff. They even reported directly to the editor and publisher and not to the managing editor. During my tenure as managing editor, the editor and publisher decided to try to merge operations and the online staff as well as print staff reported to me. I think that was a smart move and a step in the right direction. It forced me – and the rest of the staff – to start thinking about ourselves as one news operation instead of two. The question was to become: what made the most sense for news delivery of a particular story. It was a cultural shift and the biggest challenge is that not everyone – at least initially – bought in. We did a couple of things to get buy in. For instance, we formed a committee to talk about blogging. It included people from both print and online staffs. They developed guidelines for blogging. We also tried to put evangelists for online from the print staffs in every department. We did things like move a reporter to an earlier shift because we knew that’s when people came to our site for breaking news. We became much less concerned about publishing in print first. But this was a slow process that I suspect to this day is still evolving.”

Nancy Hanus was the online editor at *The News* who had to bring everyone into the upcoming 21<sup>st</sup> Century: “My biggest challenges at *The News* were in trying to



convince a newsroom of old-school journalists -- and in particular the leadership -- that it was smart to keep moving forward and innovating. That online was more than just a regurgitation of print. That online-first was something that was necessary for our future. In addition, the single biggest buzz saw was the agency (the Detroit Media Partnership that ran the business operations of *The News* and *Detroit Free Press*). It was nearly impossible to develop a business and marketing partnership with an agency that was divided and had to serve two masters -- especially when the real master was *The Free Press* and not *The News*. There were so many initiatives that just couldn't happen because of the restrictions set on us by having to be 'equal' in approach between the two papers and sites.”

All the changes meant that gathering news and putting it on the site all day is not enough. Today, editors monitor which stories are getting the hits and which aren't and constantly rearrange content on the home page. Sometimes changes are made just to make readers who constantly check in think that something is new. They expect it. Just as people are becoming addicted to the connectivity of texting, those same people want to be constantly fed with a dose of fresh news. But what do you do for those boomers and beyond who like the look of a “real” newspaper. *The News* and *Free Press* decided to give them just that online. The e-edition is nothing more than replica versions (or pdfs) of the actual page, complete with ad placement. You can turn to each page (with sound included of a rustling page) and get a bigger version of the story when you click on it. The papers found that older readers handled the transition better with the e-edition and the idea is being copied across the country. According to *Crain's Detroit Business* the *Free Press* has the second-most electronic edition subscribers in the nation after the *Wall*

*Street Journal* (449,139) and ahead of the *New York Times* (71,697). The *Freep's* 99,613 e-edition circulation grew 17.4 percent from 84,851 six months ago. *The News* grew 21 percent from 41,841 to today's 50,573. That's the fifth-largest e-edition circulation nationally (Oct. 25, 2010 Crainsdetroit.com).

Newspapers have also tried a trend called convergence – partnering with another media, chiefly television news outlets. Both sides receive exposure from putting a picture of the TV weather person next to the weather map or putting the paper's business columnist on the air when talking about auto news. They also share expenses for election polling. But a common goal – web domination – is beginning to break up these marriages. ClickonDetroit.com, run by WDIV-TV, is right up there with the daily papers in the Detroit market after years of savvy marketing from the beginning. Why should it help *The News* or *Free Press* with content that would give the newspapers more web traffic? The papers are beginning to feel the same way. Here are the rankings for December 2010:

#### **METRO DETROIT PUBLIC SERVICE/MEDIA WEBSITE RANKING**

Based on Alexa.com rankings

RANK	NAME	WEB ADDRESS	US Rank on 11/30/2010	Percent gain
1	Detroit Free Press	<a href="http://www.Freep.com">www.Freep.com</a>	921	-4.66%
2	Detroit News	<a href="http://www.DetroitNews.com">www.DetroitNews.com</a>	1,057	6.54%
3	WDIV TV 4 (NBC)	<a href="http://www.ClickOnDetroit.com">www.ClickOnDetroit.com</a>	4,340	-5.01%
4	WJBK TV 2 (Fox)	<a href="http://www.MyFoxDetroit.com">www.MyFoxDetroit.com</a>	9,230	-288.47%
5	WXYZ TV 7 (ABC)	<a href="http://www.WXYZ.com">www.WXYZ.com</a>	10,045	8.33%

Newspapers have also taken an if-you-can't-beat-them-join-them mentality. Search engine giant *Yahoo* and several newspapers have joined to begin the Newspaper Consortium in 2007. Through the partnership, ad salespeople at newspapers pitch local

businesses on advertising packages that let them reach visitors to the newspapers' websites and *Yahoo* users in the area, reports the *New York Times*. The newspapers also use *Yahoo* technology that lets them charge more for ads on their sites. And the program has also helped *Yahoo*, which has been struggling with internal turmoil and slowing growth. The consortium has grown to nearly 800 dailies, up from 176 in 2006. The other new element of the partnership allows newspapers to sell ads on *Yahoo* pages, with the two sides sharing the resulting revenue, the *Times* adds. That lets newspapers promise advertisers that their messages will reach a larger portion of the local audience, helping the newspapers compete more effectively with television (Feb. 27, 2009 New York Times.com).

Another idea being floated to help advertising is one by newspaper consultant Jim Chisholm. It is called digital shopping. Chisholm gave a dire report to the trade group the National Newspaper Association, predicting nominal ad growth for the industry – 3.4 percent less than inflation through 2014. Poynter Institute's Rick Edmonds explains Chisholm's solution: "A digital news hub," combining traditional and nontraditional content that would be the equivalent of a flagship store that draws people to a bricks-and-mortar mall. The key would be getting them to stay on newspaper websites much longer than most do now. Shoppers would be lured by discounts and links to local stores and national retail sites. The newspaper mall sites eventually would get into direct transactions, taking a small cut of the proceeds. Edmonds adds:

For all this to work, Chisholm concedes, the typical newspaper website would need a higher level of functional technology (for mobile, for instance). The idea has more potential if the industry can unite on common platforms or sales initiatives. However, newspapers often have a hard time working together in business ventures, even as they try to stave off their new digital competitors (Aug. 6, 2010 Poynter.org).

And those digital competitors are growing by leaps and bounds. To add to the piling on, new ones are being formed almost every day. As newspapers fight to survive the current squall, new media upstarts are producing a new line of storms hoping to take away more thunder from the mainstream media.

## CHAPTER THREE: MEET THE NEWSPAPER ENEMY

The mid-year election of 2010 was getting uglier by the minute as the Tea Party-energized Republican Party was trying to stop the President Barack Obama Express. Popular late-night *Daily Show* host Jon Stewart was going to skewer conservative talk show host Glenn Beck's rally in Washington with his own "Rally to Restore Sanity." Then came the dramatic offer by a woman whose website was gaining huge traction nationally. She pledged to provide bus service from New York to anyone who wanted to attend the rally. Her name? Arianna Huffington (Sept. 29, 2010 Mediate.com).

The once conservative commentator switched to the liberal side in the late 1990s and even ran as an independent for governor of California. In 2005 she co-founded the left-leaning *Huffington Post* and has a formidable list of contributors from Al Franken to Michael Moore to Hillary Clinton. Her site has it all from politics to celebrity banter. And it is all in real time which makes it the 37<sup>th</sup> top U.S. website and 154<sup>th</sup> in the world. According to estimates from Nielsen NetRatings and comScore, the *Huffington Post* is more popular than all but eight newspaper sites, rising from sixteenth place in December, says the *New Yorker* (March 31, 2008 New York.com). Not bad for a Greek-American who is the former wife of Republican congressman Michael Huffington. In fact she has been named by Forbes as the 12<sup>th</sup> most influential woman in its first ever list in 2009.

Philip Meyer, in his 2004 book *The Vanishing Newspaper* predicts that the final copy of the final newspaper will be in 2043. Huffington and other sites could hasten the death. Even *The Simpsons* television cartoon characters are piling on. In one episode, according to the *New Yorker*, a cartoon version of Dan Rather introduced a debate panel featuring a print journalist. That caused Bart's nemesis Nelson to shout, "Haw haw! Your medium is dying" (March 31, 2008).

But critics say sites like Huffington's are making their claim to fame by blogging what newspapers are reporting and that there is not much original investigation going on. The *Huffington Post* made it big by blasting *New York Times*' Judith Miller's reporting on the Iraq War, mainly those elusive weapons of mass destruction. Bashing the mainstream media sells, but you still have to have the mainstream media to bounce off of. Huffington says her site (which she sold to *AOL* in 2011 for \$315 million) is valuable in opening the floodgates to truth and thinks newspapers and websites will both thrive. "As advertising dollars continue to move online – as they slowly but certainly are – *HuffPost* will be adding more and more reporting and the *Times* and *Post* model will continue with the kinds of reporting they do, but they'll do more of it originally online," she told the *New Yorker* (March 31, 2008).

Huffington actually started her site to counter one by conservative Matt Drudge. His *Drudge Report* is called a news aggregation site, which means he picks the stories he likes (read that slanted to his ideology) from other media and links to them. Newspapers that get linked from Drudge see their stories go off the charts with hits and even offer them to him in case he misses them. This former 7-Eleven counter clerk and Time-Life book telemarketer who wears his trademark fedora now gets kudos from *Time*:

So Matt Drudge was right. Not about Bill Clinton's love child or John Kerry's affair, but he was right about this: "We are all newsmen now." Drudge hates the word blogger, yet his exclusive about the former President and intern Monica Lewinsky set out an animated-GIF siren for an army of armchair pundits to follow (April 30, 2006 Time.com).

Drudge has radio and TV gigs and 10 million people come to his site each day.

Yes, that is right: 10 million! Time points to Drudge's claim: "Drudge has goaded traditional media into playing catch-up on sordid stories they once safely ignored."

But Drudge gets his share of attacks:

There aren't many in this hallowed room who consider you a journalist," said then National Press Club president Doug Harbrecht while Drudge was appearing back in 1998 in Washington (June 8, 1998 Online Journalism Review.org).

Newspapers, which don't seem to mind story links back to them, are starting to get tough with copyright infringement. MediaNews, which owns *The Detroit News* and *Denver Post*, is suing Drudge for using a *Denver Post* photo without permission. This could be the start of a very nasty war between papers and pure websites.

How about some of the other players? Here is a roundup:

**Politico:** This is a political junkie's dream. The political journalism organization based in Arlington, Virginia has broadened from a newspaper format to the Internet, radio and TV. As newspapers cut their staffs in Washington more people are going online to the *Politico* site to get coverage of the U.S. Congress, lobbying, media and the presidency. Two *Washington Post* staffers left the paper to start it up on 2007. When election time comes it is the website to go to. A 2009 profile in *Vanity Fair* revealed its web traffic was around 6.7 million unique visitors per month, but swells to 11 million during election years (August 2009 Vanity Fair.com).

**Gawker:** This New York-based celebrity tinged website has had its ups and down over the years. Its staple is gossip and commentary about people in the news business and celebs and is owned by Nick Denton. It is the parent of *Deadspin*, a sports centric site that broke the 2010 Brett Favre scandal in which the quarterback was accused of sending a picture of his genitals to a woman, so you know we are not in *Politico* territory now. “The more skeezy stuff they post, the less respectable the site becomes and the less people consider it a place for useful stuff,” *Portfolio* business magazine writer Felix Salmon told the *New York Times*. “I don’t get the impression it’s a media insider must-read the way it used to be” (Jan. 13, 2008 New York Times.com). But don’t count it out. It still has about 8 million people coming to it daily. And *Gawker* made unwanted big news at the end of 2010 when a hacking group calling itself Gnosis stole a boatload of *Gawker*’s customers’ private data (Dec. 14, 2010 DailyTech.com).

**Slate:** It calls itself “the online magazine of news, politics, and culture that combines humor and insight in thoughtful analyses of current events and political news” (Slate.com). Interestingly, the site is owned by the Washington Post Company. Started in 1996, the homepage is an assault of in-your-face writings from “The World’s Most Dangerous Ideas” to the “Slatest” – the take on the latest news of the day. It is going after younger readers and has that edge and slant they want – honest, irreverent, not afraid of trying to please all generations.

**ESPN:** The first thing newspapers discovered when they put up online sites is that 1) online readers are mainly men, and 2) the biggest drivers of online traffic are sports and business. Just take a look at the top 10 read stories on *The Detroit News* site (detnews.com) on Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2011 at 3 p.m. This is during the height of the



Detroit Auto Show press previews and in wake of the horrific shootings in Arizona of a congresswoman in which six people were killed and 13 wounded:

1. Les Miles, candidate for Michigan job, stays at LSU.
2. Dave Brandon's OK if he gets hire right.
3. Reports: Tigers sign pitcher Brad Penny to one-year deal.
4. Miles, Brandon mum on meeting.
5. Sen. Bob Corker on auto bailouts: "I was right."
6. Barden fights wife's claim, seeks divorce.
7. DPS plan would close 100 schools.
8. No coach, no staff, less recruit interest.
9. Southeastern Michigan under snow advisory.
10. MSU's Green delivers blunt honesty about team.

Later that same day, around 7:50 p.m. it even gets better on the *Free Press* site

(Freep.com) when Michigan does get its new football coach:

1. Brady Hoke named Michigan football coach.
2. Michael Rosenberg: Hoke not popular choice, but he might be right choice.
3. Michael Rosenberg: Dave Brandon probably did not want Les Miles.
4. Les Miles approves of Hoke, Brandon.
5. Brady Hoke's back story.
6. Ex-Lion pleads guilty to touching girl.
7. Family to get \$1.8 million in dad's jailing, teen's false sex-assault interrogation.
8. Can next coach save Michigan's 2011 class?
9. Brad Penny joins Tigers for \$3 million.
10. Brandon satisfied he got right coach in Hoke.

Six out of ten are sports stories from *The News*. A whopping nine out of ten is from the *Freep*. You don't have to tell *ESPN*, the mega-sports cable channel owned by ABC that.

Take a look at the ratings for websites. Sure, you have *Google*, *Facebook*, *Yahoo*, *YouTube* and *Amazon* at the top five. And according to Alexa web information ratings (Jan. 10, 2011 Alexa.com), you do not even get to a newspaper site until the *New York Times* at No 27. But up at No. 17 is *ESPN*, filled with stats, videos, podcasts, breaking news, investigative reports, analysis and features. That is because it is raiding newspapers for the top sports reporters and columnists in the country. *ESPN* has cleverly provided

online “gamecasts” with graphics in which you see the ball fly in the air and players rounding the bases. It is perfect for the guy at work who can’t listen or watch the game in his cubicle or the student teachers think is using his or her laptop to type up lecture notes.

*ESPN* is not just happy being a top national site. It knows that local fans are fanatic about their local teams and are launching local websites in Boston, Chicago, Dallas, New York and Los Angeles. “We’re extremely bullish on this,” *ESPN* President George Bodenheimer told *Sports Business Journal* (Sept. 14, 2009). The *Journal* reports that the *ESPN* is basically doing it to “exploit the gap in locally driven sports coverage created by the historic and ongoing economic woes of the newspaper industry and the resulting reduction of content.” *ESPNChicago.com* started in 2009 and racked up more than an average of 500,000 unique visitors a month. It is already beating out the long-established *Chicago Tribune* (424,000) and *Chicago Sun-Times* (256,000). “They’re obviously a very big and powerful brand, and if they’re making this investment, then there must be something there,” said Jim Bankoff, chairman and chief executive of *SB Nation*, a network of more than 200 local and team-specific blogs. Newspapers are reorganizing their sports staffs to make sure online editors sit next to their print brethren to get stories up quickly and have a greater say in what works for the website. Another big player is *Yahoo Sports*, which claims 50 million visitors. The *New York Times* reports that it is taking on *Sports Illustrated* with its own daily magazine called *ThePostGame.com* which will publish lengthy stories – and of course the usual rants sports fans love (Jan. 12, 2011 *New York Times.com*). One phenomenon happening in sports reporting is the breaking of news by the athletes themselves on *Twitter*.

ThePostGame.com will use them prominently. Said David Katz, chief executive of *SportsFanLive*, a social networking site that will partner with *Yahoo Sports*:

We all know that the print world is challenged and that the form, structure and delivery of magazines in the print form are quickly becoming anachronistic. But the purpose they were meant to serve — the long stories and the context that they gave in the sports landscape — is still very much needed. It's our job to re-architect the sports magazine for the Internet generation" (Jan. 12, 2011 New York Times.com).

Good news for sports reporters who have seen their longer stories chopped because editors thought web users had short attention spans. Bad news again for traditional newspaper sports sections trying to keep up.

***Groupon***: *Groupon*? As in Coupon. Look at the top sites in the country and right up there with *Google*, *Facebook* and *Yahoo* is this site started by young music-major named Andrew Mason, The site's claim to fame is its deal-of-the-day (\$80 massage for \$30!) and it has shocked the advertising community with a whopping 15 million e-mail subscribers worldwide – and it is adding a million subscribers per week. It does \$1 million a day in business. You can find Mason, 30, on the cover of *Forbes* or on the *Today* show. Rick Edmonds, Poynter Institute newspaper business expert says:

That volume won't wipe out the newspaper industry. But \$1 million a day is significant compared to industry ad revenues, which I calculate to be about \$70 million a day (\$90 million if you include weeklies as well as dailies). Keep in mind that *Groupon* has plenty of room for growth, and it has spawned several hundred imitators, which are drawing brisk business as well (Aug. 25, 2010 Poynter.org).

Once again the newspaper industry is forced to play catch-up. One chain, McClatchy is partnering with *Groupon*. Other papers are trying to imitate it. But it gets worse, Edmonds warns: "*Groupon* announced (in 2010) an experiment in six large cities allowing customers to specify the kind of offer they prefer. I get golf and restaurant

offers; you get the pedicures and yoga classes. And *Groupon* further multiplies sales.”

But it gets even worse. *Groupon* is hiring writers and going after news sites. According to the *Atlantic*:

Business Insider recently listed *Groupon* as one of this year's most innovative alternative storytellers alongside *USA Today*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, and other traditional news outlets.” *Groupon* isn't a news website,” they explained. But as Thrillest CEO Ben Lerer said, “The most well-read publication now might be *Groupon*.” Forty percent of *Groupon's* writers have prior journalism experience, 70 percent were creative writers and 20 percent wrote marketing or business copy. As of this writing, there are 59 writers, 16 editors, 15 image designers, 24 fact-checkers, 11 copy editors and four editorial recruiters. They've hired 40 writers in the last six months (Dec. 20, 2010 TheAtlantic.com).

*Groupon* is the fastest growing company in the history of the Internet with an expected \$500 million in revenue in 2010. Atlantic writer Elizabeth Weingarten ends her piece called “Forget Journalism School and Enroll in *Groupon* Academy” by writing: “The bottom line? It's time for creative writing and journalism majors to rejoice: Your degree may not mean a lifetime of ramen noodles and coupon-cutting. Unless, of course, they're *Groupons*.”

More and more websites are springing up daily, taking away print readers and even causing once mighty online sites to trickle down the rankings. It is all about niche. Readers can go to a site that zeroes in on their interests in an instant. No more wading through national news pages in the paper before getting to the news about your town. Just hit the search engine and get to your story right away. But is that all bad for newspapers? Can the technology that is burying print newspapers help resurrect online versions? Welcome to the world of iPad and iPhone.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE BRAVE NEW TECHNOLOGICAL WORLD

Steve Jobs and his merry men and women of Apple have spent the last century and the new one blowing us all out of the water. Head for any upscale mall and the Apple Store will be packed with both young and old consumers drooling over the latest gadgets. The iPod and the iTunes online store are making CDs as obsolete as eight tracks and cassettes. The record industry is reeling from falling sales and is forced to jump on the download bandwagon. Now we have the iPhone and iPad to play with. Remember the famous line in 1967's *The Graduate* when Mr. McGuire was giving young Benjamin some career advice?

**Mr. McGuire:** I want to say just one word to you. One word.

**Benjamin:** Yes, sir.

**Mr. McGuire:** Are you listening?

**Benjamin:** Yes, I am.

**Mr. McGuire:** Plastics.

Today, Mr. McGuire would still say one word: Apps.

Apple brags that it has more than 300,000 apps or application software for its iPhone and working on getting there for the iPad. And yes, they are working so you can press a button to get an app for just about everything from cooking, to money-tracking, weight-watching, and yes, even reading your favorite newspaper. *USA Today* claims to have more than 1 million people downloading its free newspaper app with iPad. They do

not say how much overlap there is with current print readers. Apple is rumored to be launching a newspaper subscription plan sometime in 2011. Tablet advocate Roger Fidler of the Reynolds Journalism Institute predicts the deal would provide customer information to publishers, with Apple retaining 30 percent of subscription revenues. (Nov. 22, 2010 Poynter.org) But some are not waiting. The *Wall Street Journal*, *People* magazine and the *Financial Times* are moving ahead on their own. So is the *Columbus Dispatch*. It integrates directly into the paper's existing subscription database so it has control. The app is free to print subscribers. Those who don't subscribe can access the iPad app for \$99 a year, \$10.99 a month or \$2.54 a week. The paper also plans to offer single-day access to the app edition, at the print cover price, in the near future, according to Damon Kiesow writing for the Poynter Institute (Nov. 22, 2010 Poynter.org).

So are iPads the savior of journalism? David Carr, business columnist and culture reporter for the *New York Times* thinks so. And he points out that up to 80 rivals are ready to take on Apple, showing their wares at the 2011 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. So the outlook is even brighter for journalism. Apple has sold more than 7 million iPads at more than \$400 a pop. He says they will not go the way of the CB radio and that they are fun, here to stay and is renewing the romance of reading. Speaking on NPR's *Here and Now*, Carr says newspaper readers like the tablet or slate because it is easier to read long form works "with the swipe of a finger" instead of using a laptop in which you have to "click, scan, link and keep moving" (Jan. 3, 2011 NPR.org). Carr says we "use our hands and eyes" to read and the tablet fulfills a link to paper books and papers. The plusses of the tablet? "It encourages people to read, which is good for papers," and he adds that tablet readers are becoming used to clicking to get apps, either

free or at a nominal cost. That paves the way for newspapers to drop their print subscriber base for a new online one that people are becoming accustomed to. We are learning to buy “by pressing our finger” on an app. It is easy and fast and he says “much sexier.” Carr does have a big worry. When he is out of town he leaves “four newspapers at his doorstep.” With the tablet on the road he can “zoom to access stories, land serendipitously on a story and hand it across to his children.” That means “the need for print could go down” over the years. Another worry – when he gave his 76-year-old dad an iPad and put on several apps, his father said all the sites look alike. We may indeed be losing the identity that the layout of print newspapers and magazines now give us. Carr’s favorite app? Something called *Instapaper* in which you bookmark stories you may want to read later. Another that does the same thing is called *Flipboard*.

Ben Burns, director of journalism at Wayne State and longtime newspaper veteran, is not so sure about tablets helping papers: “I don’t know. I think charging for what you’re producing is what’s going to wind up in the long run saving newspapers. How you get to that point is the question that no one has an exact answer to. Tablets might be one way to get to that point. I was reading a piece the other day that a lot of magazines are angry because Apple won’t let them sell subscriptions on the iPad. They can buy individual magazines for a buck or two or whatever the price is, but they can’t sell a subscription. I can see that’s going to be a problem, figuring out who gets the money. I’m sure Apple wants some money.”

As a point of reference Carr’s *New York Times* announced in January 2011 that its app has been downloaded 1.5 million times, reports Beet.TV (Jan. 13, 2011 Beet.TV.com). The *Times*’ daily print circulation is 950,000 daily and 1.3 million on

Sunday. The iPad app is free but with ads and the Kindle app is subscription based but ad free. The *Times* still gets 85 percent of its revenue from the print product. The number of downloads represents a major move to digital consumption as a "deep reading" experience, circulation chief Ray Pearce told *Beet.TV* reporter Andy Plesser. Carr also pointed out the much-anticipated 2011 startup of Rupert Murdoch's new iPad newspaper *The Daily*, which is supposed to include 3-D capabilities. Analyst Ken Doctor says it will either be the greatest thing since *USA Today* came out or it will look like "a 2001 idea dressed in 2011 clothes" (Jan. 20, 2011 newsonomics.com). In March 2011 during the free sign-up (*The Daily* will cost about \$40 a year), officials said they had "hundreds of thousands" of app downloads but were coy about revealing paid subscriptions. The first reviews? Critics loved its graphic quality but worried about journalistic weakness.

The projected sales for the iPad are staggering. The site *eMarketer* calls for another 50 million tablets to be sold in the U.S. alone in the next two years, atop the 7 million plus already sold. The rivals could sell another 20 million over that same period. (Jan. 11, 2011 eMarketer.com) But the *Times* and others are finding that most consumers do not see the iPad as a "mobile" device like an iPhone or smart phone. Most are using them at home since they are, after all, a bit bulky. So just where does the iPhone fit into the newspaper equation? We learned that sports geeks want their scores and game updates instantly and sites like *ESPN* are obliging. The iPhone of course has a much smaller screen than the iPad, but it is a big mobility winner. Papers offer a sparser format than for the iPad, but you can also get the full-blown print product, too.

PressDisplay.com has a selection of 500 newspapers from 70 countries in 37 languages for smart phone users. The newspapers will display on your phone just as they appear in



the print version. You get a free month, and then subscriptions could go up to a whopping \$199 a month. For \$9.99 you get 31 papers a month (July 25, 2007 Gadgetell.com).

Another interesting rivalry is brewing between search engine giant *Google* and Apple. Both want to create iNewsstands to lure newspaper and other media websites to use their portal for app sales. Again, newspaper publishers would share a percentage of the subscriptions with either Apple or *Google* – which have more consumer clout to woo customers than through their own websites. *Google* is bragging that its digital newsstand is said to ensure a "consistent experience" for smart phone and tablet consumers besides making it easy for publishers to collect their payments, according to the *Wall Street Journal* (Jan. 3, 2011 iphonehacks.com).

Those at *ESPN* tell a cautionary tale for print people seeing iPhones and iPads as the savior of newspapers. “Whenever a new platform comes up, people want to take the old platform and transport it to the new platform. We did it when the Internet first came out (and) it didn’t work,” John Skipper, *ESPN* executive vice president for content told *MarketWatch*’s Jon Friedman (Nov. 10, 2010 MarketWatch.com). Skipper warned that if editors try the same strategy, “it won’t work on the iPad either. If you’re starting from a paper product and simply transporting it to a new device, I don’t understand what the meaningfulness is.” There is a line of demarcation between older readers who like the look of a traditional newspaper on a screen and younger readers who never looked at print papers much in the first place. *ESPN* never had the problem of trying to reinvent itself, being only a television medium from the start (although it does have *ESPN* magazine, which looks more like a website than a magazine like *Sports Illustrated*). Skipper added that consumers will not take to inferior products – they are just getting too

tech savvy. For instance, newspapers initially jumped on the video bandwagon with embarrassing amateurish results. Bigger papers have since wised up, hiring professional videographers and editors, even winning television's prestigious Emmys. *ESPN* has the advantage of putting its television documentaries and regular shows on its website, constantly knocking it out of the park, so to speak, content-wise. And all in high definition.

While some argue about the future of newspapers, others wonder where this new media is headed. Nancy Hanus, former *Detroit News* online editor and Michigan State University new media instructor who is now regional editor for *AOL*'s community online "newspaper" *Patch*, wonders, too: "Who knows? What's so exciting about new media is how it is changing constantly. And frankly, that's something newspapers just don't get, for the most part. To be part of this exciting new media age, every company needs to be reinventing itself and revising its goals and business plan at least every six months to a year. Newspapers just can't and won't do that in a wholesale way. They are just too invested in what they have always done. As for news -- I think news is now consumed and delivered by a much wider audience, and that we all benefit by that. Instead of a few folks deciding what 'news' is and delivering it down from the mountain, news is decided by the consumer. Consumers can go to numerous sources and can pass on what they think is important. They can jump into the discussion and help bring about change. If newspapers and other old media companies learned to truly understand that concept and not just think of social media and reader interaction as a 'must-have' they might have a chance. But they pay lip service to social media and citizen journalism. And that will be their demise. The world of news and information has changed; if they do not also change

how they process and work within the world to synthesize and bring about discussion -- rather than insisting on leading it -- they will die.”

Scary words. So you got a new iPad or iPhone as a gift in 3G, 4G or whatever G comes next. You buy a few cool apps, but now you have to make the choice of getting, and even paying for, news content. Are you willing to pay for something that you can get for free on that old-fashioned website? Publishers still wonder what your answer will be.

## CHAPTER FIVE: WHO WILL PAY TO PLAY ON AN iPad?

Reporters and editors cringe every time they hear this sentence from friends: “I used to get the paper but I cancelled it since I can get it for free on the Internet.” Then they add, “And I can block those pop-up ads.” Now they know how TV executives feel as DVRs have made it even easier to race by those bothersome commercials that just so happen to pay the bills. Critics say newspaper publishers deserve the sorry state they are now in since they gave away the store – news content at no charge. Now those same critics are clucking at those same publishers who are trying to put the genie back in the bottle. The new dirty little word in the publishing industry? Paywalls. Few, except the big boys like the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* have had the guts to charge or look at charging for content. Would people pay money to read the *Flint Journal* online? At a 2010 panel discussion on the future of newspapers at Mott Community College, most of the crowd said no. They were angry enough that the paper had cut back days of circulation (although as fortunes have improved the paper did add back a day). Panel moderator Marcus Paroske, assistant professor of communication at the University of Michigan - Flint, even asked the question if newspapers should get a bailout like the auto industry or at least get subsidies. Again, a resounding no both from the crowd and the panelists. How can newspapers be a watchdog of government when they are feeding from the public trough?

When the journalism icon *Rocky Mountain News* shocked the newspaper world and folded in 2009 a group of laid-off reporters tried to start a subscription based website. Surely the people of Denver who said they loved the paper would support it. It quickly folded. A former *San Antonio Express-News* journalist and a past editor of the city's alternative weekly newspaper announced in January 2011 they are launching a news website focusing on local politics, business and the arts. The cost is \$5.99 a month or \$60 a year. "I think there is room for more coverage, and I believe competition is good for everybody," co-founder Elaine Wolff told MySanAntonio.com (Jan 12, 2011). *Express-News* Editor Robert Rivard offered a cautious welcome. "There's plenty of room for a little competition in this market, and we welcome their arrival," he said. "They will definitely add to the mix. The question is whether they can be viable as a business. It's hard to make a buck in digital news."

The *Wall Street Journal* has been charging for web content all along and has no problem because business people see the content as necessary to do, well, business (also they are probably expensing it or taking it as a deduction on their taxes). The mighty *New York Times* took the paywall plunge in March 2011 and everyone will be watching. The paper is trying a "metered" model, charging the most frequent users of its site \$15 for a four-week subscription. Here is how the paper explains it in a front-page story:

Beginning March 28, visitors to NYTimes.com will be able to read 20 articles a month without paying, a limit that company executives said was intended to draw in subscription revenue from the most loyal readers while not driving away the casual visitors who make up the vast majority of the site's traffic.

Once readers click on their 21st article, they will have the option of buying one of three digital news packages — \$15 every four weeks for access to the Web site and a mobile phone app (or \$195 for a full year), \$20 for Web access and an iPad app (\$260 a year) or \$35 for an all-access plan

(\$455 a year). All subscribers who take home delivery of the paper will have free and unlimited access across all Times digital platforms except, for now, e-readers like the Amazon Kindle and the Barnes & Noble Nook. Subscribers to The International Herald Tribune, which is The Times's global edition, will also have free digital access (March 17, 2011).

Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation took a different approach in Britain, Carr says. It put up a solid paywall in front of the *Sunday Times* and the *Times of London* last year.

The results were dismal -- an 86 percent decline in traffic. Carr sees his paper's leaders learning from that:

In the instance of the *New York Times*, executives are hoping that the site's most loyal users will be willing to pay for convenience, ease and access — a number of tiers of service are reportedly being contemplated — while the company continues to reap the benefits and visibility of large numbers of drive-by, nonpaying users. At the same time, the iPad and other tablets, which move print out of the nomenclature of “subscriptions” and into “applications,” could be something of a do-over. That option, however, comes with a threat: many people have found newspaper websites, tethered as they are to a mouse and computer screen, to be a poor substitute for the printed product. But a tablet offers a scannable, leaned-back format for newspapers, one that can be passed back and forth at the breakfast table just like its dead tree ancestors (Jan. 2, 2011).

No surprise, Carr says paid print subscriptions will continue to fall as tablet sales soar. Simon Dumenco, a media columnist for *Advertising Age*, thinks the paywall will be a success. Although he likens newspapers to ambulance chasers who don't know that they should be the one in the ambulance, Dumenco says quite bluntly: “I'm a frequent visitor to NYTimes.com. I *will* pay. (The *paper* paper costs roughly \$700 a year; I will gladly pay, say, half that.) I would be, quite simply, an asshole -- and, existentially speaking, as a writer, a suicidal schmuck -- if I'm not willing to pay for the goddamn *New York Times*” (Jan. 10, 2011 Adage.com).

Publishers in a funk are now drooling over what media analyst Ken Doctor writing for the Nieman Journalism Lab calls “The Year of the Tablet” in 2011. Sales

could reach 70 million in the U.S. in 2011 and 2012 -- 50 million of them iPads. And more good news: “the Reynolds Journalism Institute’s study shows longer news session times, more-than-snippets-reading, and a renewal of lean-back, pleasurable longer-form reading, publishers have been edging into an age of news reading renewal,” Doctor says (Jan. 15, 2011 neimanlab.org). As Carr pointed out, as more of us are conditioned to buy apps, it will be easier to construct paywalls. Maybe. The *Wall Street Journal* is luring rookie readers with a new pitch. Pay one price -- \$2.69 a week for the first 52 weeks -- and you can get the *Journal* by paper, tablet, online and smart phone. Don’t like that? How about the “Print *Journal*” for \$2.29 per week and the “Online *Journal*” for \$1.99 per week. The idea, says Doctor:

Why mess around with less than a dollar a week, when you can just say “yes” and read it whenever, wherever you want. The big play here: getting readers conditioned to paying for digital access. The big side benefit: Fewer people may terminate their print subscriptions (in the short term) because they are just paying once for access across all product types. While digital subscription revenue is the big key here to reestablishing two revenue streams for news publishers, one-off sales will become increasingly lucrative. “Single-copy” becomes less about buying a single day’s paper and more about buying a selection of content from that brand (and increasingly aggregated, multi-brand news products), special sports and features products tailored to individual interests (Jan. 15, 2011).

A 2011 Pew Internet study gives more hope. It says that 65 percent of users have paid for accessing or downloading content. Of course what content is key here, and newspaper and magazine sites are beat out by music, software and cell phone apps and video game downloads. But it ranks ahead of ring tone and movie downloads. And gratefully it is way ahead of “adult entertainment.” Pew says the average user spends only \$10 a month, but some people spend hundreds. The secret is to grab the affluent online and mobile user (Jan. 4, 2011 cmswire.com).

Another sign of hope for paywalls comes from an experiment called *Journalism Online*, in which small and medium-size newspaper work together to charge for some content. The initial results published in the *New York Times* in January 2011 after a seven-month trial run are encouraging for publishers: on average advertising revenue and overall traffic did not decline significantly despite predictions otherwise (Jan. 17, 2011 *New York Times.com*). The key here is that the papers did not put up a total paywall, readers could still get some free content. This is the so-called “metered” plan the *Times* is looking at. *Journalism Online* said monthly unique visits to the sites included in its study fell zero to seven percent, while page views fell zero to 20 percent. No publishers reported a decline in advertising revenue. “If you set this meter conservatively, which we urge people to do, it’s a nonevent for 85, 90, 95 percent of the people who come to your website,” Steven Brill, the man behind *Journalism Online*, told the *Times* (Jan. 17, 2011). Readers could get a range of five to 20 free stories a month and are charged fees from \$3.95 to \$10.95 month. Proponents say the findings show that people will pay for news sites they really rely on and go to every day. They are not sure how it will work for bigger papers. Tim Ruder, chief revenue officer of Perfect Market, a news media consultant, told the *Times*: “How well that success will translate to larger sites depends on many things, including the quality, nature and exclusivity of content.”

Ben Burns of Wayne State says “some sort of pay system has to happen. You’re not going to find enough foundations supporting quality journalism to allow for charitable operations to supply all the news. It’s not going to happen. They will go to some good national ones. *Politico* looks pretty good. There will be some good



partnerships. But, sooner or later you've got to charge for the product that you're delivering."

Again, tablets are seen as a boost in disseminating that content. But this euphoria about tablets can come crashing down, critics warn. Americans cannot multi-task that much and critics fear the print product will eventually be the one to go. Projections are that one in five Americans will have a tablet by 2014. What if readers trade up? Doctor asks. "Or what if they trade *over*, moving from one reading experience, print in morning, smart phone on the go, desktop at work, tablet in the evening?"

Walter Middlebrook, assistant managing editor at *The Detroit News*, has been slugging in the news trenches for more than two decades. He is senior management at the paper and privy to what executives are thinking about the future. He has his thoughts on paywalls in a January 2011 interview for this thesis:

"I think the cat has gotten too far out of the bag for 'paywalls.' That's not to say they won't happen or that they are inexistent. I think there is a chance of survival for them in niche publications/news gathering operations. *The Wall Street Journal* and *The American Banker* are perfect examples of publications that I believe would exist with a paywall. But that's because they each have very specific audiences. Niche is the word here.

"My former employer, *Newsday*, grew out of the fact that no New York City newspapers were really covering Long Island, N.Y. *Newsday* has redefined itself as a local news operation, selling only and primarily on Long Island. It has tried to resurrect its paywall. It's an experiment that could be successful because of its geographic niche.

“I suspect a publication like *The Washington Post*, could try a paywall on its federal governmental coverage, but its success could be suspect with all the other newsletters and newspapers that offer similar coverage with no paywall involved. And we could repeat that scenario on any news niche, from business to sports to news including crime and punishment. But if you look at the magazine industry, you'll see that the audience will go where this news is free or cheaper, or is told in a better or more presentable fashion.

“The bottom line here is that all news organizations would have to agree to go to paywalls if this ever has any chance of growing. The nature of the competition in this business makes it highly unlikely. (The minute the Detroit papers decided to drop daily delivery, the suburban papers started bragging about 7-day delivery. The minute Ann Arbor chose to go online only; how many of the other area papers went in touting their publications? The same would go for the operation that chooses to go to a “paywall”).”

Sue Burzynski Bullard, former *News* managing editor who now teaches journalism at the University of Nebraska, has her take on it: “Obviously companies are going to try paywalls. I’m frankly doubtful they will work at least for most publications. They may work in niches – i.e. small community papers that are the only source of local, local news. Pay to read the entire report. Or big name papers like the *Times* that could charge for premium content that I want to read like Maureen Dowd. But I don’t think they’ll work for everything.”

In Jan. 2011 Dean Singleton, who was boss of *The News* and the rest of MediaNews – the nation’s second largest media company -- stepped down as CEO. He gives this candid remark about paywalls to the *Denver Westword Blog*:

We're experimenting with paywalls, but there's no certainty paywalls are going to work. The best reason to have a paywall is that it sends a message to consumers that all information is not free. And I think having sent the message for fifteen years that it is, we need to send a different message -- that all information isn't free. Although you can't have a total paywall, because we're generating a lot of traffic, and a lot of revenue, for the content we have (Jan. 19, 2011).

Mary Beth Christie, head of product management of Britain's *Financial Times* website FT.com, says news organizations should not be afraid to charge for content. She hates the word paywall, and says it was an ugly word made up by reporters. It sounds like some obstacle that you cannot overcome, she told a group at a 2011 journalism seminar (Jan. 2, 2011 News 3.0 Media). If you buy milk from the grocer or buy a book online you are not facing a paywall, you are simply paying for it, she argues. So why not just say you are paying for news content just like everything else? She boasted that FT.com charges and is making money.

Former *Detroit News* online editor Nancy Hanus is now the regional editor for the *Patch.com* online news site (a future chapter will be devoted to *Patch*). She does not see paywalls as the total answer for publishers: "I think people will continue to pay for very premium service. But I don't ever see paywalls coming into play in a big way. I think Patch is just one of zillions of outlets for news and information, and that all of those ways to get information cannot be put behind a wall. It is just too big, and there's too much, and the sources of information are too many."

Some newspapers savvy about the power of sports content are putting some of it behind paywalls. The *Dallas Morning News* knows that Cowboys' fans are nuts about their team. The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* knows that people will pay extra to get every tidbit about the Minnesota Vikings. So you can go to their websites, but if you want more

than the initial free content then you will have to pay for it. *ESPN* tried that successfully with its “inside information” gambit. You want the inside scoop, pony up the cash. Business magazine sites like *Crain’s Detroit Business* are also trying it with premium content. Doing that in competitive markets like Detroit in which you have several dailies and heavy sports talk radio action makes it tougher to try to charge. And many are wondering when *ESPN* will enter the Detroit market with a local website.

Media giant Gannett started testing paywalls with three of its newspapers in 2010, but is keeping tightlipped about results so far. It seems as if everyone is waiting for the other guy to take the big plunge first to test the waters. No one wants to drown, but as executives drag their feet their employees are being subjected to a form of waterboarding with layoffs and furloughs. For them there seems no end to the storm.

## CHAPTER SIX: DESPERATE LIVES CAUGHT IN THE STORM

Go to the renegade *Gannett Blog* website and you will find angst, plenty of angst. While the company remains mum on what fate may be in store for reporters, copy editors, photographers and printers, its workers are feverishly searching for information, even rumors, through the forums. Memos leak out, predictions are made, anger toward bosses is spewed and contempt and praise is posted for the blog's creator Jim Hopkins. This is like one giant water cooler. Hopkins, who took a buyout a few years back, is a former editor and reporter at *USA Today*. He gets donations to keep the site alive and has enough people visiting it to actually warrant some advertising. Corporate does not talk about the site but Hopkins says it is monitoring it. What readers find is mostly gloom. Hopkins has kept tallies of layoffs through crowd-sourcing, even breaking down the numbers by Gannett's 80 community newspapers. The news industry has lost an estimated 40,000 workers in the last decade, a staggering number (April 18, 2010 First Amendment Center.org). Despite talk of paywalls and tablets the immediate future is not looking any brighter. Look at the trends:

- Newspapers have not only frozen pay but have instituted furloughs, forcing a week off without pay, which erodes the base pay. Gannett announced in December 2010 that most employees in its community newspaper division will again have to take a week off in the first quarter of 2011. There are no guarantees it will not ask again later in the year.

- Employees at *The Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press* have agreed to a 6.5 percent pay cut in 2011. The papers under a joint operating agreement wanted a 12 percent slashing, but settled for the middle ground. Workers also will have to pay more for health benefits and have a higher deductible.
- Newspapers facing higher newsprint and gasoline costs are cutting back on days of delivery or printing altogether. This means layoffs. What readers are finding are thinner newspapers for the same or increased prices. And newspaper carriers who work as independent contractors are taking a hit in the wallet.
- Newspapers are beginning to cluster work at key sites in the nation, thus eliminating workers at individual papers. The *Port Huron Times Herald* copy editors also edit copy for the *Battle Creek Enquirer*. Those papers have eliminated publishers, classified representatives and human resources personnel, who are all centralized at the sister paper *Lansing State Journal*. This is also happening with Booth Newspapers. Editing is done at the *Saginaw News* for the *Flint Journal*. Nationally, it is getting even worse. Gannett shocked the design world by creating five “hubs” or as it calls it more politely “design studios” in key geographical cities, eliminating local control of design. These were still in the hiring phase in early 2011, but basically designers will either have to move or lose their job. They still may lose their jobs anyway since the purpose of the hub system is to cut down on staff. Some critics in the design community fear that this will lead to a cookie-cutter design and that individual papers will lose their identity, much like radio stations across the land have the same formats.

- To feed the hungry beast in print and online, reporters and editors are not only writing for both platforms, but taking pictures and shooting video. Staffers at smaller papers complain of burnout as their ranks are depleted. With the new 24/7 deadlines, there is no breathing room left. Many talented reporters are bailing out when offered buyouts. Ironically, the superstars are being scooped up by burgeoning websites like the *Huffington Post* or *ESPN*. The talent drain can be felt by readers who complain that coverage of local communities has become superficial and sometimes sophomoric. Fact-checking and grammar slip through the cracks. With copy editors in another town or state, information that a local employee would know is sometimes missed.
- In New Jersey, Gannett announced in January 2011 that three newspapers will be consolidated. They are the *Courier News*, *Daily Record* and *Home News Tribune*. Sister paper the *Asbury Park Press* will produce the bulk of the news stories. The bottom line: 99 current staffers must reapply for the 53 remaining positions. (January 10, 2011 Gannettblog.com) “We still have a very significant number of local reporters full-time in those markets. . . . We're not ceding any of those markets from a local content standpoint,” *Asbury Park Press* publisher Tom Donovan told Patch.com. But do readers buy that? At the fall 2010 forum in Flint about the future of the town’s newspaper, readers in the audience said when the paper cut delivery days they felt they were getting less despite pleas from editors that they were not shortchanging coverage. Most had the institutional wisdom of remembering a fat *Flint Journal* of a bygone era. That makes for a tough sell until that generation is gone.

- The *Arizona Republic* threw everything it had covering the tragic shootings in Tucson which killed six including a 9-year-old girl and wounded Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. But Editor Randy Lovely told the *Columbia Journalism Review* it was logistically difficult because the paper did not have a bureau in this key city. Why? Gannett, owner of the *Republic*, had dumped the sister paper *Tucson Citizen* which helped the *Republic* in the past (Jan. 12, 2011 CJR.org).

When or will the bleeding end? Newspaper industry watcher News Cycle (Dec. 14, 2009) reported that more than 15,000 journalists lost their jobs in 2009 alone. It detailed the bloodbath:

November -- 293 people.  
October -- 375 people.  
September -- 347 people.  
August -- 425 people.  
July -- 2,505 people.  
June -- 318 people.  
May -- 1,084 people.  
April -- 1,350 people.  
March -- 3,943 people.  
February -- 1,492 people.  
January -- 2,256 people.

And the rumors are rampant on the *Gannett Blog* by a reliable poster that the company is looking at cutting at least another 4,000 people in 2011. When *USA Today* announced in August 2010 it was really going to push its mobile tech platform, some wondered if there was an ulterior motive. Said Katharine Taylor of the *CBS Interactive Business Network*: “While part of me truly believes the newspaper is headed in the mobile direction, another part of me wonders if the announced ‘radical’ shift to mobile is only so much window-dressing, conveniently trying to obscure the fact that as part of this new shift the newspaper — already beset by layoffs — will let go another nine percent of



its staff, or about 130 people. The reason I wonder about that is that, so far, the numbers for a mobile transformation just don't add up."

At only 33 years of age, the crisis in the newspaper industry forced Chris Machniak to change course, going from journalist at the *Flint Journal* to part-time college instructor and now also an editor with Patch.com. He also went back to the University of Michigan - Flint to get his master's degree. When the Journal reduced delivery days the staff knew cuts would be made. In a piece for the Nieman Foundation he tells of the angst of job loss as he took a buyout:

Only weeks before my first class as an adjunct journalism lecturer, my boss at the *Flint Journal* pulled me into his office and told me I'd better take a buyout. It was two days before Christmas. ... At this point, my job was eliminated as part of more than 80 layoffs, though I'd continue to work for another few months. Those left in the newsroom faced pay cuts as much as 60 percent. The *Journal* and its sister papers, the *Saginaw News* and the *Bay City Times*, also announced they were merging their sports, entertainment, opinion and copy desks. Even though the *Journal* remains the fourth largest paper in Michigan, the lower salaries make it more difficult for employees to support a family and pay a mortgage (Jan. 29, 2009 nieman.harvard.edu).

Wayne State's Ben Burns says fewer people mean more mistakes in the media: "I think some people are putting material in papers and it's not as reliable as it once was. Look at the outsourcing of editing. I see typographic errors in leads in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. The little *Grosse Pointe* magazine which comes out six times a year – they outsource their ad work to India. What quality work are you getting? You're getting it a lot cheaper, but you're not getting very high quality work. Does the general public like that? That I couldn't answer. It may be that the next generation won't mind sloppy writing and terrible spelling, loose work with the facts. I do believe that the lines are blurred. You're getting more material error in print or on-line that is not

reliable.” And editing from miles or states away? “If you don’t have editors that know the history of the community, if you don’t have editors that know which streets intersect in a community, you’re at risk and you’re not going to have as accurate a product. What is the consuming public going to think about that? Currently, the consuming public hates it and they think that the newspapers have basically shot themselves in the foot repeatedly. How the consumer public will view it in 10 – 20 years I have no clue.”

Finally, employees are at the mercy of that bottom line. Stockholders want their dividend and newspaper stocks have long been in the tank. For instance, less than a decade ago Gannett stock was selling at \$80. Now it is hovering around \$14. Newspaper companies have eliminated pensions and not contributed to employee 401(k) programs to stem the red tide. Most analysts scoff at a government bailout for newspapers, but others say journalism is too sacred to be cast to the winds of business models and profits. They suggest non-profit journalism sites. And one in Minnesota is leading the way.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: SHOW ME THE MONEY – OR NOT

Making a buck is the American way – unless you are a non-profit organization like the Boy Scouts or Campfire Girls. But running a newspaper as a non-profit? One website in Minnesota is just doing that. *MinnPost* is run by Joel Kramer, a former editor and publisher of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*. Tough times hit the *Star Tribune*, which had to go into bankruptcy in 2006 after the media giant McClatchy Co. sold it to a private-equity firm. Its rival paper over in St. Paul, *The Pioneer Press*, has had troubles of its own as its previous owner, the once mighty Knight-Ridder newspaper chain went belly up and is now owned by MediaNews (The *Detroit Free Press* was also a Knight-Ridder paper. Gannett picked it up when the company folded). So the time was ripe for a bold, new experiment in which a news site would not be beholden to the whims of business. The mission statement for *MinnPost* is simple: “To provide high-quality journalism for news-intense people who care about Minnesota.” And its website is clear about what the site is all about:

MinnPost.com provides news and analysis Monday through Friday, based on reporting by professional journalists, most of whom have decades of experience in the Twin Cities media. The site features video and audio as well as written stories. It also includes commentary pieces from the community, and comments from readers on individual stories. The site does not endorse candidates for office or publish unsigned editorials representing an institutional position. They encourage broad-ranging, civil

discussion from many points of view. Our goal is to create a sustainable business model for this kind of journalism, supported by corporate sponsors, advertisers, and members who make annual donations. High-quality journalism is a community asset that sustains democracy and quality of life, and we need people who believe in it to support our work (MinnPost.com).

Sounds good, but is it working? Four families put in the seed money -- \$850,000. The board consists of many donors and professionals from academia to business. “We want *MinnPost* to be able to stand on its own by 2012, and I have a very aggressive definition of sustainability, which is that we have enough revenues to survive without foundation money,” founder Kramer told the *New York Times*’ David Carr. Kramer did brag in January 2011 that the site finished 2010 with a surplus of about \$19,000. “A lot of the foundation money for journalism goes to large, investigative-oriented sites, and I don’t know that there will always be money for sites like ours where the emphasis is on regional coverage” (June 1, 2010 niemanlab.org). Carr gives his assessment of the site:

The staff is small, some of the work comes from freelancers and, journalistically, *MinnPost* is a careful, really smart site, but it is built on high-quality analysis rather than deep reporting and investigative work. Mr. Kramer was hard-pressed to come up with a single large story the site broke that changed the course of events (June 1, 2010).

And that is one problem critics see in non-profit journalism. Is the money there to let a reporter or reporting team go and dig out an investigative story of Pulitzer Prize worthiness? Of course, that is a big fear even in newspapers today as staffing is cut. Smart papers are cutting coverage of “fringe” areas with little circulation (both Detroit papers have pulled back on out-state coverage for core audience impact). But will non-profits make a journalistic difference? Laura McGann of the Neiman Foundation at Harvard University, a journalism think tank, wonders. She points to another non-profit

journalism website called *ProPublica*, which in 2010 became the first online site to win a Pulitzer Prize:

Kramer's right that much of the attention nonprofit news outlets receive focuses on the big investigative operations, most prominently *ProPublica*. And if your goal is to replace what newspapers no longer do as much of, investigative reporting is an obvious focus for nonprofits and foundations. *ProPublica's* Paul Steiger has said he measures his success by "impact" — a.k.a. stories that "changed the course of events" — more than audience (June 1, 2010).

According to its website:

*ProPublica* is an independent, non-profit newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest. Our work focuses exclusively on truly important stories, stories with "moral force." We do this by producing journalism that shines a light on exploitation of the weak by the strong and on the failures of those with power to vindicate the trust placed in them (Jan 10, 2011).

Again, it is a case of impact vs. audience. Newspapers today are expected to give you everything from the church rummage sale listings to bringing down a corrupt politician. Both of these non-profit sites are doing one or the other. So how is a city such as Detroit served unless two non-profit sites take care of one or the other, if not both?

What *ProPublica* does is stick it to big business. Again, from its website:

Profit-margin expectations and short-term stock market concerns, in particular, are making it increasingly difficult for the public companies that control nearly all of our nation's news organizations to afford — or at least to think they can afford — the sort of intensive, extensive and uncertain efforts that produce great investigative journalism (Jan. 10, 2011).

*ProPublica* earned its Pulitzer by chronicling the life and death decisions made by one hospital's exhausted doctors who were cut off by the flooding of Hurricane Katrina. A worthy effort. But some critics warn against falling too deeply in love with non-profit journalism. Says *Slate* writer Jack Shafer:

But before we get out the party hats and noise-makers to celebrate the rise of non-profit journalism, here's the bad news. In the current arrangement, we're substituting one flawed business model for another. For-profit newspapers lose money accidentally. Non-profit news operations lose money deliberately. No matter how good the nonprofit operation is, it always ends up sustaining itself with handouts, and handouts come with conditions (Sept. 30, 2009).

Shafer points to Harry Browne of the Dublin Institute of Technology “who warns that both nonprofit news and commercial news often find themselves constrained by the hidden agendas of their masters. Just as commercially supported journalists often find themselves dispatched to investigate the owners' hobbyhorses, non-profit newsmen are frequently assigned to 'chase after the idiosyncratic whims of funders.’” Shafer also argues that for-profit entities may reflect their owners' views, but that view is tempered by the need to attract readers and viewers. “Non-profit outlets almost always measure their success in terms of influence, not audience, because their customers are the donors who've donated cash to influence politics, promote justice, or otherwise build a better world,” Shafer argues.

Critics also point to the unrealistic tenant of a non-profit proposition: There is no free lunch; people want to be paid, not be volunteers. Critic Robert Gammon takes a shot at the non-profit *East Bay Express*. He warns that it is threatening traditional media in the San Francisco Bay area and calls the 120 Berkeley students working for free "slave labor." In the short term the public benefits, but it will end up relying on inexperienced, unpaid students instead of professionals who could lose their jobs because of the unfair competition (Sept. 30, 2009 Slate.com).

Today, about 50 non-profit journalism centers have banded together into the *Investigative News Network*. That is a good thing. Member Robert McClure says:

Together we are trying to eke out a living while figuring out how to democracy. That's really what it's all about: preserving editorial voices that can inform Americans and keep the powers-that-be honest. On *InvestigateWest*'s office wall we have a bumper sticker: "Democracy depends on journalism." And our motto is: "Journalism for the common good" (Dec. 24, 2010).

McClure hopes for-profit journalism and newspapers will thrive. But, he adds, "I'm looking forward to a new era in which those voices are supplemented by a lot of non-profit journalism ventures as well. It's what's best for all of us" (Dec. 24, 2010).

Wayne State's Ben Burns says non-profits are a noble attempt. "I think a number of them can work. Although there's an article out just recently by the publisher of the *MinnPost* saying that business model still doesn't work. I think they've got a quarter-million dollars or more as a start-up and they're struggling."

So we find for-profit and non-profit journalism both grappling to stay alive. But can a news organization pull the plug on its print product and dive into the world of online only? One newspaper is doing just that and it is in a university town known for upper-scale ferocious readers – Ann Arbor, Michigan.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: HAIL TO THE ONLINE VICTORS

You could call Bob Needham a survivor. He loved his job as longtime arts and entertainment editor of the *Ann Arbor News* in downtown Ann Arbor, not far from the revered University of Michigan. And his wife, Dawn, is a journalist, too, working as a news editor at *The Detroit News*. When they married they did not know that journalism would become such a precarious profession – some would even argue extinct profession. There was no reason to think that Ann Arbor would have a problem supporting its 174-year-old newspaper. The town had a huge university and high-tech credibility. Even *Google* was moving in. But the owners, the iconic Booth Newspapers who operated papers in Kalamazoo, Saginaw, Flint and Bay City, shocked the state and the newspaper industry when it announced it would close the paper and start up a website at a new office location. The owners blamed the lack of classified advertising mainly to *Craigslist*, low home ownership and the student and transient population for the shutdown (July 23, 2009 Editor and Publisher.com). The shuttering would give the paper the distinction of being the first in the country to close in a one-newspaper town (although it may not be fair since it is so close to Detroit where many can get the metro stalwarts *The Detroit News*



and *Detroit Free Press*). The new website Ann Arbor.com would only need 35 people out of the 272 print employees. Bob Needham was one of them.

In true journalist cool, Needham rolled with the new venture. “Overall, the transition was easier than you might think. There were some new technologies to learn, of course, but that's been true all along, from time to time. The basic job isn't that different. You've got information to communicate, as quickly and accurately as possible. It was initially a little odd not to have a single daily deadline, but I got used to that very quickly. Frankly, the toughest parts were just the parts connected to the way we were organized as a startup company -- the first few weeks working on cafeteria tables in a bare room, trying to hire people quickly, trying to line up copy before the site launched.” Other papers are watching Ann Arbor. Some wonder if one of the Detroit dailies may go the same route. People expected a revolutionary website. They were disappointed. When it debuted *The Metro Times* alternative weekly out of Detroit was not impressed with its tame look: “Ann Arbor.com is an appalling pile of crap. And an insult to the intelligence of any functioning adult” (August 5, 2009). The Nieman Journalism Lab was a bit kinder: “To the credit of its editors and designers, it's a brand new approach to online daily news, featuring a blog-style chronological presentation of news items that can be accessed via a variety of topical and neighborhood heading” (July 24, 2009). It did notice that photos were sparse, though. No matter the bumpy start, Needham thinks the model can work elsewhere. “Journalistically, sure,” he says. “There's some resistance from some readers, but you'll see less and less over time. There are obvious advantages like timeliness; the potential for using multimedia; and direct interaction with the audience. The only real

question about ‘can it work’ is on the revenue side. And that is a big question. I don't think we know yet, but I think it's certainly possible.”

And that is the big question. Rick Edmonds, who writes about the newspaper business for the Poynter Institute, revisited the site one year later. He found that parent company Newhouse, per tradition, was keeping revenue and profit/loss numbers confidential. Tony Dearing, the site’s chief content officer, did give this e-mail summary to Edmonds in 2010:

Our online revenue is growing rapidly and constitutes a much larger share of our total revenue than you would typically see at a traditional newspaper. We still have a ways to go before we reach our goal of being profitable online, but we’re encouraged by the progress we’re making (July 23, 2010).

The site has a social media feel and like the comments above, it turned off some readers so changes have been made. Edmonds reports that the site offers a free e-mail newsletter with a more traditional story hierarchy (and its own advertising). That reaches 21,000 and counting. The company has also brought back the *News* as a print edition on Thursdays and Sundays. There are a few original stories along with recycled information from the website. Dearing told Edmonds “that the audience has taken well to the print product.” Its circulation is 43,000 Sundays and 34,000 Thursdays, compared to 49,000 Sunday and 39,000 daily just before the *News* closed. Subscriptions go for \$9 a month, compared to \$12 for seven days of the paper before the shutdown. (July 23, 2010) And the website? Dearing said it gets 50,000 unique visitors a day, 960,000 a month. Edmonds says “that is an unusually high figure for a 100,000-person city and its environs — possibly reflecting broad national interest in University of Michigan sports, assiduous

search engine optimization and the site's status as a primary news source five days a week.”

From a business aspect moving to a website-only makes sense. The print product was bleeding red for several years and MLive.com is one of the most cumbersome news websites in the country. Chopping staff from 272 to 35 saves you big money; some of those are lower-paid, too. You save on printing and delivery. But what about the tradition, the love people have for their newspaper? Can you fall in love all over again for a website? Vickie Elmer of *Ann Arbor Online* says Ann Arbor.com must persuade Ann Arborites to change life-long habits. She says:

Whether you love or hate your hometown paper, you know it, writes former sports columnist Jim Carty in his blog, *Paper Tiger No More*. “In many cases, you are tied to it by ties you don’t even realize exist.” By closing the *Ann Arbor News*, the Newhouse family has cut those ties to the local community. Now, its challenge will be to create new ones (May 28, 2009).

Media survivor Needham is an eyewitness to those who say online is the future. “Although things seemed to stabilize somewhat last year, I think print will continue to decline. I think local papers will keep closing, but I suspect a handful of national papers (*New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*) will be able to hang on for quite a while, picking up some of the readers who simply want print. But long term, the bulk of the business is headed online.” But how is the journalism? asks *Chicago Tribune* writer Eric Zorn. “Better,” he observes:

At first, Ann Arbor.com used a latest-news-on-top presentation that was very current but often looked trivial as breaking silly stories pushed important news down the page. Now, with more anchored stories and improved navigation, the site makes it easier for readers to get a sense of what's important as well as what's just happened (July 23, 2010).

Former columnist Carty told Zorn: “It's producing just the sort of content you'd expect from a small-town paper with a staff that size. It's hardly the revolution the city was promised.” Carty agreed with residents who say the site does not have a strong editorial voice and doesn't shape what we should care about like old newspapers did. Dearing responds: "In the online world we live in, (consensus) opinion is more important than our opinion or any one opinion. We add our voice, but we don't seek to dominate the discussion” (July 23, 2010). Edmonds is more philosophical about the Ann Arbor experiment. The year 2010 was “shaping up as the year when the industry stopped jawboning about the search for new business models and got busy with real-time initiatives. Credit the Ann Arbor crew and its corporate parent with taking the plunge into fundamental change a year ahead of the pack” (July 23, 2010 Poynter.org).

**Bold initiatives or desperate measures:** The right wording can be a blur as the newspaper industry treads water while it waits for at least the rescue from a poor economy. But if anything, the free enterprise system and the cold hard sweat of business competition makes being complacent a dangerous move. While newspapers are trying to forge ahead with anything that will stick financially, they are facing a new foe. It may have a silly name, *Patch*, but the people behind it are dead serious. And that could spell trouble ahead for those who expect the daily miracle at their doorstep.

## CHAPTER NINE: A PATCH OF NEWS GROWS IN THE AREA

Nancy Hanus is giggling like a kid in a candy store. That is because journalism is fun again for the newspaper veteran of more than two decades. Hanus is an innovator and does not like grass growing under her feet for too long. She left a successful career at *The Detroit News* to be part of an online start-up focusing on people with disabilities. She was lured back to launch a cutting-edge features section and then was tapped to be the online editor who would take the stodgy newspaper into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. But she shocked the staff in 2008 by taking a buyout and landing a teaching job at Michigan State University that would lead students into the world of new media. Again, needing to be challenged Hanus left security in 2011 for a bold new venture that some say could change journalism – Patch.com. What is it? This is what its website has to say:

Simply put, *Patch* is a new way to find out about, and participate in, what's going on near you. We're a community-specific news and information platform dedicated to providing comprehensive and trusted local coverage for individual towns and communities. We want to make your life better by giving you quick access to the information that's most relevant to you. *Patch* makes it easy to:

- Keep up with news and events.
- Look at photos and videos from around town.
- Learn about local businesses.
- Participate in discussions.
- Submit your own announcements, photos, and reviews (Jan 12, 2011).

*Patch*, run by a collection of some of the industry's best and brightest editors based out of New York, is owned by media heavyweight AOL. The *New York Times* gives this analysis:

Over the last year and a half, AOL, the former Internet colossus, has spent tens of millions of dollars to build local news sites across the country through Patch.com. The idea is that the service would fill the gap in coverage left by local newspapers, many of which are operating on a string after declines in advertising revenue. *Patch* has already set up shop in nearly 800 towns. By the end of this year, it expects that to be in 1,000 — each one with an editor and a team of freelance writers. (Each full-time reporter gets a laptop, digital camera, police scanner and a cell phone). Traffic on individual sites is low; former editors say that the average post attracts just 100 views and that they considered 500 page views a wild success. But the overall traffic is growing quickly. In December, Patch had just over three million unique visitors, 80 times that of a year earlier, according to comScore” (Jan. 16, 2011).

*Patch* has a lot of money to throw around and is not just luring rookies and mom and pop wannabe reporters, but some very impressive talent from newspapers. That is where Hanus comes in. She is the regional editor for southeast Michigan and is hiring reporters, both still working for other media and those who may have been laid off to cover communities in the area. She got one of the online editors from *The News* who focused on the popular moms' site to jump ship as her assistant editor. It is no small feat starting a local website from scratch and Hanus says with a smile that she is working “a hundred hours a week.” *Patch* is in several states and has a few cities started in Michigan. *Patch* says it tries to go where communities are ignored or underreported by the media. It is not trying to compete with the big boys – at least not yet. “I think national and regional newspapers will continue to have a role in society, but I'm not sure about small dailies or weeklies,” says Hanus. “I think whereas regional and national papers can provide wider scope coverage, and can scale audience to appreciate it, smaller papers and the cost of

keeping up online and in print is just too much. People get too much of their breaking news, weather, sports and local information via the Internet now. Smaller local pubs can't keep up and do what we do at Patch and what others do with nimble, online resources.”

Chris Machniak, a *Flint Journal* reporter who took a buyout and is a journalism lecturer at the University of Michigan-Flint, is one of those journalists lured to *Patch* by Hanus. “It's more work than I expected, but it's also very rewarding,” he says. “It's been a unique opportunity to build something new and help tell the story of the community where I live in a profession that I love. I tell people I never worked harder in my life, but I've also never had the flexibility at a job (I commute down my stairs to an at-home office). In addition, the autonomy given in running the site is refreshing and provides us the opportunity to innovate. All these things are exciting to be a part of.”

Machniak runs the Hartland area *Patch* and could expand to other areas near Flint. He says the reaction has been “positive” and he has a budget to hire a staff of freelancers. How is it different from his print experience? “It's similar in terms of the demand for news. As a 24-7 site, we always need to be thinking about the next day, next week, etc. That was my experience at a daily newspaper. A big difference is *Patch* is very oriented toward social media and trying to interact with readers and listening to readers on what we should be writing about. This model is also present at newspaper websites, but for us, it's essential for our success and future while at newspapers, in my experience, it was considered nice to do but not the top priority.”

But is *Patch* a threat to those papers? Hanus responds: “I believe what will work is changing constantly, listening and involving the audience, involving readers in the dialogue and sometimes letting them lead and direct it. It is about letting go of the control

and paying attention and being a member of the community that you are serving. As communicators, we have the ability to bring people together, highlight what is being said or talked about, spot patterns and bring it all together. Will that threaten local papers? If they don't do the same thing, yes. "But in some places, local papers are catching on. There's one paper out East that invites the community in for the daily news meetings, and encourages participation. Community members can walk around the newsroom, have a coffee and chat with the beat writers. (ha ha, imagine that?) Will that paper survive? I think it has a better chance than most because it's thinking outside the box."

Machniak adds: "Right now I only see *Patch* as competition from a news-gathering standpoint. As a company, I don't believe we're trying to put mainstream newspapers out of business. We have separate missions and business models. *Hartland Patch* is hyperlocal. The main newspaper is a countywide publication."

*Patch* has hired more than 500 journalists and counting. That seems like a lot, but as industry analyst Ken Doctor says it is "one journalist per community, communities that range in size from 10,000 to 80,000 people." It appears that large "news" organizations are all heading in this direction, with the result being that "the neighborhood florist will have to wear a flak jacket, just to ward off the dozen 'hyperlocal' sales guys and gals, all rediscovering the joys of local – at the same time" (Aug. 18, 2010 the Atlantic Wire.com). The *Atlantic* magazine reporter Erik Hayden does not beat around the bush about *Patch*:

Local newspapers and alt-weeklies, once considered lucrative for their relative monopolies on arts coverage and classified listings, have found themselves assaulted by a variety of hyper-local online start-ups, citizen bloggers, and media giants hiring cheap freelancers. *AOL*, which is in the midst of transitioning to an ad-supported business model, is vying to



dominate the hyper-local market with an experimental network of *Patch* websites (Aug. 18, 2010).

*USA Today's* David Lieberman goes on to add:

Based on the company's current help wanted ads, it seems that most *Patch* reporters cover Town Hall, fires, the police blotter, high school sports, community theater and other local developments from home." The writer also notes that the company would become the "the largest hirer of full-time journalists in the U.S. this year (2010)" (Aug. 17, 2010).

But what are being called hyperlocal news sites have failed and money has not exactly poured in, although *AOL* will not give numbers. *Backfence*, a hyperlocal forerunner that invited readers to contribute articles, closed after it was unable to attract enough users and advertising. Tim Armstrong, a former *Google* ad exec, helped form *Patch* in 2007 and when he became *AOL* chief exec in 2009 he had plenty of clout and cash – \$50 million – to make *Patch* work. Why did he start it? According to the *New York Times* "a failed effort to find online information about volunteer opportunities for his family in their hometown" gave him the idea. *Patch* is all about helping *AOL* reinvent itself, too. "I just wanted something in my town," he said. "I actually gave the idea to the local newspaper and they didn't want it" (Jan. 16, 2011). Doctor adds simply: "*Patch* is going after the same prize as local newspapers, but so is *Google* and *Yahoo*. Everyone is going after those local digital marketing dollars" (Aug. 18, 2010).

Joseph Tartakoff at the *Guardian* points out the master plan of *Patch*: "*Patch* is selecting towns to expand to based in part on a 59-variable algorithm that takes into account factors like the average household income of a town, how often citizens vote, and how the local public high school ranks," he says (Aug. 18, 2010 the Atlantic Wire.com). Once in town, *Patch* will vigorously target local businesses by courting them to "buy

banner ads and also letting them set up their own business listings, which they can convert into ads.”

Some critics are honing in on *Patch*'s journalism. The *Chicago Reader* headline blares: “Is *AOL*'s hyperlocal news network an evil slave empire or a boon to hungry journalists?” Writer Michael Miner lets the reader decide:

The case that it's evil is the usual one: too big, too heartless. Across America, *Patch* is supposedly strutting into town with all of *AOL*'s financial muscle behind it to crush the real grassroots news organizations, its cat's-paws being journalists desperate for work that *Patch* hires for peanuts and exploits like gulag slaves (Nov. 18, 2010).

There have been problems of lifted photos from other media and accusations of plagiarism that have led to firings. But *Patch* editors point with pride to stories like the hazing of students in New Jersey and say that the organization has seven Pulitzer Prize winners on board.

You have seasoned veterans like Chris Machniak. Then you have Sara Fay, 22, at the other end of the spectrum, writes Miner. A year ago she was a Medill undergrad; today, she's *Patch*'s Winnetka-Glencoe editor. “I can tell you I have never worked on a print deadline in my life,” she says. “I've always worked on a web deadline, which is right now right now right now. Election day was ‘madness’ but fantastic. I'm live tweeting, I'm sending live pictures ... I mean it's so awesome” (Nov. 18, 2010).

Some wonder if *Patch* can make a big enough dent. At a 2010 forum on the future of the *Flint Journal*, one of its editors did not seem alarmed about the plans of *Patch* infringing on the paper's circulation area. Bill Lynch, editor in chief and publisher of the biweekly *Sonoma* (Calif). *Index-Tribune*, does not think *Patch* will beat it out either. He

told the *New York Times*: “If you ask nine out of 10 Sonomans what *Patch* is, they’ll just look at you and say, ‘Huh?’”(Jan. 16, 2011).

Wayne State’s Ben Burns is not sold on *Patch*, even though he is letting it be part of the journalism school’s curriculum. Students can get credit for working on one of the sites and Hanus supervises the “class.” “I don’t think the business model will work. But, I’ve been wrong before. I don’t know why it would work. For example, they have a *Patch* in Grosse Pointe and their argument is that they’re serving an underserved community. Well, the Grosse Pointes have two weeklies and our on-line operation. What do they have to offer that we don’t offer? Ad sales people, but how long does it take people to come to the conclusion that spending their money on a company that takes the ad money out of the market is not the most brilliant thing to do, since they’re constantly arguing ‘shop locally’?”

Can *Patch* survive long-term? Sue Burzynski Bullard, veteran journalist who now teaches at the University of Nebraska, wonders: “I think it’s an interesting concept. ... I think the financial end – will they make enough money through advertising – to support it is still to be determined.”

Despite the criticism, Hanus is a believer, chucking her college teaching gig for an unproven world. And the pay is better, at least for now. The single mom has a daughter entering college soon and believes her *Patch* job will pay the bills into the future. *Patch* is another enemy newspapers must fend off at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Another nagging trend nipping at the heels of mainstream media has a patriotic ring to it -- citizen journalism. The belief is simple: Everyone can become a reporter.

## CHAPTER TEN: YOU, TOO, CAN BE A REPORTER

Got a cell phone with a camera or video? You are a reporter. Can you tweet on *Twitter*? You are a reporter. Know how to put together your own website? You are a reporter and blogger, too. It is called citizen journalism in which just-plain-folks are making a difference in cyberspace, and in the world. Citizen journalists have shown videos of unrest and protest in press-controlled and censored countries like Egypt, Iran and Tunisia. They download to *YouTube* and *Facebook*, bypassing government manipulation. Soon the whole world is watching. It is raw, uncensored, unfiltered and yes, sometimes, perhaps many times, seen through the prism of bias. But that is OK, say critics. Let it flow, let it rip. Truth is truth.

To improve the quality of newsworthy video *YouTube*, known all too often for sophomoric video production, has started the Reporters' Center, training people and saving content that news organization such as NBC and CBS are using on their newscasts. You even have a very popular video of Katie Couric showing folks how to conduct meaningful interviews. College teachers have used it in their beginning news reporting classes, too.

Although the term citizen journalism is one of the hottest buzzwords in the newspaper industry in 2011, many are confused or have different views of what citizen

journalism is. Sue Burzynski Bullard, journalism professor at the University of Nebraska, offers this analysis: “I think citizens can contribute news especially in breaking situations. When the plane landed in the Hudson River, the first picture was disseminated on *Twitter* by a citizen. When the Fort Hood shooting happened, the *Austin American Statesman* realized that citizens could help report the story and they sought out on-the-scene reports from people who were not journalists but were there. They combined them in one *Twitter* feed. At the same time, I think that some stories – in-depth, investigative, public service – will need professional journalists with training.”

Steve Outing of the Poynter Institute sees eleven layers of citizen journalism, from people sharing information on a traditional site to all-out citizen participation. We see comment sections, forums and even blogs. But some sites have the reporters interacting with the public about which way his or her story should go. Others use “crowd-sourcing or “open-source” reporting in which citizens are asked to provide their expertise to the story (June 29, 2009). Outing says on the far end of the spectrum is the total citizen journalism site:

Such sites focus on local news — very local news. Citizen contributors can submit whatever they want, from an account of a kids’ soccer game, to observations from an audience member at last night’s city council meeting, to an opinion piece by a state legislator, to a high-school student telling of her prom-night experience. The site’s editors monitor and perform a modest degree of editing to submissions, in order to maintain some degree of “editorial integrity” of content placed under the publisher’s brand name (Jan 29, 2009).

The final version is the let-’er-rip journalism in which the contributors are not edited, even for spelling. Get enough volunteers and you have a news organization. South Korean site *OhmyNews* has recruited some 38,000 “citizen reporters,” who contribute articles. A small team of professional reporters also create content, but citizen reports

account for about 70 percent of the site's content, says Outing. If you want to get really out there on a limb you can go to the *WikiNews* site, a spin-off of the *Wikipedia* public encyclopedia. Anyone can write and post a news story, and anyone can edit any story that's been posted. It is hoped that people with a purpose will use the site. Good luck, say critics who point to the silly stuff on *YouTube* that gets the most hits.

Power to the people, advocates say. So what is wrong with citizen journalism? Those who have tried it on their sites see drawbacks. Poynter's Kelly McBride asks: "In this media saturated world, in this era of viral marketing, how's the average consumer supposed to know the difference between real journalism and a cleverly disguised press release or a marketing campaign" (Feb. 24, 2006)? The answer is that many can't, unless you label it that way. Some argue that the public is a lot smarter than that. But many journalists in this tough economy are already worried that the wall separating journalism from advertising is crumbling in traditional media. "Advertorials" disguised as real news stories and written by ad staffs are finding their way into newspapers more and more without warning labels, say traditional journalists. Others are willing to look the other way, lest they be the next layoff target. So separating the wheat from the chaff is even tougher in the world of citizen journalism when the gatekeeper is swamped or nonexistent.

And where is the news? asks Poynter's Rick Edmonds. He sees citizen journalism as a way to enrich content, but the results have been spotty. What it does do is bring in a generation who has been turned off by mainstream newspapers:

Citizen journalism and blogs remain something big, even if that something isn't a news medium. At a minimum, they compete for time and attention, and influence an expectation by readers to be talked with conversationally rather than talked at, a development that would be imprudent for

(mainstream media) to ignore. Blog buzz has become a supplementary stream of content that younger users, especially, are comfortable mingling with professional journalism. And, of course, content-light offerings like *Craigslist* and *Google* drain advertising and threaten the traditional media business model that pays for costly news-gathering (Oct. 31, 2005).

Good or bad, citizen journalism is here to stay in one form or the other. You cannot get the genie back into the bottle, or want to. Mark Glaser in his piece for PBS called “Your Guide to Citizen Journalism” looks at the good it has brought:

When a traditional media outlet covers a story, the editor usually assigns the story to a reporter, the reporter does the work and turns in a story that gets edited and published. But in the case of ad hoc citizen journalism, a blogger or observer might see something happening that's newsworthy and bring it to the attention of the blogosphere or the online public. As more people uncover facts and work together, the story can snowball without a guiding editor and produce interesting results -- leading to the mainstream media finally covering it and giving it wider exposure. Here are some older and newer examples of ad hoc citizen journalism:

-- Trent Lott resigns as majority leader of the U.S. Senate in December 2002 after blogs keep up pressure over a racist remark he made.

-- Conservative bloggers helped discredit documents related to President Bush's National Guard service used in an episode of *60 Minutes II* in 2004. This became known as Rathergate.

-- A former Lockheed Martin engineer takes his story about security flaws with Coast Guard ships straight to *YouTube* after the mainstream media ignored his entreaties. Later, the *Washington Post* wrote about it (Sept. 27, 2006).

Veteran newsman Ben Burns, now with Wayne States, says citizen journalism is a mixed bag. “Citizen journalism ranges from absolute crap to reasonably good material,” he says. “It’s always true that private citizens can discover stories and can pursue stories and can promote stories to professional media. The concept that the big newspapers have tried to adopt is citizen journalists trying to replace professional trained journalists is not going to work. It will not work now – it will never work. You don’t get anything for free. You get a citizen journalist who has an axe to grind. Then you’ve got to figure out what the axe is. You get a citizen journalist who knows half of a story. So somebody has

to go in and take that material and fix it. It goes back to the early '40s and '50s when you had rewrite banks – that's skilled writers sitting in rewrite banks and then you had fairly unskilled but aggressive people out in the field as reporters gathering facts and calling them in. The rewrite guy would interview the reporter and say, 'Well, you gotta get this, you gotta get that.' That is essentially what a citizen journalist is. The only difference is that the street reporter was a low paid professional scribe. The citizen journalist is frequently not paid at all."

John Timmer, writing in the *Newspaper Research Journal*, says studies reveal that "despite hopes for a thriving genre of citizen journalism as at least a partial replacement for legacy journalism, those hopes have not been realized. In content and coverage (citizen journalism) lags behind legacy web sites on a variety of dimensions considered indicative of news quality." (June 2010) So maybe professional journalists aren't extinct after all, even though their numbers are dwindling. That probably makes those students still flooding to college journalism schools a bit more optimistic. But is there a future for them and how are they being trained? Finally, what do educators think about the future of the subject they are teaching?



## CHAPTER ELEVEN: GROWING A NEW CROP OF JOURNALISTS

Sue Burzynski Bullard is holed up in a Galveston, Texas condo in January 2011, trying to finish her journalism textbook on copy editing. While she writes the ranks of copy editors across the country are being thinned and placed into hubs or clusters, editing for not one, but for several newspapers. The tough award-winning reporter and editor of more than thirty years has turned into a tough but perhaps a bit more compassionate associate professor of journalism, first at Michigan State and now the University of Nebraska. She was inducted into the MSU *State News* Hall of Fame in 2009. And in 2010, she won the Promising Professor Award from the mass communication and society division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications. She remains bullish about journalism but is brutally honest to those she teaches:

“I tell them very few will have careers that are similar to mine. I tell them they need to learn to tell stories over multiple platforms to succeed. No longer can you be print-centric. I tell them they may work for themselves or for non-profits instead of mega-companies like I did. I also tell them that even if they don’t become traditional journalists the skills they learn in our college will serve them well – communicating clearly over a variety of platforms. I acknowledge that this transition period is tough and it’s hard to see newsrooms cut staff and jobs. But it’s also a very exciting time to be a journalist – now

you can tell stories and reach people across the world very easily. When I was a reporter only the folks in my circulation area could see my story. Now if I write something, it can be read and commented on by people around the world. That's pretty cool. I also think it's good for storytelling. Face it, some stories are told better with audio or with video. My skills as a strictly print reporter – limited me. But not anymore. So there are a lot of up sides to what's happening.”

Nancy Hanus, who taught at MSU from 2008 through 2010, is just as enthusiastic in telling students about the future: “I tell them it is the most exciting time I've ever seen. That I can't tell them a thing about what this industry will look like in five or ten years, but if they want to be part of the excitement of change, they can have a very bright future. I believe -- and tell them -- that there is so much of an information overload today that journalists and communicators are more needed than ever to help people make sense of it. But that they need to be preparing themselves to go in many directions. Just writing won't cut it for most of them anymore.”

Indeed, most college instructors warn students they must know how to do podcasts, shoot and download digital photos and even video and tweet verdicts from murder trials. There is no more pigeonholing of talent. Don Pilette, who has been in the newspaper business since the 1950s and has taught at Wayne State University for more than 30 years, echoes the others: “I tell students that traditional newspapers even now are dusty relics of the past. Most news gathering will be regionalized and collected electronically by ‘publishers’ and distributed to readers. I believe journalism schools should continue to teach reporting, editing and the universal ‘truths’ that made us go into journalism in the first place. But more emphasis must be placed on the whole new world

of electronic layout and publishing.” Pilette knows about newspaper closings from way back in the early '60s. He was working at *The Detroit Times* when *The Detroit News* bought it and laid off all but five journalists. Pilette was one of the lucky five.

Wayne State has an opening on the journalism staff and director and veteran newsman Ben Burns is seeking someone well-versed in new media. The school has had more than 30 PhD candidates apply for the tenured position. Burns, who figures he has taught more than a thousand students, was asked in January 2011 if today's journalism schools are doing a good job. “Some are -- some aren't. Most are making some sort of an attempt. Again, remember it's a revolution in the delivery system, not in journalism particularly. Which means: Do you teach typing at Michigan State University? No. Do you teach computer keyboards? Yeah, we did. Early on we had a requirement for a two-credit course in using the computer. But, that's not really part of what we do as an educational process. So the question is – what do we educate them to do? We educate them to tell the truth consistently, accurately. Have an ability to critically analyze problems. Be able to take disparate sets of facts and compare them to each other. Those basic things do not change. If you're going to be a professional writer, you need to have a good thinking process. If you're going to be a professional report giver, which is essentially what *Patch.com* does, you can get away with a lot less skills.”

Chris Machniak, who has taught several kinds of journalism classes, including online journalism, says you have to be up front with students about the future of journalism. “I've always been honest,” he says. “When I was going through a buyout, I told my students all about it. Now that I'm with *Patch*, I tell them my experiences whenever I can as well. In all cases, the students are always more optimistic than me. I

am definitely more optimistic about the future now than I was when I left the *Flint Journal*, but as a journalist, I also realize that I'm in a business venture that could be wildly successful or not be here in a year or two. And at the moment, knowing what I know, I do believe *Patch* has a good chance of being that first break out online-only site at the local hyperlocal level across the country.”

Poynter Institute's Maurren Skowran points to a university in the United Kingdom as leading journalism into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Birmingham City University is offering master's degrees in Freelancing and Journalism Enterprise, Online Journalism and Social Media, Magazine Journalism and Interactive Content. Schools in the United States are not far behind. She says recent additions to journalism schools have often focused on digital storytelling. But new programs tend to put more emphasis on audience, business and experimentation. Point Park University in Pittsburgh allows students to earn a joint master's degree in mass communications and business. Classes are evenly divided between media courses and business courses. Why? “If schools want to produce entrepreneurs, students need to learn how to make money from their products,” says Skowran (Aug. 18, 2009).

The prestigious Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University has made several changes, including a controversial name change of itself. It is now The Medill School of Journalism, Media, and Integrated Marketing Communications, which has created a firestorm among old-school alums. Medill's master's degrees for experienced media professionals include six options for concentrations: Audience Understanding, Content Creation, Digital and Interactive, Innovation, Marketing and Media Management. “There's a big focus at Medill on audience,” Owen Youngman, Knight

Professor of Digital Media Strategy at Medill, told Skowran. Although journalists are often disinterested in marketing and promotion, journalism that falls on deaf ears does no good, he said. “Stories need to go looking for people,” Youngman said (Aug. 18, 2009 Poynter.org).

Analysts see some of these changes for the reason why enrollment is booming at journalism schools despite the bust in jobs. The Chronicle of Higher Education reports that many universities report that journalism enrollments are up as schools embrace the digital age. Applications to Columbia University's master-of-science program in journalism rose 44 percent, to 1,181 in 2010 and an investigative-journalism specialty drew more than twice as many applications, up from 54 in 2008 to 121 in 2009. Applications to master's programs were up 30 percent at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 25 percent at the University of Maryland at College Park, and 24 percent at Stanford University. Enrollment in undergraduate journalism programs nationwide has grown 35 percent over the past 10 years, to 201,477 (Sept. 21, 2009 Chronicle.com).

Sarah Lacy, writing for the *TechCrunch* website, pushes back with her piece “Who in the hell is enrolling in journalism school right now?”

Journalism schools are like foot-binding. They force you into a style that a bunch of dinosaurs all agreed was acceptable a zillion years ago. So in an age of blogging, you have no voice. In fact, if I were in J-school now, I'd have my knuckles rapped for using the rhetorical “you” in those last two sentences. Fortunately for me, my feet were never bound. I use the rhetorical you with impunity and a great many other sins that would make a Lou Grant equivalent choke on his bad Styrofoam cup of coffee. That means a lot of people hate my writing. It also means a lot of people love my writing. But guess what? Both of those make money in an online news economy. You know what doesn't make money? Rewriting an earnings report according to a formula you learned from a book. Of course, this is all obvious by now, right? When I ask aspiring journalists where they want to be in ten or twenty years, not a single one says the *New York*

*Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*. They want to have a famous blog. Some already do (April 8, 2009).

Lacy points out that people are rushing to schools even though one-sixth of the newspaper jobs disappeared since 2001. And, she says, the average \$40,000 pay a journalist gets just about pays for a bachelor's degree in journalism. "I know people do crazy things in a recession, but taking out a student loan for a degree that won't give an edge in a wheezing industry actually makes getting an MBA look smart." She takes one final shot: "Journalism isn't dying; it's just in a period of extreme volatility. And in any time of volatility, there's huge room for opportunity. But you're not going to learn how to exploit it in a stuffy classroom taught by people who got there by working at newspapers."

Lacy received plenty of criticism for her piece, including a tweet from an old-school professor: "Signs of celebrity rot in Sarah Lacy's journo-brain. She thinks (her story) is a think piece. I see an 'I'm too busy to think' piece," tweeted New York University journalism professor Jay Rosen (Sept. 10, 2010 BusinessInsider.com). Paul Dailing in the *Huffington Post* asks Lacy: "Have you been to journalism school lately? ... Some people might have called journalism schools and talked to professors, asked students their reasons for enrolling and otherwise done some reporting to answer that question" (April 10, 2009).

So what do students have to say? Emily Morman is a journalism student at Wayne State who admits she got the biggest thrill in seeing her name in print above a story she wrote for the school paper *The South End*. "I had stories online, but it is not the same as seeing your name in print," she says. Why is she going into journalism? "First, because I enjoy writing and talking to people. I'm curious, and I like to get my questions answered.

Secondly, I don't want a boring desk job where you do the same thing day after day. I want to be able to get out and travel, meet new people, and learn new things. Thirdly, and more idealistically, I suppose, I want a job that really helps people. I want to be able to look back on my life and see that I've had an impact on people's lives for the better -- that I've made a mark on this world outside my own bubble of existence. Journalism educates and informs people, and I want to contribute to that.” Morman knows all too well about the struggles of the industry: “Yes, I am worried about the turmoil with newspapers. It means fewer jobs for journalists, and probably lower-paying ones, too. Online newspapers depend on advertisements for money, and unlike print newspapers, there's the entire Internet at the hands of businesses and sponsors to decide which website they want to advertise on. Therefore, online newspapers probably can't charge a very high price for ads, because those companies could always choose to take their ads to *Facebook* or another website instead. I want to write for magazines, so their case is probably a little different from that of newspapers because magazines have so much content in them. However, it might be only a matter of time before magazines follow the same route and go completely online. I probably will have a hard time finding a job when I graduate from Wayne, and that does indeed have me worried about the future.”

Andrew Ferguson knows how hard journalism can be – he is an editor at his college paper at the University of Michigan-Flint. “The reporters don’t know what a deadline is,” he sighs. Not much different from the “real” world. Ferguson also works at a weekly newspaper, honing his craft and even got to attend a press conference in Ann Arbor with embattled football coach Rich Rodriguez before he was fired. The outing with his sports writing class was Ferguson’s first visit to Ann Arbor – ever. “I am going into

journalism because I feel it's a great field that really helps me exercise my strengths in writing. I've always been interested in the process of news, how it's collected, the process and time that goes into constructing a good story and is something that has always really appealed to me. I am an aspiring sports journalist since I began college at Delta Community College in 2006. I have never really been an athlete, but I love sports. It's exciting, entertaining and very interesting to me. The knowledge I've accumulated over the years of watching sports, along with discussing them with friends and family, I discovered that I actually have a knack for the research side of it. Coupled with my strong writing skills, I felt it was the perfect field for me. Journalism is a great opportunity for me to find that 'dare to be great' situation because it's combining a lot of my strengths, strengths I'm sure I share with many other young journalists."

And the future of newspapers? "I think that print journalism is struggling, absolutely, but I think journalism is not going to suffer much. Because of the presence of the Internet, journalists are always going to have opportunities for work, and the reason I think that is because news is always happening. Someone has to report it."

Professor Lee Becker is author of the Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Enrollments compiled by the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. Becker, who has surveyed journalism enrollment for nearly two decades, tells the *Columbia Journalism Review* that the growth spurt is due to traditional news outlets expanding to the Internet and a new crop of digital media jobs. "There is no evidence that students track the downsizing of the industry," says Becker. "They see mass communication as a broader enterprise. Everyone can be a journalist" (September 2007).



And that is good news to counteract the naysayers who claim newspapers' problems will spell the demise of journalism.

## **CONCLUSION: NEWSPAPER SLOWS; JOURNALISM GROWS**

Al Neuharth stunned the newspaper world when he started a national newspaper in 1982 filled with color, graphics, a much-copied weather map and short stories that did not jump to another page. It was called *USA Today* and critics then called it McPaper referring to the fast-food chain. Quick and unfulfilling, they said. Soon, every paper jumped on the bandwagon, stealing ideas. It was the savior of the industry at the time and now boasts 1.8 million readers. Neuharth, then head of the Gannett Co., also had a mantra passed on to all his editors. It was called journalism of hope. People do not just like the bad news of crime, corruption and disaster. They need a break, something uplifting. Now editors are wondering if there is hope for journalism.

Many long for the good old days, especially newspaper publishers who remember the times of 20 percent profits. But the big three television networks remember the days before cable spliced into their domain. And the big three automakers remember the days when they did not have to deal with those pesky Japanese auto upstarts.

We are a nation that still craves news. Look at the shootings in Arizona in which a congresswoman was injured and six people were killed, including a 9-year-old girl. We clamored for information about the gunman, his past, what he did hours before he sprayed a strip mall parking lot with bullets. We followed the recovery of

Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords who was shot in the head. We blamed conservatives, we blamed liberals. We were becoming too mean-spirited. Bloggers demanded gun control or tighter reins on those caught in the mental health web. We turned to newspapers, websites and TV pundits looking for answers. They are the water cooler, the town crier, the purveyors of truth and analysis. News people do not have high credibility in reader polls. We can't stand it when we find grammatical errors in a news story. But we also become angry when a newspaper bleeding red cuts the number of days of printing or reduces those days of home delivery. It is a love-hate relationship. Boomers who are fighting technology to the death are forced to go to their computers and look at more than the silly forwarded e-mails their friends send them. Tech savvy GenXers (age 32 to 45) call up the latest on Arizona on their smart phones or iPad. We wonder if GenYers (age 18 to 31) even know how or care to access news.

We still crave perspective, analysis and, yes, closure. The media gives it to us, but some say we are not grateful for it. Not everyone is willing to pay when subscriptions are raised for a thinner product. Others reject coughing up cash for an online version. So publishers scratch their heads and desperately try to figure out what works, all the while cutting the product, cutting their workers and perhaps, some say, cutting off their noses to spite their faces. We grab for ideas from non-profit to citizen journalism as the answer. Some try closing a paper and starting up a website only. Others try to start up online newspapers in communities that could take a toll on existing media in the area. Executives try to figure out how to make money with new technology while students in revamped colleges try to figure out how to just get a job.

Emily Morman will be graduating soon from Wayne State. For an idealist, she is also a realist: “Unfortunately, I don't think we're ever going to go back to the traditional style of print-media that we had ten years ago. Online newspapers do allow access to the news for more people, and they're better for the environment because not as many trees have to be cut down for paper. I don't think print newspapers are going to ever completely go out of business, though, because you'll always have the traditionalists (and I'm one of them) who enjoy being able to turn the pages of a newspaper and hold it in their hands. I think what will happen is that all of the minor newspapers will be eliminated or moved online, and that only major national and state newspapers will remain -- *USA Today*, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, etc. Over the years, that number, too, will probably decrease.”

Newsman Don Pilette, 83, says print is dying: “The future of newspapers? Electronic and read by subscribers on their I-pads or cell phones,” he says flatly.

Nancy Hanus, an online innovator and educator who now is part of a new journalism venture called *Patch* says: “I think national and regional newspapers will continue to have a role in society, but I'm not sure about small dailies or weeklies. I think whereas regional and national papers can provide wider scope coverage, and can scale audience to appreciate it, smaller papers and the cost of keeping up online and in print is just too much. People get too much of their breaking news, weather, sports and local information via the Internet now. Smaller local pubs can't keep up and do what we do at *Patch* and what others do with nimble, online resources.”

Andrew Fergerson, University of Michigan-Flint journalism major, sees a bright future for the trained writer: “What I believe has many journalists scared are the growing

number of bloggers, opinion writers, etc., however it's their lack of credibility that is always going to have readers crying for legitimate journalism that will keep the wheels turning in the world. The educated journalists who know how to approach stories, sources and write unbiased, well-researched news stories are always going to be the top dogs in the journalism world. So while young journalists have it tougher these days with the Internet writers a threat, they'll still have the opportunities presented to them if they push themselves. Journalism itself is always going to be a strong field, despite its constant evolution. But when the news changes, the style that news has to be distributed has to change with it. It keeps journalism fresh and new at all times. It may be a dated profession, but with breaking news happening constantly, the wheels are always turning how to get it out to the readers, viewers and listeners.”

Sue Burzynski Bullard, who watched circulation drop when *The Detroit News* was on strike and is now teaching a future generation, says the jury is still out: “I don’t think anyone knows for sure. But my guess is that news organizations will continue to produce and provide news in a variety of ways, including some we haven’t even discovered yet. Newspapers, in my view, will be one small part of that. In some ways, newspapers (printed on newsprint) may become niche publications. I don’t think news organizations can continue to think of newspapers as their sole or even major outlet for the news they produce. It just doesn’t make sense. For instance, when a breaking news story happens, I am much more apt to find new developments online or on my cell phone or my iPad than I am in a newspaper. The next day though I enjoy reading the longer takeout – the tick tock – in a newspaper.”

Burzynski Bullard, who is writing her book that students will probably see online, not just in print, adds: “I think the main thing is this is a transition time. It’s a huge revolution in news delivery. None of us really know how it will shake out. I don’t have the answers in terms of how to pay for the journalism. But I don’t think journalism is dead or will die. I think it will continue to be delivered in new ways. I’m very intrigued by things like all of the non-profits that have sprung up, many in conjunction with colleges for investigative or non-profit journalism.”

Ben Burns, veteran newsman and educator, says newspapers aren’t going away – at least not yet. “I think newspapers are going to survive for a long time. How much is a long time? I’d say 10 to 20 years. Some newspapers will survive, others will not. It depends on whether you have a niche and you have a customer base that wants a printed product, then you can still make money producing it. There are some newspapers across the country which haven’t suffered that much circulation loss in communities that are very well served. Can they continue to put out a newspaper? Sure. How about community weeklies? Yeah, I think community weeklies can survive for quite a while. I think we’re talking about 20 years before the culture changes so much that everyone basically is on-line. They want their product on their computer, iPad and on their phone, what-have-you. So I think it will be phased out over the next 20 years.”

The *Times*’ David Carr looks at the media chaos in his piece “The Great Mashup of 2011:

Click through a few years and suddenly the media landscape looks profoundly altered and punished, like a place where a serious earthquake was followed by a tsunami. News about the news business, once a rare commodity, now comes out of a fire hose, with many days bringing yet another shift in old paradigms. Two-year-old websites are worth more than 50-year-old magazines, storied newspapers are now owned by their

lenders, cable news has been upended by partisan shouters, social media now preoccupies attention that used to be owned by mainstream producers, and that television screen in the family den is just one of the numerous screens people are staring at (Jan. 2, 2011).

And what about the hallmark of print journalism: investigative reporting? Most reporters get into the business not for the money, not for the glory, but to right wrongs, to help the downtrodden, to ferret out corruption. At a panel discussion at Harvard University some see gloom. "I will frequently work on a story for six months, a year, even two years," said David Heath, a 2005-06 Nieman Fellow from the *Seattle Times*. "Those types of jobs are really disappearing" (Aug. 7, 2006 Harvard.edu Gazette). But a survey by the Poynter Institute's Al Tompkins shows that some find 2011 a turning point for investigative work. They see:

- an increase in nonprofit investigative journalism organizations that partner with legacy newsrooms to produce meaningful work;
- investigative and enterprise reporting grow as a key distinguishing feature of newsrooms that prosper in 2011;
- a wider range of "investigative" work that can be delivered on many platforms, including mobile, social media and through micro-local Web networks;
- the hottest investigative stories of 2011 will be about federal spending;
- a need for all journalists to learn new skills in social media and database reporting;
- fallout from the WikiLeaks controversy that they say will make it harder to get information, including public records (Jan. 3, 2011).

Joe Bergantino, director/senior investigative reporter for the New England Center for Investigative Reporting, is upbeat:

The most promising news is that many of the investigative reporters who've left mainstream newsrooms have decided to start their own nonprofit investigative reporting centers to continue their work. The number of centers is growing rapidly nationwide. Those centers, in some cases, now offer readers, viewers and listeners more in-depth investigative stories than their local newspapers or TV stations (Jan. 3, 2011 Poynter.org).

Analyst Ken Doctor points in his *Newsonomics* blog for the Nieman Foundation that technology will forever be unleashed on us.

Let me suggest that as the newsonomics of tablets-replacing-newspapers gets serious, there are three big numbers to watch (subscription or “single-copy” pricing, advertising pricing and overall costs). These three numbers are the drivers that will separate out the winners from the losers, come 2015, when daily print is confirmed as a waning niche choice and digital news consumption is our way of life. They tell us how much revenue news companies can generate and how much it costs them to produce, market, and distribute these mainly digital products, as they seek to meet two simple goals: take in enough revenue to afford a significant professional news staff, and produce a stable profit. Given how the industry flirted with unprofitability in 2009, even a stable 10 percent profit margin would be welcome, one to build on in the years to follow (Jan. 6, 2011).

Free enterprise is the American way of life, but it can be cruel. Ask the makers of typewriters, VHS tapes and floppy disks. Alan Mutter, former newspaper columnist turned Silicon Valley CEO, writes a blog called “Reflections of a Newsosaur: Musings (and occasional urgent warnings) of a veteran media executive, who fears our news-gathering companies are stumbling to extinction.” He warns that publishers blew it in the 1990s when they continued to freely give away the same expensive-to-produce content they put in their newspapers or online for free. This resulting in two unintended consequences:

1. They shifted a growing number of formerly paying print readers to the Web, while barely attracting any new consumers to their online platforms. Although you won't see this on anyone's rate card, every savvy publisher knows that some 90 percent of the traffic on her website comes from current or former print subscribers.
2. Because they failed to differentiate their print and Web offerings, publishers almost certainly hastened the erosion of their circulation and, thus, the print advertising that is the mainstay of their business. Weekday circulation has slid 37 percent in the last two decades to a point that only one out of every three households today takes a newspaper, compared to



an average national penetration of more than 100 percent in the 1970s (Jan. 13, 2011).

Now Mutter is shouting to the execs to get it right, but fears they are blowing it again, giving away free apps like *USA Today* is doing. There is little or no advertising and the sites look like newspapers, not something special. That may please the boomers longing for their print paper, but as Mutter maintains:

Worst of all, the apps are doing nothing to attract the two-thirds of the people who do not happen to read a newspaper or visit its website. And a great number of those people are in the under-55 generation coveted most by advertisers. Static apps filled with yesterday's news just won't cut it. This time, newspapers really, really can't afford to get this wrong. Really (Jan. 13, 2011).

Wayne State's Burns agrees. "I think that the major newspapers and a lot of writers fail to distinguish between the delivery system and journalism. The delivery systems have changed over the years – all the time. Look back to Charles Dickens who would cover a story and he would write his notes on his celluloid cuffs on the way back to the office. I'm sure that when the typewriters came along, they said, 'Oh my God, what's happening – the typewriter,' so that's all part of the delivery system. Journalism basically will survive."

In summation, print newspapers are indeed shrinking and reading habits and technology likely will not change that even though the trend may eventually stabilize. They will survive, most likely as a niche product in which print fans will pay a premium to keep it in their hands. Mobile? Long live mobile and because of it journalism will live long and prosper as long as publishers from profit-making to pie-in-the-sky ventures get it right. These news organizations need to survive in whatever form because they have the tradition, talent and gumption to right wrongs. We cannot lose that watchdog role,

that First Amendment freedom. But forget all the business spreadsheets and the technological G forces. In the end journalism -- and at least for a while newspapers -- will survive because we need news -- plain and simple. Be it health care reform wrangling or the winners of the Academy Awards. News unites us as a nation. It is in us to want to know what is happening, to chew on the information and formulate the opinions that make us who we are. The smart people will keep journalism pumping. We are indeed in a transitory time; a time of shaking out in which jobs are quickly changing and only the strong and agile will survive in the news business. We may have to work harder to separate the junk from the truth as we lose the gatekeepers. That is OK, we can meet that challenge. But the best news of all is that there is still a new generation of news junkies out there training in colleges or in the school of hard knocks, ready to work hard to tell you a great story filled with facts, rich detail and passion -- and that is the best reason of all for the hope of journalism.

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