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Five Ws and an H:
Digital Challenges in Newspaper Newsrooms and Boardrooms
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It is no news to anyone involved with the media, from the newsroom to the boardroom to

the classroom, that journalism is at a crossroads as an occupation, a business, a content form, and

a public good. This is perhaps particularly true of journalism in the traditional news medium of

record, the newspaper, where enormous uncertainty surrounds virtually every facet of the

enterprise as it adjusts to being part of a digital network. This essay uses a framework familiar to

journalists and journalism educators -- the traditional "five Ws and an H" of who, what, when,

where, why, and how -- to address some of the significant issues facing corporate and newsroom

managers, as well as journalists themselves.

Where?

Let's start with the "where" because that may be the easiest question to answer. As the

wise folks at the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2005) pointed out several years ago now,

it is increasingly clear and increasingly inevitable that the primary "where" of journalism will be

on a digital platform. At the moment, the dominant version of that platform is the internet, and it

likely will be for the foreseeable future -- dominant but certainly not exclusive. Other digital

devices already allow people to both deliver and receive information of all kinds, including journalistic information.

The fact that the platform is digital is quite significant for journalists and journalism. For starters, it means the content can be far more multifaceted than in the past. Digital bits can and do combine seamlessly with other digital bits (Negroponte, 1996); they essentially are all identical in their underlying binary structure, regardless of whether we humans comprehend them as written or spoken words, sounds, still or moving images, or any number of seamless combinations of those and other formats. A major management challenge over the past decade has been overcoming cultural resistance, particularly among print journalists, to the transition to a multimedia newsroom (Killebrew, 2003; Lawson-Borders, 2003; Singer, 2004).

More broadly, the digital environment entails fluidity and flux. Unlike the packaged print product, the digital newspaper is incomplete in both senses of the word: It is neither finished nor whole. Rather, it is always a part of something that extends out from itself in time and space. It contains connections to the past, through archives, say, or background materials. And it contains connections that transcend geography, with the potential to link any pieces of content no matter where in the world they originated. So in moving to a digital environment, the newspaper becomes an unbounded and unfinished thing, never final and never finite but instead interconnected with all the other unfinished things with which it now shares its communication space in a way that it never did – or could -- as a physical printed product.

Managing this transition to a fluid rather than a finite media form entails legal, ethical, and economic challenges. Legal concerns include those related to copyright, as well as to responsibility for external content that you host or to which you link. Ethical issues range from the very broad – how to nail down "truth" in a world where evidence is always mutable – to the

relatively narrow, such as how to handle corrections when what you thought was true turns out not to be. Economic challenges, discussed more below, include the perennial need to profit from what you create –and from its use by digital competitors who are happy to reap the benefits of your content without bearing any of the cost of producing it. All these and more, of course, are in addition to the significant challenges of managing change within your own newsroom and of supervising work that is never "put to bed" by the rolling of those industrial-age presses.

What?

In touching on the nature of digital content, we already have begun to answer some of the questions about the future that start with "what?" But how about the nature of print content? If the future is a digital one, what happens to the physical newspaper? We seem to have a great deal of attachment to it – at least some of us do, including most print journalists, and a great deal of concern about its survival. Media owners are understandably among the most concerned. The "daily miracle" has been a reliable revenue-generating machine for many, many years. Less metaphorically, the very real machines needed to create it -- those enormous printing plants and distribution infrastructures -- represent substantial fixed costs that must somehow generate a justifiable return on investment even as the organization migrates into the virtual world.

I believe the printed paper will survive but will become something different from the broad mass market product it is today. As Roger Fidler pointed out more than a decade ago in *Mediamorphosis* (1997), media forms rarely die out entirely. Individual outlets come and go, but forms or formats tend to stick around. However, they do change, sometimes significantly, and so do their revenue streams. Just like living species, they adapt to new environments and new competition in order to survive. The only alternative to evolution is extinction.

What changes might newspapers undergo in order not to die? Here is one scenario.

Digital becomes the primary place where most if not all of the news dwells. If news is what's new, newspapers do not really provide it now, let alone in an even more pervasively digital future. There seems little reason for breaking news and all sorts of updates not to move entirely online. Other hard or straight news -- the here's-what-happened-today types of stories – also seems likely to move online, in a variety of formats including both textual and visual. The news that is a relatively simple information commodity -- all that basic, keep-me-informed-about-the-world stuff, whether it's local, regional, national, or global -- is much better suited to something like the internet. It has become a cliché that people demand, and can get, information at any time and from anywhere. That goes for sports, it goes for business, it goes for entertainment -- it goes, frankly, for probably 90 percent of what is in most newspapers now.

And, of course, that material need not all come from journalists. A considerable amount can and probably will come from outside the newsroom: from citizens, from businesses, from organizations (think of press releases) and from various civic entities, including government bodies, the police, schools, and sports clubs. I'll come back to that idea later, but for now, suffice to say that digital news becomes a joint collaboration among journalists and non-journalists, including many of the people and organizations who are now journalists' sources. No middleman is needed for much of the information that reporters provide today. Why go through the journalist to let other people know whether your team won or lost, or that the council passed a new street-cleaning ordinance?

Also online – and this material, I think, continues to be produced by journalists, ideally drawing on knowledge within the community – are more sophisticated multimedia packages. These are the results of in-depth reporting and careful editing that we see in virtually every bit of digital journalism that brings home an award from organizations such as the Online News

Association or the Newspaper Association of America. Day-to-day digital journalism does not yet incorporate nearly enough of this good online storytelling, though as tools become more readily available and easier to use, there is routinely more of it on the sites of industry leaders such as *The New York Times* or the *Washington Post*, as well as of smaller innovators. This is the stuff that journalists have the resources and skills to do well -- and that not many other people outside the newsroom either can or will generate.

So the digital medium becomes home to the quick and easy items that, to a potentially large extent, will be jointly produced. And it will be home as well to the "brand name" content, with higher production values and greater quality control: the harder, better-researched stories that take considerably more time and talent to produce. Most of this material, at least if we're talking about content on sites affiliated with a newspaper or other traditional news outlet, will come from journalists – reporters, photographers, editors, producers -- in digital newsrooms.

What's left for print? The answer, perhaps, is relatively niche products for relatively niche audiences, taking at least two key forms. One is the "Metro" kind – the grab-and-go commuter publication at the short-and-snappy end of the content spectrum. This newspaper may look much as it does today, essentially a mass-market headline service containing extremely short articles, lots of celebrity news and assorted other fluff. All that content works just fine online, and it likely runs there, too. But it survives in print, I think, because it takes advantage of the portability and scannability of print to serve people rushing to or from some other obligation such as work or school. These sorts of free newspapers already have taken off in most major cities around the United States and United Kingdom, among other countries. They are cheap to produce and cheap to distribute, and I think they may continue for quite a while.

The other kind of printed newspaper in the future is far more interesting to me, someone who loves both newspapers and journalism. It is a very different sort of niche medium that offers primarily context, interpretation, and analysis, the think pieces that can be neither produced nor consumed in a hurry. There are, and always will be, people who want that sort of content, and my sense is that it works better in precisely the kind of format that the internet is not: finite, concrete, complete, tangible – produced and packaged. It works, that is, in print.

There's a subset, then, of the people who may be getting most of their information online but who also want the things that take advantage of what print can do. There are at least two key advantages, and they yield nearly opposite sorts of content. One advantage is portability – hence the grab-and-go publications, supported by advertising. The other advantage is "readability" in the broadly literate sense of the term, encouraging the sit-and-think-about-it information that works less well online. True, some of the reason why it does not work well in a digital format is logistical: poor on-screen resolution, the discomfort of sitting in a computer chair. Future technologies may resolve those sorts of issues. But digital media will always, I think, encourage quick hits and short bursts of attention. That's just the nature of the network: There is always something else to see, somewhere else to go, another e-mail or text or RSS alert incoming.

In addition, and contributing to the same pattern of information consumption, it seems clear that digital content is becoming more visual. Some visual storytelling is excellent; well-thought-out combinations of audio, video, text and/or graphics are powerful and enlightening. A great deal of the visual material online, however, is not nearly at that level. In any case, I think the narrative centrality of the stories that both journalists and non-journalists tell in a digital medium is increasingly going to lie in the visual, with or without complementary words.

Well, Marshall McLuhan (1964) and Harold Innis (1951) before him were right, at least in their basic idea. Print is harder. It engages a different part of the brain, and extracting meaning from written words takes more and different effort than extracting meaning from images. I think fewer of us, a decreasing amount of the time, are going to want to make that effort to engage with the harder medium. But some of us, some of the time, will want to do it -- and print, I think, will continue to be where much of that engagement happens. The nature of the effort -- the nature of the reading enterprise for, again, the material that is not easy to either produce or consume – is simply better suited to the print medium.

This same textual material may well be available online – perhaps even for a fee, though so far, readers have firmly resisted efforts to get them to pony up for media content. But more popular will be the material that has always afforded the mass appeal and will continue to do so in a digital environment. Again, some of it may appear in print, for instance in ad-driven commuter publications for the captive, bored audience stuck in a bus or on the train. But when we don't need an excuse for avoiding eye contact on public transport, the internet is a faster, more convenient, more visually engaging, easier medium for getting that quick-hit information. Yes, there are accessibility issues, social issues of the haves and the have-nots. Those raise serious concerns -- but over time, I think they diminish, at least in much of the developed world. The computer and internet access are growing steadily closer to television in their market penetration, a trend that seems likely to continue as prices keep falling and the perceived value of digital media keeps increasing.

Is there a market for the more challenging material that my reconfigured newspaper contains? Yes, indeed there is. But it is not the mass market that newspapers still enjoy today, dwindling from its heyday though that market already is, and fast. It is a far smaller market, with

a smaller profit – but a profit nonetheless, particularly in combination with digital partner publications. One example of a newspaper that is already moving in this more in-depth direction is the *Guardian* in Britain. The *Guardian* contains some here's-what-happened-yesterday news. But most of what's there is much more interpretive. Indeed, the *Guardian* seems to me closer to a daily magazine of analysis and commentary than a traditional mass-market newspaper. It has a fairly small print readership, one of the smallest of the UK nationals -- roughly 300,000 daily, one-tenth that of the *Sun* or *News of the World*, both down-market News Corp. publications. (It also has, incidentally, by far the largest online readership of any British newspaper, though this is due largely to overseas readers.) The *Guardian* is not, yet, a niche publication. But the sort of content that it prints is the sort that I think will continue to work in a print format, while virtually everything else that the typical newspaper does migrates online. And although the *Guardian* is a national newspaper, I think the idea also works for local papers, at a more finely grained level.

As the "massive" part of "mass" communication moves online, as the niche that remains in print becomes complementary to the dominant digital format and tailored to a different sort of reader – yes, reader, not just news consumer -- where does the money to produce it come from? That management question is urgently pressing for everyone involved in journalism today, as newspaper companies all over the world see their revenues shrink without a clear digital business model emerging to replace the one that has served them so well for 150 years and more. Mass media have long been a stunningly lucrative business to be in. I believe they will continue to be lucrative -- but significantly less stunningly so.

It seems to me likely that profits for newspaper companies will continue to fall, perhaps dramatically. While revenue from digital operations, including advertising, will increase, the percentage of that annual increase will not be as large as it has been in the past few years, when

the starting point was close to zero. Nor, in my opinion, will digital revenue for media companies be comparable to that provided by traditional print and television for many years to come, if ever. The internet is simply not the same type of medium; old revenue models do not translate easily, and emerging new ones are far from clear.

Tom Rosenstiel of the Project for Excellence in Journalism puts it this way: The internet, as an advertising vehicle, is like the *Yellow Pages*. Getting information about goods and services is an activity in itself, not a byproduct of getting news (Rosenstiel, 2007). Online advertising just is not the revenue driver that it is for traditional media players because while people once needed the newspaper to see what's on sale at their local department or grocery store this week, they do not need the paper to find that out now. They can go straight to the Macy's site or the Tesco site – and buy goods there, too. Even more frightening to publishers, people who once needed the paper to look for jobs, apartments, cars, or even a date no longer do – they've got autotrader.com, monster.com., match.com, rightmove.co.uk, Ebay, Craig's List, and on and on and on.

Will advertisers continue to want to be associated with the news content of a known media brand and to be able to target audiences seeking it? Probably, at least for retail ads. Will they be willing to pay as much for it as they paid for the same association in print? No, I would be very surprised if they will. The audience is too transient, too fragmented, too geographically dispersed, and too easy to reach online in other and likely cheaper ways.

For these and other reasons, Rosenstiel (2007) points out that the fundamental issue for the future of newspapers or journalism in general is whether the internet can create a new economic model. If not, the quality of both print and online will decline because there will be fewer resources to spend on the expensive process of creating strong journalistic content.

Researching, gathering, organizing, and presenting information require time and talent that frankly are out of reach for the "citizen journalist" and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

In fact, a growing number of people are pointing out that this is a huge issue – maybe, for media owners and managers, *the* huge issue. If the newspaper survives only in a much-changed state and, as seems likely, with a smaller audience, and digital becomes the dominant medium (but with a revenue model that largely cuts traditional publishers, the middlemen between advertiser and audience, out of the loop), who pays for the quality information that a democracy needs? Sure, one viable answer is "us" – we, the people who want that information, pay.[1] But our willingness to do so has so far been minimal at best, particularly online. That seems unlikely to change unless publishers force it to change -- if not by getting money directly from users, then by getting it indirectly, for instance from internet access companies and content aggregators.

At least at the moment, the business of news aggregation seems a very profitable one – for the aggregators. Rosenstiel (2007) believes newspaper and other media companies should go to war with entities such as Google and Yahoo! over pricing, enabling the people who bear all the costs of producing content to tap into the revenue flow that content generates. A somewhat related idea also may work well for local media, in particular: Become essentially a portal for local and regional information, provided, again, both by journalists and other individuals and enterprises within the community (Gordon, 2007; World Editors Forum, 2007). Local media websites already, in many ways, serve as portals or gateways to not just news of the community but also a host of area businesses. However, most are structuring and positioning this in an advertising framework. If they ditched that mind set and created a new message -- "Our site is the hub for our town. Be a part of that hub or lose out" -- it might open the door to different

pricing strategies and growth opportunities. And it would get everyone, including advertisers, thinking about networks and connections rather than finite and segregated media vehicles.

When?

We've covered the what and the where. The when is, in a word, "now," though the precise pace of change is hard to predict. There are too many contingent factors – technological, economic, social, and cultural, both inside and outside the newsroom and boardroom. I suspect the transition may come in what evolutionary biologists call "punctuated equilibrium" (Gould & Eldredge, 1993). The idea is that there are short bursts in which a whole lot changes quickly, followed by some stability and ongoing refinement of the previous change, then another burst of rapid change, and so on.

For instance, we had the web for about 10 years, from roughly the middle of the 1990s. Over that period, most media organizations migrated online, a big change for them. It is easy to say in retrospect that they were not particularly innovative, but being there at all was itself a huge and often traumatic step. Things flattened out for media sites for a few years in the early 2000s following the dot.com bust. But then came a flurry of related developments grouped under the heading of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005), with a far greater emphasis on the social power of the network. Now everyone is scrambling to deal with that one, and journalists are no exception. What's next, and when will the next big thing arrive? Who knows? But it will arrive, and we'll all deal … or not. Evolve … or not. And you know what happens if you don't.

A historical aside about the "when": The mass market newspaper, along with the economics that sustained it quite nicely for 150 years and more, looks more and more like a historical anomaly. It arose in the first half of the 19th century and grew in strength, power, and profitability, driven largely by advancements in technology, in literacy, and in commercial

opportunities that entrepreneurs quickly realized and seized. All those same factors are now driving the mass market away from print. The new technologies of the internet and its digital companions are cheap, easy, and so broadly accessible that everyone today can be a publisher. Literacy is shifting to an online environment as the digital natives come of age and are far more comfortable with "reading" images, with taking in (and, through their mobile phones, producing) small bursts of information, and with "writing" their own similarly brief blog or Facebook items than they are with reading, say, stories in a newspaper. That's something they really don't do, and there are indications that a majority – not all, but a majority -- never will (Mindich, 2004).

As for commercial opportunities, they do exist. But they are not the same ones that existed for a mass-market medium funded primarily by the ability to deliver large numbers of people to the advertisers seeking to reach them. The mass market, as it moves steadily online, is different: diffuse, fragmented, and completely fluid, as everyone dips in and out of dozens of different sites, creates transient, personalized information spaces, and mixes and matches in a billion different ways – one for every user on the planet. Various subsets of that market, some of them sizable, are still reachable through advertising. But as outlined above, it seems unlikely that advertising will ever generate the revenue it has done for traditional newspapers in a mass market environment. The medium simply doesn't work that way.

Before the penny press, of course, the newspaper was quite different. It was – guess what? – a niche publication, targeted at relatively small segments of the population who wanted and needed, among other things, informed analysis of world affairs. In short, the newspaper historically served an interpretive role for a narrowly targeted audience. In the coming years, it's a role to which they may return.

Who?

The shift in the what and the where also has dramatic implications for who produces journalism. Here, too, the changes are already under way, if somewhat slowly, but the short answer is that who produces something that can and should be classified as journalism is the journalist plus a whole lot of other people. These include bloggers, "citizen journalists," videographers, you and I with our mobile phone cameras, and a host of others not yet labelled but surely out there or on the way. Again, the nature of the medium makes this inevitable. Its openness means everyone can create content. The fact that it is unbounded, a truly vast repository with no walls around it, means that everyone can gather and publish at least some information from wherever they happen to be, with whatever tools they happen to have, and with no special skills or access rights.

Moreover, the network means everyone can disseminate what they have created to everyone else. The network makes everyone a publisher in the traditional sense of that word. And the fact that it is a digital network means all forms of content will work seamlessly, as already mentioned: words, images, sound, video, whatever. Some of this material clearly overlaps with what journalists do -- again, particularly related to much of the content that works especially well online: the quick hits, the updates, the breaking news, the on-the-scene photos. This content includes "hyperlocal" material (Schaffer, 2007) of interest to small numbers of people, though of course communities can be both geographic and interest-based. Both are well-served by information gatherers who actually inhabit them.

So where does that leave the journalist? Although it is tempting to see all this as a threat, it also can be seen as liberation. We do not, or very soon will not, need the journalist to cover the minutiae of civic life nor to cover the events or routine bits trumpeted in endless press releases. Do we really need a professional journalist to tell us who has been appointed the town's new fire

marshal or what Company X's latest profit margin was? No. All that and much, much more can come from, and be disseminated by, other sources.

What do we need the journalist for? We need journalists to put those bits of information into a broader context, to help us understand what's relevant and important. We need journalists to explain how the pieces connect – to the past, to the present, to the future, to *us* – and what's interesting or useful to know about those connections. And we need the journalist to do all that without fear or favor, courageously and honestly and as fairly as possible.

We need journalists to be sense-makers -- or, more accurately, to help us to be our own sense-makers. Will there be other people who also can and will do that? Of course – there have been in the past, there are now, and there certainly will continue to be in a networked environment. Some of them will be bloggers; some will be podcasters; some will be citizen journalists. They will contribute to our knowledge base in vital ways in this multifaceted, multicultural, interconnected world. Indeed, journalists must be open to the fact that informed people outside the newsroom (and outside their usual source pools) deserve trust and respect, and have a great deal to contribute; to date, there has been considerable reluctance among too many professionals to admit that others may indeed know more than they do (Gillmor, 2004).

But I think it will continue to be hard for people to do this analytical work adequately and on an ongoing basis for a variety of topics without the resources provided, let us fervently hope, by media organizations. It will continue to be hard for people without the training and, let us hope again, talent that journalists themselves bring to go very far beyond offering their opinions, informed though they well may be. It will continue to be hard to readily find people whom others can trust, let us hope once more, to work in the public's interest and not solely their own.

And so here we get to the heart of who is a journalist in a digital future. It is not so different from who a journalist is – or should be – now. New competitors, new technologies, and new pressures perhaps make the need to enact this role even more crucial to the profession, the industry, and society in general. A significant part of the answer to who is a journalist lies in ethics. I realize this is not necessarily reassuring. We can all point to journalists who have been guilty of egregious ethical lapses, and public trust in the institution of journalism is tenuous at best (Harris Poll, 2005). But journalism is, at its core, about truth and fairness and independence and accountability (Society of Professional Journalists, 1996). Trustworthiness must be fundamental to how journalists are perceived (Singer, 2006) or the jig is indeed well and truly up.

The other part of the answer lies in the kinds of things journalists can do better than anyone else. That is not cover a meeting, pick up a phone, get a few quotes, and file a story saying "The city council today voted to ...." It's about doing the reporting that the bloggers, podcasters, and citizen journalists cannot and will not do -- not as well, not as fully, and not as fairly. It's also about telling the story – using appropriate multimedia tools from the smorgasbord of available formats -- in a way that engages us, enables us to make sense of what this information means, and even empowers us to contribute our own information and our own meaning. It's the investigative part of investigating reporting, if you like, and it's accompanied by careful and well-informed editing, whatever the medium in which the result is published.

Completely unfeasible, you say? Dream on? I admit to being in the realm of optimism here. But remember, someone else can provide the nitty-gritty stuff that takes so much of the journalists' time and energy now. Much of the commodified information – the press releases, crime reports, meeting summaries, and other quick-hit items that will have largely migrated online – can be provided directly by the source. The journalist no longer has to fill the paper with

such items every day; instead, the paper becomes the smaller vehicle for interpretation and analysis described above precisely because the journalist has the newfound time to produce that kind of work. Yes, the journalist does have to keep the website updated, but that task can be shared with users and, perhaps, with less-experienced journalists. The role of overseeing such work is largely a managerial one, involving primarily organizational and technical tasks.

Managers also are crucial to setting and adhering to a set of priorities that will enable reporters and editors to regain the time to create the packages, both print and online, that require effort and ethics, as well as skills and talent. The journalist's job is to dig into what lies behind the press release, not to simply rewrite it. That has always been the journalist's job, but the time available to do it has slipped away as staffs have been cut and duties added but never subtracted. Here is an opportunity to subtract some tasks and reclaim the true value of the job and the role.

So who will keep us informed in this digital environment? For basic what's-going-on information, the answer is a whole lot of people, many of whom are not journalists. Who will help us make sense of that information? Also a lot of people, but here, I believe the journalist does have pride of place, supported at a philosophical level by ethics and at a practical level by resources, training, and skills. It's a role that becomes more, not less, important in a digital environment. If Web 2.0 is all about social networks, about the power of ubiquitous communication and connection, then Web 3.0 may well be all about cutting through the clutter (Jensen, 2007). It may be about tools, processes, and people who can help us grasp what's meaningful, important, and, yes, trustworthy amid all the noise. Media sociologist Michael Schudson (1996) suggested years ago that those people are journalists, and I agree. The important role that journalists have to play here is a role complementary to those of bloggers et al., and I hope to see them do it.

How and Why?

These are always the most difficult part of a story to get one's hands around, and that is no less true for this little story than for those that journalists write every day. The "how" for the story of digital journalism requires a lot, of a lot of people. It demands of owners, publishers, and journalists that they relinquish some degree of control over both the process of producing content and over the content itself. I think more and more media companies are going to realize that they need to find partners to provide an array of needs in a rapidly changing networked environment.

They also will need to open up accessibility to what they and their users jointly produce. Search engine optimization is just the start. Accessibility is about access of all sorts, to all comers. In an unbounded medium, material cannot be roped off and out of bounds. Isolation simply doesn't work in a network. It leads to invisibility in a world where connections are crucial to survival.

At a nitty-gritty level, there are many additional important "how" questions to address. Some of them arise in the newsroom. Others are in other operational units, such as advertising, marketing or sales, and technical. Many are in the boardroom. How can owners and publishers keep shareholders happy in this environment without gutting the journalistic enterprise that is central to long-term survival? The news industry is simultaneously a mature industry and an emerging one. It's hard to know which set of behaviors is appropriate: To what extent should we worry about next year as opposed to five or six years from now (Rosenstiel, 2007)?

I actually think that the newsroom, rather surprisingly, is one of the less contested spaces in dealing with contemporary change. Despite what one editor calls a "reservoir of scepticism" (Outing, 2008), a transition is at least under way almost everywhere, particularly involving the multimedia storytelling part of the equation. There's always more that could and will be done,

but journalists are demonstrably learning to tell stories in ways that take advantage of a range of tools and a range of sources. They are becoming fluent across platforms and formats, and discovering just how powerful their stories can be with the newly expanded toolkit available to tell them. No small numbers of those journalists are excited about the potential. Some media companies – the BBC springs to mind, but there are many others -- also are already shifting some of the routine, and particularly the local, news coverage onto people outside the newsroom. BBC journalists follow up on some but not all of the stories these citizens provide.

It is true that most media companies are not doing this; they are still relegating users to the role of commenting on rather than generating stories (Domingo et al., forthcoming). But evolution, even the "punctuated equilibrium" kind, takes time, and many newsrooms show signs of a cultural shift. Certainly, there are concerns about, among other things, where the time will come from and about unpaid work being added (National Union of Journalists, 2007). But there seems to be relatively little resistance to the actual idea of cross-platform journalism itself. There is more resistance, or at least uncertainty, to user-generated content, particularly involving unresolved issues such as quality assurance, legal responsibilities, and revenue opportunities. But then, it's a newer thing, a Web 2.0 thing, whereas the multimedia bits are really a matter of catching up with Web 1.0.

Various organizations are finding ways to deal with the quality and legal issues. The revenue model is another story, and just like good journalists, we have to keep following the money. It is the biggest issue, the elephant in both newsroom and boardroom. Bluntly put, successful transition to a digital newspaper environment is going to take real money and real commitment from media companies. It demands clear assessment of core strengths, combined with good decisions about how to both safeguard and expand those strengths. It demands sharp

thinking about how to profit from them in new ways; profit is vital to support the kind of work

that is neither cheap nor easy in a publishing environment where the cheap and easy are

ubiquitous. It likely demands rethinking the business model, a recognition that the huge profits of

a mass media environment in which media companies controlled the information process are

gone and are unlikely to return. That means openness to risk among business leaders and,

importantly, shareholders accustomed to media companies being a safe and lucrative investment.

Above all, it demands a recommitment to journalism as the core of the business at a time

when, frankly, the easiest thing is the opposite: a backing away from journalism and journalists.

So far, we are seeing more companies choose the easy answer than the hard one. Newsroom

layoffs are hardly abating. There are new hires – jobs are being filled (though not necessarily as

many as at some points in the past; Cox Center, 2007), but they are being filled largely with

people who can generate the quick-hit kinds of information that feed websites and large

advertising-driven print news holes. These are not necessarily the people who, at least at this

stage of their careers, can do the investigative reporting, interpretation, and analysis that is in

large measure not only the newspaper's future but also the future of journalism in any format as,

again, a great deal of the other stuff becomes easy for anyone to produce and publish. Many of

the people who could do that harder work are leaving the profession, willingly or unwillingly.

The toughest question for journalism, then, comes down to how to pay for it (Rosenstiel,

2007) at a level that will generate both money -- without which media companies, especially

public ones answerable to shareholders, cannot survive -- and quality, without which they lose

their reason for surviving. That reason comes down to providing a public service, which brings

me, at last, to the hardest question of all: the "why." Although the commodity of information is

in overabundant supply, providing basic here's-what-happened-today stuff is still a part of the

newspaper's public service role. But as that content migrates in large part to the digital environment, it becomes much less narrowly controlled and much more broadly shared with people who are not journalists -- shared with, if you like, that same public.

The broader public service that journalists are especially able to provide is one that emphasizes trust. It is one that continues to base its enterprise on truth-telling, fairness, independence, and accountability. It is one that emphasizes use of the resources – time, talent, access, money, clout -- that only journalists backed by committed organizations have, the resources to tell us perhaps less about what happened and more about what it means and why it matters. That is where journalists' value lies: not in controlling information, as they did in a past when the companies they worked for were the only ones who could afford the printing press, but rather in controlling the quality of what they provide.

In short, journalism needs to claim -- or reclaim -- both its role and its soul. The role remains what it always has been in a democracy: providing the information that citizens need to be free and self-governing (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). The fact that journalists no longer have a virtual monopoly on much of the information in no way lessens the need to help citizens understand, assess, and be able to act on it. Many in the industry, at all levels, are currently floundering. In too many cases, they are abrogating their role in desperation and losing their soul in the process. The loss of journalism, as an institution and a public good, would be a deep loss indeed. We must all think seriously about what we do not just well but best, and about what, at the end of the day, enables us to do it.

Endnote

[1]   While writing the original version of this essay, I bought a copy of the *Guardian* on 8 September 2007 and found this item on page 2:

> **Price Rise**
> The price of the Saturday *Guardian* rises from £1.40 to £1.50 today. The price of the weekday *Guardian* will rise by 10p to 80p on Monday. At a time when many news organisations are cutting staff and expenditure on reporting, the *Guardian* remains committed to investing in the quality journalism that has seen it collect more major awards then [sic] any other title over the last two years."

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