

New Media Summit Report
and
Online Industry Survey Report
appear on the following pages

New Media Summit

By *Randy Reddick, Facsnet*
and *Jim Fickess, Arizona Republic*

Does the explosion of “New Media” venues in a developing “New Economy” mean that traditional journalism values are dead?

“No.”

That’s the consensus of seven panelists who conversed with more than 90 people attending the New Media Summit during the 2000 AEJMC national convention in Phoenix. Each member of the panel had had successful newspaper careers before jumping into the online world.

“Never give up the basics,” insisted Neil Budde, publisher, wsj.com, and founding editor of The Wall Street Journal’s online unit. “It’s still about getting the news, getting it right. It’s about explaining an event or telling a story clearly and concisely.”

WSJ.com offers only moderated on-line discussions. Contributors must use their real names and all messages must go through the newsroom before being posted. That makes the postings more meaningful and more focused on the topic, Budde said. He added his editors don’t edit the messages, but decide what will be posted.

Mike Read, content supervisor for HoustonChronicle.com, spoke of the importance of the “need for accuracy and thoroughness” in a milieu that “necessitates the need for regular updates and rewrites of developing stories.”

“We aren’t seeing skills sets that are needed, such as how to collaborate with others,” said Leah Gentry, the Los Angeles Times’ editorial director of new media.

She insisted that new journalism grads must “know how to think and problem-solve: gather information, evaluate it, put it in context, propose solutions, test and then propose alternatives.” She added that when students are solving problems, they need to “know how to weigh solutions alternatives against the core principles of journalism and against the evolution of the marketplace.”

Nora Paul, director of the Minnesota New Media Initiative, insisted that new media journalists “remember the four Rs — Reporting, Riting, Rithmetic, Responsibility.” She called these “the core skills that must be the foundation of any journalism training.”

She added that part of interactivity will be further tailoring content for the individual. Online news services are hearing more and more statements like, "Understand me"; "Know me"; and "Hook me up with what I need," she said.

That presents the challenge of trying to tell readers what they need to know when media products are produced based on an individual's interests, pointed out several participants. "We need to develop new ways of engaging people," Paul said. "We just can't put it on page 1 any more" and assume people are going to read it.

Not only are journalists finding themselves less insulated from their audience, but they are also in more contact with advertisers as many online ventures are a combination of news content and marketing. Several participants raised concerns that such ventures can color news judgment and content.

Educators looking for an answer to what's new to teach in the new media had a number of different answers to ponder.

Echoing Gentry's insistence that new journalists need to be responsive to the needs of an evolving marketplace was Elizabeth Osder, vice president of iXL Enterprises. Osder spoke of "making jobs entrepreneurial."

One important trait of that marketplace is interactivity, according to Dave Farrell, president of Lone Buffalo, Inc. Farrell said "the most important thing we've done in this medium that we never were able to do at the newspapers I worked at is get close to and interact with our audience.

"I was in print journalism 20 years and I could hold in one hand the reader responses I received," Farrell said. "Online, I received hundreds of e-mails per week. The connection to the audience is very close— an e-mail away," he continued. "Expect response and often a dialogue. Some reporters have regularly scheduled chats." Facilitating such chat rooms could be one of the hot new jobs in journalism, agreed panel members.

Farrell, Osder, Budde and Gentry all spoke of building online communities where readers take an active part in creating news content. Farrell added, "The online world brings readers and journalists very close together. In fact, it often blurs the line between them."

AEJMC members attending the Phoenix convention expressed interest in the importance of teaching HTML, XML, JavaScript or other scripting languages to prepare tomorrow's journalism stu-

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dents for careers. This question inspired many responses about the need to think critically, to analyze, to report in context, and to get hands-on experience in the craft of journalism.

“Let’s face it,” Gentry insisted, “new media is hard enough on its own. Few grads can balance being new at new media and new at journalism simultaneously.”

Osder and Gentry suggested that students needed to know basic HTML, but argued that it should not displace other things in the journalism curriculum. Several summit participants suggested that basic HTML is relatively easy to pick up in other ways.

Read recommended that college journalism curricula include hands-on training in all media, since graduates will likely work in more than one medium.

After nearly two hours of panel-based conversation, the group broke into three sub-sections to develop independent lists of action items that schools of journalism could take to prepare students for new media careers. Some of the recurring teaching suggestions developed in those break-out sessions were as follows:

- Stress traditional journalism values
- Give cross-media (or multiple media) familiarity; know the

relative strengths of different media

- Focus on journalistic skills required across media rather than on skills specific to new media
- Develop curriculum based on intermedia skills instead of dividing into areas such as print, radio and television and on-line
- Provide good examples of the use of new media, such as different methods of storytelling
- Teach the future of journalism, not the history
- Give students experiences collaborating with people with other skills and from other disciplines, such as bringing readers into class for their input
- Emphasize critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Revise law and ethics classes to cover areas such as privacy that are affected by media innovations
- Educate other disciplines on campus about the media innovations and their effects

The New Media Summit was sponsored by the Newspaper Division with co-sponsorship from the Council of Affiliates, Community College Journalism Association and Visual Communication Division. Moderators included Randy Reddick of FACSNET, Cecilia Friend of Utica College and John Neal of Brookhaven College.

Online Industry Cites Needs

*By Nora Paul, Director
Institute for New Media Studies
University of Minnesota*

In the spring of 2000 the Online News Association set up a journalism educators committee. We quickly agreed that the burning questions for journalism educators that we might help address was, "What do online news editors look for when they are hiring? How can we prepare journalism curricula that address the industry's needs?"

As it turned out, discovering the answer to the first question was fairly straight-forward. It is the second question which is still, for so many journalism/mass communication schools, the open question.

We decided to conduct a survey of those doing the hiring in online newsrooms to determine the types of editorial skills they need and the level of technical skills they were looking for from applicants. It was hoped that the responses would help inform journalism educators struggling with the need to reform their programs to make training relevant for an industry undergoing unprecedented change.

Mindy McAdams, Knight Chair in

journalism technologies and the democratic process at the University of Florida, and Nora Paul, director of the Institute for New Media Studies at the University of Minnesota, designed the survey with input from the committee.

Notice of the survey, launched in late spring and designed to be conducted online, was sent to online news industry electronic mailing lists, the membership list of the Online News Association, and individual contacts. There were 141 responses to Part 1 of the survey which asked basic questions of the respondents: name, address, position, organization, web address, how long the site has been online. They were also asked some demographic information about their organization: number of editorial staff, number of advertising / marketing staff, number of ad / marketing staff shared with their print / broadcast affiliate. But the question which determined whether they would be asked to fill out Part 2 of the survey was: "Are you responsible for hiring?" Those who answered in the affirmative were sent Part 2.

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Of the 141 who filled out Part 1, 109 answered “yes” to the hiring question. After sorting out consultants and people from associations, and managers from non-news or one-person sites, there were 87 requests sent to fill out Part 2. Fifty-five people responded.

Part 2 had two sets of questions, one set about the editorial tasks their workers performed and their current need to fill positions to accomplish those tasks, and the other set about technical skills and the degree to which they were desired or required in new hires.

The editorial tasks set included:

- Edit, revise, rewrite or copyedit text for online
- Update and/or maintain time-sensitive material
- Write original copy
- Report original stories for online only
- Write or rewrite headlines
- Select news photos from wires or archives
- Write original photo captions/cutlines
- Create multimedia projects or applications
- Manage user interactivity
- Prepare transmission to PDA, WAP
- Select related stories and link to current stories

For each of these editorial tasks the respondents were asked to rate them with one of the following:

- We have enough people who do this.
- We need more people who do this well.
- We don’t do this but plan to hire or train someone to do it.
- We don’t do this.

The second set of questions were about technical skills:

- Use of a WYSIWYG editor package (such as Dreamweaver or FrontPage)
- Hand-coding raw HTML
- Efficient use of Web search engines/directories (other than Yahoo!)
- Adobe Photoshop: scanning, cropping, saving and optimizing Web images
- Creative: original Web page design and layout
- JavaScript, VBScript or other scripting languages
- Databases: input to a database system using ColdFusion, ASPs
- FTP and basic server-side management of files

For each of the technical skills there were three possible responses:

- They should know this.
- We will train them if they don’t know this.
- They don’t need this.

The results in each of these categories in many ways confirms what many journalism educators have always felt - the core journalistic skills are still the most highly required and technical skills train-

ing can, in many cases, be done on an “on the job” basis. But the responses also revealed some new emphasis on skills not traditionally part of the journalist’s job. Take a look at the editorial skills for which 40% or more of the respondents said, “We need more people who do this well.”

- Update / maintain time-sensitive material: 75%
- Edit, rewrite or copyedit text for online: 71%
- Find external Web resources to link: 53%
- Create multimedia projects: 51%
- Find related internal stories to link to stories: 49%
- Manage user interactivity (forums): 47%
- Write original copy: 45%
- Write / rewrite headlines: 45%
- Do fact checking or research online: 40%

That updating material was rated the highest reflects the new imperative of websites to provide the latest news. But the desire for more people who can find external and internal links to supplement news stories reflects the need to create deep and complete news packages.

In the category of “We have enough who do this,” there were only two tasks which got over a 40% response: “Select news photos from wires and archives” and “Write or rewrite headlines.”

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The category “We don’t do this” was interesting. Forty-five percent of the respondents said they weren’t preparing stories and information for transmission to small-screen wireless devices. This has probably changed considerably in the past six months as more alliances between wireless appliance and content companies are being made.

Another interesting result is that 35% said they don’t report original stories for online only. With the cutting back in many online news shops of the creative team, this number may be going up.

In the category of technical skills, only three were rated by 40% or more as ones new hires should know when they come to the job:

- Efficient use of web searching - not just Yahoo! (89%)
- Hand-coding raw html (53%)
- FTP / basic server-side management of files (49%)

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These are important results for journalism educators. Clearly there is an expectation that the newly employed come to the job with a deep understanding of research on the web, the basics of webpage coding, and the organization of content. Journalism educators need to examine how their students are getting exposure to these core skills.

It is also interesting to see those skills that were rated as relatively unimportant (“We’ll train them if they don’t know”) or unnecessary (“They don’t need to know this”) for new hires.

- Adobe Photoshop - We’ll train (47%)
- Databases: using ColdFusion, ASPs, etc. - We’ll train (44%)
- Javascript, other scripting languages - don’t need (65%)
- Databases: using ColdFusion - don’t need (49%)
- Creative: original Web page design/layout - don’t need (42%)
- Use of WYSIWYG editor packages - don’t need (38%)

These results may well indicate the fact that once a website has been designed, the technical skills are less required than the journalistic skills. The implication for journalism programs is that the discussion about skills training versus journalistic training should definitely skew toward the journalistic skills.

But the most interesting part of the survey may be the responses to the question “Are there other editorial skills you are looking for?”

The following were listed:

- Journalism background with keen understanding of the Internet and where it is heading. Some design or conceptual background is also desired.
- Ability to produce short wire-type stories quickly to cover breaking news.
- Speed, meticulousness, flexibility, and collaborative skills.
- Good newsgathering and organization skills. People who understand the value of communicating clearly, concisely and writing clear, concise heads and cutlines.
- Sound news judgment and a broad understanding of issues of interest to local residents. Too many see the world narrowly through the eyes of their generation.
- Ability to write compelling headlines and copy. Sound news judgment. Superb copyediting skills. Ability to perform under deadline pressure. Ability to work as part of a team without asking, “What’s in it for me?”
- We are looking for people who have both HTML skills and stronger editorial skills as well as news experience. Most of the people who apply here are strong in only one or two of the three areas.

While many of these are core journalistic skills, there is one that doesn't usually get covered in the course of journalism education and that is the need for working well in a team. The environment of the online newsroom requires a new mode of working from the assembly-line model of most legacy newsrooms. Providing students the opportunity to develop their news content in a team environment will serve them well in the new newsroom.

As for the technical skills, the comments in the open response area pointed out that what is required is more about attitude than aptitude:

- I'm generally interested in having journalists who have no fear of new technology. I have no problem training people, but I have a great deal of difficulty

overcoming the techno-phobia of those who won't take a mature attitude toward learning the rudiments of using new technology in their work.

- Basically, they need to show they are trainable. They need to have enough familiarity with all the high-end "tekkie" stuff that they understand what to ask for.

This survey is now about a year old. With the changes, cut-backs, re-alignments and re-organizations going on in the online news industry over the past several months, resurveying the online news industry about their needs and desires for new hires would be a very good thing. If you have ideas for what could/should be asked, please contact Nora Paul (npaul@umn.edu) or Melinda McAdams (mmcadams@well.com).