

# reporter's guide to online news delivery

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## HISTORY

# In the beginning

**Wendy M Grossman** looks back at the evolution of British online journalism from information services run out of somebody's spare bedroom in the early 1980s to the plethora of webzines and news sites we take for granted today

**MUCH MORE** than its American counterpart, UK online journalism has its roots in the technology scene, in part because in the early days technology journalists and their readers were almost the only ones who had online access. The few mainstream exceptions (such as the late John Diamond) had to take up technology journalism to pay for their online habit.

British online journalism goes back to the 1980s, when the first personal computers and modems were coming into general use. The early online world featured both paid information and conferencing services such as CompuServe, CIX, Delphi and AOL, and free bulletin board services, typically run on a computer in somebody's back bedroom. Both types carried news. The free services, such as today's blogs and web forums, carried articles written by members for fun. Paid journalism was the province of the information services, since these had revenue streams. CompuServe began a news service called OnLine Today as early as 1987, hiring freelance journalist Steve Gold to write for it.

Gold's first online journalism, however, was even earlier than that: 1983, for Micronet, a service started up by BT in partnership with East Midland Allied Press to help attract users to British Telecom's online service, Prestel. Within six months the user base had swelled to 10,000, and many stalwarts of today's scene were writing for it: Gold, Robert Schifreen (now a security expert and book author), and Rupert Goodwins (ZDNet UK). At its peak in 1985, Micronet had 60,000 users.

Micronet closed its modems in 1989 and some of its user base migrated to an area on CompuServe UK. Gold accepted an invitation to become a partner in and contribute British news stories to Newsbytes, a wire service carried on another early online service, The Source (later acquired by and subsumed into CompuServe). Within a year the service had become so popular that The Source had begun charging for it. Newsbytes was eventually sold to *The Washington Post*.

I began working in British journalism in 1990. At that time, there were dozens of computer magazines and hundreds of technology hacks, most of whom hung out on CIX (where I researched the above), and CompuServe dominated information services.

Then two things changed everything: Windows 3.0 turned the world graphical (helping both AOL and the web), and in 1993 the US government began allowing commercial traffic on the internet. Dan O'Brien, who wrote technology gossip ('Micrognome') for Micronet when he was only 15, likes to call this period the "crypto-Mosaic era". The watershed was 1994.

O'Brien, who went on to Wired UK and Virgin Net, was hired for *The Guardian's* New Media group when he gave the correct answer to "What is MPEG?" The New Media group, he says, was "only a distant ancestor" of today's site; it briefly produced a weekly webzine, Shift Control. The purpose, in any case, was to map out the future. In 2004, *The Guardian* reviewed the group's 1994 10-year projection: much of it was startlingly accurate.

O'Brien's key project, however, was the electronic 'zine that he and Future staffer Dave Green began in 1997: Need to Know (Now), or NTK, intended to be "kind of like Suck" (a sarcastic US daily web column, later sold to Wired).

"The idea was to show that you could do a small, subversive, low-budget journalism project and get attention," explains O'Brien, who is now activism co-ordinator for the San Francisco-based Electronic Frontier Foundation and a columnist for *The Irish Times*.



1994 was also the year that foreign reporter Ben Rooney convinced *The Daily Telegraph* to launch an online edition. "I was reading all these things about the internet in wire copy coming out of America," he recalls, "and thought it sounded interesting."

The Electronic Telegraph began with no budget. "We had a Sun Sparc server we blagged from Sun, a 64k (count 'em) line blagged from Demon Internet, and some Macs blagged from the *Telegraph* art

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Mary Branscombe,  
technology journalist

department. Mark-up was done on the old Atex system and through a Heath Robinson method ended up on a Mac. To publish, we stuck it on a tape, walked up a flight of stairs and transferred the contents over by hand."

Rooney predicted it would be profitable within six months. "I was wrong. By about a squillion years." Richard Burton, the current editor of what is now *Telegraph.co.uk*, says the site became profitable in 2003 and is increasingly lucrative. "It's certainly taking more and more advertising share for us as a company, and the trend is only going to continue."

The site, which features video, blogs and podcasts, also makes money from subscription-only areas such as fantasy football leagues and co-branding deals with corporate partners.

By 1999, when I was a judge for the first British Online Journalism Awards, today's major sites were all operational. My own first paid writing specifically for the web was in August 1995, when I was commissioned to do a column for d.Comm, a webzine published by *The Economist*. I wasn't the first: in early 1995 Paul Ockenden did a few columns

for a website published by Allied Domecq, which he believes to be the first time a non-media, non-internet company commissioned online editorial.

Many of the biggest sites are still technology oriented. Ten-year-old ZDNet UK, which now belongs to CNET Networks, began as Ziff Davis's supplement to its print magazines. AOL, which launched in the UK in February 1996, also played a role. Mary Branscombe, an early 'producer' for AOL, says many of AOL UK's early staff came from the BBC. Many of the computer magazine publishers opened content areas on AOL, and German publisher Bertelsmann entered into a joint venture.

"They all went through the same process," says Branscombe. "It was always an outsider going, 'We have to do this internet thing now' and building up a separate division and running almost in competition to the print magazines. Hardly anybody managed to do it as a way of supporting the print magazines. It was always different and separate."

These channels ended after a few years when AOL's US management changed the service's revenue structure from hourly access fees to a monthly subscription augmented by advertising.

Branscombe points out an important factor in the development of British online journalism: "There was no venture capital to spin these things up in the UK. It was always people who already had a publishing empire and had money to lose."

The exception is The Register, which began when

two long-serving technology hacks, Mike Magee, who specialised in writing about computer chips, and John Lettice, who mostly covered software, decided to do an email newsletter.

Says Magee, "We realised the chip industry was worth about \$200bn a year then, and we were down the pub one day and said, 'Why don't we do a newsletter because we can and this is a big, big market, and nobody else seems to be doing much about it.'"

The early years were painful: working in their "spare" time over a dial-up connection, though the subscriber list grew quickly after posting on Usenet and CIX. Even after moving to the Web, however, the newsletter didn't make any money, and Lettice was thinking of quitting when, in early 1997, Drew Cullen, an editor at VNU, joined them and found investment from Linus Birtles. For a time The Register made money selling news feeds to other sites that thought news was the way to attract traffic. But the bottom dropped out around the time The Register hired additional staff. They decided to try for advertising.

They had a lot of competition from heavily venture capital-funded US subsidiaries of American publications: Silicon.com (now part of CNET Networks), the Industry Standard, Business 2.0, TheStreet. What UK investment there was went into financial and sports sites such as Internet Investor and 365.

"The initial thing was to have content — and then it didn't make money," says Cullen. "We spent well over £1m before we became profitable in 2003. We had two investors, both of whom are still in there. It took ages to find out how to make money against the backdrop of a difficult climate. And it was harder for us because we were the new kids on the block."

Lettice adds: "We were shuffling around waiting for the world to accept that there is sense in advertising on web publications." In addition, in about 2001 The Register's founders split, with Magee going off to do a rival publication, The Inquirer (recently sold to VNU).

Of course, American online journalism also has roots in the technology scene, but it also has widely read, influential online general-interest publications such as Slate and Salon, which have no true counterparts here.

"We're much more trivial," explains Cullen. "We've got Popbitch and Holy Moly. The Guardian is the closest, and it's a hybrid, and also the BBC."

But, he adds, "It doesn't do the sort of thought leadership and longer essays that a Salon would do. But there is that sort of American magazine culture that's not really the same here."

Wendy M Grossman is a freelance technology writer who has covered the internet since 1991 and writes a weekly column, *net.wars*, [www.pelicancrossing.net](http://www.pelicancrossing.net)

36 steps towards a new media landscape  
THE CHANGING FACE OF JOURNALISM

compiled by Mike Ward



**1 Early 1995** Craig Newmark founds Craigslist, the community advertising and forum site.

**2 December 1997** John Barger coins the term 'weblog'.

**3 August 1999** Pyra Labs creates Blogger, making blogs easier to set up and operate.

**4 February 2000** OhmyNews is founded in South Korea with the slogan 'Every citizen is a reporter'.

**5 January 2001** Launch of Wikipedia, the collaborative encyclopaedia where users can add, remove and edit content.

**6 September 2001** Major websites including Google buckle under public demand for news following the World Trade Centre attack. Users turn to blogs such as Dave Winer's Scripting News to share and post information.

**7 December 2002** US Senate Republican leader Trent Lott is forced to step down after controversial remarks made at a party — initially ignored by the mainstream press but picked up by bloggers and made a major political issue. Lott is described as the bloggers' first scalp.

**8 December 2002** Following his election, new South Korean president Roh Moo Hyun gives his first interview to OhmyNews.

**9 February 2003** Google buys Blogger.



**10 March 2003** Journalist Kevin Sites, covering the Iraq war for CNN, creates his own blog. Several weeks later, after discussions with his employer, Sites suspends his blog.

**11 March 2003** Salam Pax, the 'Baghdad Blogger' describes the impact of the Iraq war on the people of Baghdad through his weblog, which soon has worldwide readership.

**12 February 2004** Flickr is launched, allowing bloggers and other web users to share digital photos.

**13 July 2004** Bloggers receive official press credentials for the US Democratic convention.

**14 August 2004** eBay acquires 25 per cent of Craigslist.

**15 November 2004** Veteran CBS news



presenter Dan Rather announces he is to step down after bloggers raise questions about the accuracy of a CBS story about President Bush's National Guard service.

**16 December 2004** In the immediate aftermath of the Asian tsunami, scores of weblogs provide a network of information on missing people and aid provision.

**17 March 2005** Yahoo! acquires Flickr.

**18 April 2005** Rupert Murdoch warns the American Society of Newspaper Editors that its industry has been "remarkably, unaccountably complacent" in the face of digital developments.

**19 June 2005** BBC News Online asks the public to send in stories and pictures on any event they think is newsworthy.

**20 June 2005** Los Angeles Times suspends its 'wikitorial', where readers could rewrite the paper's online editorial, because "a few readers were flooding the site with inappropriate material".

**21 July 2005** Mobile phone images from inside the London Underground following the 7/7 bombings are flashed around the world.



**22 July 2005** Launch of Scoopt, a photographic agency selling citizen journalists' pictures to the mainstream media.

**23 July 2005** Rupert Murdoch buys the social networking site myspace.com for \$58 million.



**24 August 2005** News organisations in the US hit by Hurricane Katrina turn to the web and blogs to break news.

**25 October 2005** Craigslist established in up to 150 cities worldwide.

**26 November 2005** The Pew 'Internet and American Life Project' says 57 per cent of US teenagers using the internet can be classified as 'content creators' as well as consumers.



**27 December 2005** ITV buys Friends Reunited for £120 million.

**28 December 2005** The BBC receives more than 6,500 emails containing pictures and video footage of the Buncefield oil depot explosion.

**29 January 2006** Dan Gillmor, doyen of citizen publishing, admits that his Bayosphere site has failed to take off, either editorially or financially.

**30 January 2006** The NUJ terms members of the public who submit pictures "witness contributors", not "citizen journalists". It urges news organisations to use material from its members instead, if possible.



**31 February 2006** OhmyNews signs \$11 million contract to provide Japanese version of the site. It now has more than 40,000 citizen reporters.

**32 March 2006** Publication of the millionth article in the English edition of Wikipedia. There are 3.8 million entries in all languages.

**33 March 2006** Newsvine launches. The website combines professional and amateur journalism with many participatory media features such as keyword tagging of external links and a voting system that allows users to determine the order of content.

**34 April 2006** The BBC announces participatory media will play a major part in its future online strategy.



**35 May 2006** Craigslist records more than four billion page views a month.

**36 May 2006** The blog-tracking service Technorati puts the number of blogs worldwide at more than 40 million, with a new blog being created every second of every day.

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## NEWSPAPERS



PHOTOGRAPH: PHIL ADAMS

ever since Rupert Murdoch became a digital immigrant, everyone is now pretending the axe wielding never happened, and newspaper executives realise that they have loved the internet all along — but that is another story.)

In this second wave, it is clear that the ultimate challenge is not simply to build a good web operation, but to build the news organisation of the future. And having your online operation as a remote satellite simply isn't going to do it.

That said, the one thing you realise after looking around is that there is no clear model for making it work that everyone can feel comfortable following. This is partly because it is still all so relatively new, and partly because the only solution that will work within a particular organisation is the one that fits exactly with the culture, people — and, yes, office space that exists there.

I do predict, however, that the next five to 10 years will bring a wave of change in newspaper offices around the world as they grapple with this. Sometimes that change will be swift and brutal, in other places it will be gentle and organic.

And this isn't just change for change's sake. It is change to make sure that the newsroom of the future can deal with four critical challenges.

The first is the obvious balance in pace and output between continuous deadlines and daily deadlines.

Our smartest decision at the launch of Guardian Unlimited was to commit to breaking news — despite the fact that everyone (including many of us) believed the BBC and the wires would do more of it, and do it better, so we should leave it alone.

True, it's much more their game than ours, but the online hunger for news is remarkable. And if you fail to satisfy it, you simply lose audience — even your most loyal readers — to someone else.

The question, though, is how far down that line will newspapers want to go? At one end you might have a small team rehashing wire stories from nine to five; at another, some will start to see themselves as 24-hour news operations with a paper that is in effect the best of the web output. Needless to say, most will try to find a comfortable space somewhere in between.

Second is dealing with user-generated content — that handy catch-all phrase that covers a multitude of online activity where our audiences shift from readers to contributors.

Of course, newsrooms have for years dealt with letters, phone calls, emails, pictures and video sent in by readers and viewers. But this is now no longer simply feeding into print offerings, but taking on a life of its own.

For example, we have a travel site, Been There, which is built around recommendations from readers. Managing this is a very different process from managing a traditional site or section. It brings with it creative, technical and legal challenges — none insurmountable, but enough to scare off many publishers in the first place.

If you speak to those who run Wikipedia (as much as anyone actually 'runs' it), or any major community site, you soon realise there is a set of skills and ways of working that are very different from normal editorial practices, but just as critical to success. We all have plenty to learn in this area, and much to gain in terms of loyalty and relevance if we get it right.

Third is the use of multimedia. Once the current frenzy over podcasting and vodcasting subsides, we will be left with an inevitable truth that audio, video, photo galleries and animated graphics are part of the way that we publish.

The challenges here are increasingly less to do with technology, since it is getting cheaper and easier to use by the week, and more to do with skills and working practices.

The final challenge is the relationship between editorial and technical sides of the operation. Excellent software development lies at the heart of every great online outfit. And over the next decade, good software developers are likely to be as important, if not more so, to many newspaper organisations, as journalists are.

Successful organisations will find effective ways for traditional editorial and software teams to work together effectively. Again, this is a mix of processes, personalities and decisions of where to put people.

None of this is easy. But it is inevitable. There are plenty of risks involved, but the biggest risk of all is to do nothing, and to hope that it will all simply go away.

*Simon Waldman is director of digital publishing at Guardian Newspapers*

# Future-proofing the newsroom

Without a strong online presence, newspapers risk becoming irrelevant to many of their readers and advertisers, warns **Simon Waldman**

**TEN YEARS** ago, I was at a conference where one of the newspaper industry's senior statesmen said: "After its moment in the sun, the internet will eventually slip back and take its place alongside other secondary media."

I sense this was less a prediction than a case of wishing out loud, which as we all know, never works.

With broadband spreading throughout the UK (we have one of the fastest growth rates among the world's major economies), with 90 per cent of 15 to 19-year-olds online, and with online advertising revenues growing at 60 per cent year on year, the internet is currently doing anything but slipping away.

But even these bald facts of usage are simply the start of the challenge that the World Wide Web is posing to newspapers. They, and a host of other statistics, create the imperative for action. Quite simply, if you don't have a strong online presence, you are going to become increasingly irrelevant to a large proportion of your readers and advertisers.

But what to do? And, more importantly, how to do it? Here the fun starts. It is not just the dramatic growth in usage of the Net we have to take on board, but the fact that this really is — as promised — evolving into a medium unlike any other.

The growth of blogging, wikis, podcasting, search and social software is creating a completely different landscape where the rules of who creates content and

**"Once the current frenzy over podcasting and vodcasting subsides, we will be left with an inevitable truth that audio, video, photo galleries and animated graphics are part of the way that we publish"**

how people access it are unlike anything seen in traditional media. In other words, it is not simply a place where you can publish stories more quickly and longer than in print.

All of this makes the organisational challenge for newspapers even greater.

The first wave of online activity was really about letting discrete teams get on with it. If it worked, fantastic. If not, well, it wasn't really part of the organisation anyway, was it? And indeed, when the dotcom bubble burst, it was all too easy to wield the axe and pretend it had never happened. (Of course,

/discuss



The internet is revolutionising life as we know it and wherever you are in the world now, you are never too far away from a connected device.

As a provider of internet services around the world, AOL loves the fact that the web is the world's greatest democracy — it's not run by one individual but by millions — and that it is constantly changing.

By its very nature, the internet is an incredibly powerful tool, but as with all things, its power is used for both good and bad purposes. With freedom of speech comes access to obscene information, and with instant communication comes the ability to spread evil.

So, to try to assess the internet's impact on society and to get consumers involved in shaping its future, AOL decided at the end of last year to launch the /discuss platform.

We believe it's vital that these fundamental issues are raised and that we have a responsibility to raise them.

The /discuss initiative is harnessing the power of discussions to make the internet better by raising both its good and bad points for the benefit of everyone who uses it.

We started /discuss with an advertising campaign asking the most basic of questions: "The internet: is it a good thing or a bad thing?"

The ads, which first aired in the UK on New Year's Day, showed good and bad aspects of the internet. On the good side, they highlighted a host of issues including the fact that more money was donated online to the tsunami fundraising effort than by some national governments, and on the bad side, that the internet can be used by terrorist groups to preach their messages of terror.

However, /discuss is much more than simply an advertising campaign. At the heart of it is aol.co.uk/discuss, our microsite where consumers are invited to debate the good and bad aspects of the internet, while at the same time read essays about key internet issues written by public figures including Piers Morgan, Alastair Campbell (pictured) and Mariella Frostrup.

Since January, more than 50,000 people have visited the microsite and more than 4,000 people have registered with the site to take part in the debates. Some of the hottest topics so far on the site have been the impact of the internet on children's education as well as its impact on dating.

As /discuss has become a neutral platform for consumers to express their views on the internet, we have also been hosting topical polls on a daily basis to assess its impact on our day-to-day lives. Some of our most interesting findings include:

- One in six people know someone who has had their personal banking details stolen online
- 55 per cent of parents are anxious that their kids will miss out without the internet
- 61 per cent of people say the internet has changed the way they shop
- 71 per cent of people think the high street will die because of the internet
- 92 per cent of people would not pay to access newspaper content online.

AOL is using /discuss to shape both the future of our business and to try to influence how the consumer uses technology and the internet in the future.

With broadband now reaching mass-market status and the web established as an ever-present part of our lives, there has never been a better time to engage in the future evolution of the internet.



COMMERCIAL FEATURE

# Time for the great discussion to begin

**AOL and Press Gazette are launching a debate on how new technology will influence the future of news generation — and your input is needed**

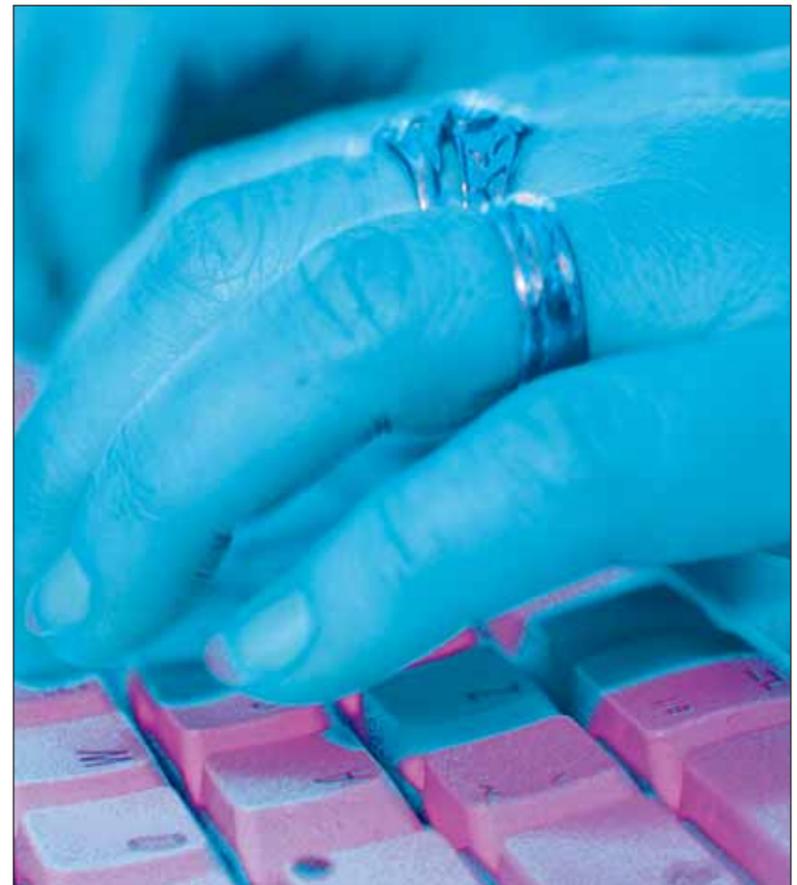
**ONLINE JOURNALISM** may have established itself over the past 10 years, but it's now moving into the second phase of its development, driven by the search for sustainable online publishing business models, changing demands on journalists and an evolving relationship with an audience that is no-longer passive. And while there has been a huge amount of hype and debate surrounding it, its long-term impact is only just being realised.

AOL has partnered with *Press Gazette* to launch /discuss Journalism to provoke discussion around the ongoing debate about the long-lasting impact that technology will have on news generation.

Via a special microsite, /discuss Journalism will provide a platform to debate the future direction of the industry and whether the changes it's now being forced to go through are for the better or worse for journalists around the country.

Over the next six months, /discuss Journalism will seek to explore a number of key themes and issues, which are now impacting journalists including:

- The disruption of traditional publishing and broadcasting business models caused by the unbundling of content. How will quality journalism be paid for unless a sustainable business model for making money online is developed?
- The emergence of new forms of competition for journalists: Regional, national and global media are all competitors online; print and broadcast organizations are all competitors online. Sources are also becoming competitors as they can publish direct to the public — and then there are the bloggers.
- The rise of the bi-media journalist. Media convergence made possible by digitisation is forcing professional journalists to learn new skills. Print reporters need to learn broadcasting skills; everyone needs to learn new forms of writing for the web.
- The changing relationship with "the former audience". No longer passive consumers, the audience is feeding back and producing its own content online. Blogs and citizen journalism ventures



Just how will the internet affect the future of journalism?

are challenging the very definition of journalism. Broadcast-quality recording equipment is becoming ubiquitous among non-journalists. Is journalism being "amateurised" as a result?

- How is media law adapted online? Far from the libertarian paradise that early online journalists assumed would emerge, the internet has become governed by a uncharted regulatory framework where online media law affecting journalists is still emerging and unclear.
- Where is jurisdiction in online libel cases, for example? Will publishers comply with states' censorship?

Senior industry figures will also be contributing to the debate and will be writing bylined articles about the impact of the internet's development on their

careers and how they see the media evolving in the future as part of /discuss Journalism.

With journalism going through perhaps its biggest changes since the emergence of broadcast as the dominant media, the debate about the shape of the future media is becoming increasingly vital.

This debate needs to be led and developed by journalists across the spectrum as the newsmaking industry of today is likely to be radically different to the one of the future.

The /discuss Journalism microsite will be updated regularly as the debate evolves, while the best discussions from the site will appear on a special page every week in *Press Gazette*.

## Discuss site launches next week

The first discussion topic on the new /discuss Journalism website will be included in this space in next week's *Press Gazette*, when APTN's executive director Nigel Baker looks at how news sites are scrambling to implement video features. Using the new website, which will also launch next week, you will be able to debate the issues this raises.

As recent debates on *The Guardian's* Comment is Free blog have shown, moderation in public online forums is a tricky subject. Internet users don't like to be told

how to behave in their discussion. Journalists are probably even more intolerant of being told what they can and cannot say. We will therefore try to keep the moderation to a minimum.

We will, however, ask you to register with the new site using a valid email address in order to make comments. Registration is now open at [www.pressgazette.co.uk/discuss](http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/discuss)

But participatory journalism is about more than merely commenting on topics selected by publishers. We hope our

readers will take the opportunity to set the agenda of this forum.

If you have a view on how the internet has changed or (is likely to change) the way you work as a journalist — for better or worse — and you can write a compelling 500-word comment piece on the topic, send your pitch to [discuss@pressgazette.co.uk](mailto:discuss@pressgazette.co.uk)

**To register:**  
Go to [www.pressgazette.co.uk/discuss](http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/discuss)



/discuss Journalism



## CAREER DEVELOPMENT

# Can you cut it in the new era?

The rise of online content delivery means today's print journalists need new skills to meet the challenges of the future, says **Lisa Rohumaa**

**ACCORDING TO** technology guru Steve Jobs, we are all here to make a dent in the universe. But how do you make a dent in cyberspace as an online journalist, and what are you going to do about those denizens of the blogosphere who say they can do your job better than you?

Mr Jobs would probably advise you to buy Apple's new 'blogging, podcasting, do everything-out-of-the-box MacBook', but getting the right technology is one thing. Getting the technology to do the right thing is quite another. And getting the technology to do the write thing is yet another.

Let me explain. Spending a lot of money on your website is a brave strategy when technology is evolving at a pace, so buying off-the-shelf packages such as blogging software can make sense. Harnessing technology to feed content to the reader in the way they want it, in the formats they have bought into, whether it be an MP3 or a BlackBerry, is equally challenging.

Doing the write thing, the journalism, requires new skills and new ways of thinking about how to get the story across and engage those who click on to your site. Readers no longer take a passive role but contribute to forums, discussions, blogs and polls, adding their own commentary, analysis and links to their own websites. They want to be editors at large, contributing editors — 'citizen journalists', reporting big news events, allowing their words and pictures to be emailed, texted, downloaded and published anywhere in the world. Some of them argue they can do a better job than us, that mainstream media has become cowed by commercial and political considerations.

However, what they, and we, all need is a good editor with experience, training, traditional skills and a whole bag of new tricks for the digital age. If you are a mid-career journalist whose background is mainly in print, TV or radio, there will always be an online component to your career and if you are a dotcom specialist it is even more important to keep abreast of developments and keep an eye on your competitors.

We are in a state of constant evolution so online reporters have to be adaptable and the need to understand and be involved in the production process should not be underestimated. The importance of good navigation, links and search engine optimisation — tagging stories and tailoring headlines so they attract traffic drivers such as Google and Yahoo — is a critical element of the job. Big stories can be conveyed in packages using a selection of text, video, audio, webcast interviews, podcasts, picture galleries, blogs, FAQs, timelines and links to resources. Content delivery is increasingly shaping how we edit these packages — readers are using some or all of a combination of instant messaging (SMS), emails, bespoke feeds, Really Simple Syndication (RSS) and their own websites and blogs to disseminate and pass on news. In a recent survey, WSJ.com asked readers what they wanted and the answer came: "Information in the palm of our hand."

Scared yet? Only if you think you are being left behind. The UK Association of Online Publishers (AOP) is reviewing how media organisations can track developments and improve training for

journalists. "The online industry is still quite young. If there is anything constraining it, it is the skills gap," says Alexandra White, director of AOP.

The association represents more than 160 publishing companies and its members include the BBC, the *Financial Times* and News International. In its recent annual membership survey, it found a shortage of skills required by the online publishing industry. Seventy-four per cent of AOP members reported having unfilled vacancies in January 2006, compared with 58 per cent in 2005. Publishers rated difficulty in recruitment and retention as one of the biggest constraints to business growth.

A quick trawl of Guardian Unlimited's recruitment site shows more than 300 new media jobs up for grabs as opposed to about 80 press jobs. Of course, not all of those positions under the new media tag are strictly journalistic, but for those print professionals facing redundancy the good news is your skills are eminently transferable and this might be the time to reinvent yourself. The same goes for TV and radio journalists who know how to put a package together and make video and audio fly online.

Trainee journalists at universities and NCTJ accredited colleges are prepared for working in a multiplatform environment — sounds ghastly, doesn't it? Let's just call it convergence. In fact, let's not, and just call it a newsroom, since these labels will soon be completely outdated as journalists write, edit and format for print, online, TV and audio.

If you are mid-career, now is the time to muscle in and show these whippersnappers how to do it. The AOP website ([www.ukaop.org.uk](http://www.ukaop.org.uk)) is a good place to start for short courses for the web journalist. Universities are also filling the training gap by providing tuition. Bournemouth University has just launched its first online course aimed at mid-career professionals who need to re-equip themselves for future opportunities. A bookmark must be Poynteronline ([www.poynter.org](http://www.poynter.org)), which is full of resources for online reporters and editors and has launched an RSS feed so you can customise your information about courses and latest dotcom developments.

At this point you may be thinking this is all very well, but aren't blogs and podcasts simply fads? In which case it is worth noting the latest forecast by technology analysts at Forrester Research. According to Forrester, the number of households in the US using podcasts in the next three to four years will grow from the current figure of 700,000 to more than 12 million. Can this really be true? As journalists it is our inclination to immediately investigate and question those figures — but you will find the bloggers have got there before you. And there are nearly 40 million of them out there.

And if you are thinking, 'Goodness, I don't even know how to download', my advice is cheap, quick and easy. Grab a teenager (any teenager) and ask them to show you how to do it. If you want an indication of future reading habits, see how they surf the internet, communicate and distribute information via moblogging and community sites such as Flickr and MySpace. But a word of warning: ask the permission of the parent first.

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PHOTOGRAPH: PHIL ADAMS

## Life as an online journalist A WORKING DAY

By **Kate Mackenzie**

I start work today at 7am — the earliest and, unfortunately for night owls like me, the most common shift on the FT.com companies desk, because pre-market statements are published between 7am and 8am. I am covering BSKyB's third-quarter results first up. There is no reporters' conference call, so after looking at the figures and the statement itself, I write a first take fairly quickly. I then 'produce' it — adding an image, metadata, headline, short and long lead, and links to related stories — before it is subbed and published by Toby, who is editing on the companies desk.

After making a difficult choice in the staff canteen between a plain or a raisin bagel, I try to avoid getting crumbs in my keyboard while checking the BSKyB share price, and then look for early analyst notes on the company. I am about to start calling some analysts when one of the UK companies news editors appears and asks me to cover the BSKyB results for the newspaper too. Emiko, the FT's media correspondent, is busy with the latest round of acquisitive wrangling between EMI and Warner Music.

As it's not a terribly busy day for my desk, I'm able to spend most of the day focusing on working up the newspaper story rather than doing more stories for the website.

BSkyB's financial PRs get wind that I am writing for the newspaper and phone me, offering a call with the company chiefs — something that almost never happens for a website version of the story. After six years of working across online and print journalism (and prior to that, online and

radio), I'm amazed that PRs still value traditional media coverage so much more highly.

I spend most of the next hour calling analysts and updating the FT.com technology page, which I co-edit. This involves promoting good features and adding any relevant stories published out of Hong Kong in the early hours of the morning. FT.com has a 'continuous newsdesk', meaning that it is always staffed by at least one of our offices in London, New York or Hong Kong. We also communicate throughout the day with our newspaper counterparts, which is made easier by our proximity to them. The FT.com companies desk, for example, is adjacent to the newspaper's international companies desk.

I take advantage of it being a quiet day and head outside for half an hour to get some lunch. After I return and do my phone interview with James Murdoch, Emiko stops by and asks how the story is going. We discuss the top line, which is proving difficult as the two main areas of interest around Sky right now are the bidding for the Premiership football rights, which it simply won't comment on today, and the company's "triple play" plans, which it is still keeping fairly close.

After fiddling for longer than usual with the lead, I file the newspaper version, then overwrite my earlier website story with this version and ask a colleague to read it through and re-publish it.

*Kate Mackenzie is a journalist at FT.com and the Financial Times*

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

# A bit of give and take

It's time for the traditional media to re-evaluate their relationship with their audience and understand that news generation has now become a two-way process, says **Suw Charman**

**THE INTERNET** is cool again. After the long hangover following the dotcom crash, the world wide web is once more abuzz: start-ups are starting up, venture capitalists are dipping into their pockets, and millions of people are rushing to launch blogs and podcasts. People are spending more and more time online, playing *World of Warcraft*, watching videos on YouTube and editing wikis.

In the '90s, the traditional media saw the web as one vast publishing platform, a new place for them to sell advertising; and that was all they wanted it to be. But while the web evolves into web 2.0, they are struggling: newspaper circulation is declining and broadcasters are losing viewers. The world isn't what it was five years ago and the traditional media, having woken up a little late, are desperately trying to get a piece of the action, trying to buy a clue.

But buying a clue and having a clue are entirely different things. Big media are repeating many of the same mistakes that they made in the mid and late 1990s. In trying to understand the internet through the filter of what they already know, they miss an opportunity to learn what makes the Net — and the people on it — tick.

Take blogs, for example. For a long time, the traditional media dismissed blogs because they didn't seem to be successful. During the 1990s, businesses learnt a whole new language, that of page impressions, hits and unique users. The data provided by web servers allowed publishers and advertisers to analyse who they thought was visiting their site and clicking on their ads. It was a numbers game — the more impressions and the more users, the better. Of the millions of blogs that had been started, however, only a tiny minority drew serious traffic, so blogs were dismissed as insignificant.

After a while, the media realised something important: blogs don't exist in isolation but as a part of a community, and bloggers are more influential than the media could have imagined. This point was rammed home by the loss of high-profile journalists' jobs such as Dan Rather and CNN's Eason Jordan in the US. Suddenly, they wanted to blog, to regain their status as influencers and, more importantly, to regain control.

"Blogs. Snarky opinion, right?" said the editors and execs. "We've got plenty of opinionated columnists. Give 'em a blog."

But the media were creating blogs in their own image, and in doing so the majority got it wrong. They took content they had already produced, chopped it up into bite-sized pieces and published it in reverse chronological order, as if trying to create news sushi out of fish and chips. They decided comments weren't cool, and their blogs felt like a bad date with a narcissist who only ever talked about themselves.

In getting it wrong, they were met with confusion from their audience and disapproval from bloggers. Had they engaged with bloggers beforehand, had they attempted to understand blogging culture instead of just wading in with their own pre- and misconceptions, perhaps they wouldn't now be feeling so out on a limb.

It seems that there is a chasm that the media needs to cross to 'get' what's going on online at the moment, but it's not the one they think it is. They

**"The audience is now an active, important participant in the creation and dissemination of news and information, with or without the help of mainstream news media"**

*Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis, Hypergene blog*

**Participatory media WHO GETS IT?**

Comment is Free: [commentisfree.guardian.co.uk](http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk)  
Bluffton Today: [www.blufftontoday.com](http://www.blufftontoday.com)

Lawrence Journal World: [www.ljworld.com](http://www.ljworld.com)

Battlestar Galactica Official Blog: [blog.scifi.com/battlestar0](http://blog.scifi.com/battlestar0)

are thinking primarily in terms of journalist versus blogger, but they fail to see that blogging is simply one aspect of the live organic web ecosystem in which the 'people formerly called the audience' participate. The chasm is not between blogger and journalist, but between the giver and the taker.

Participation is not defined by simply leaving a comment on a blog, sending in a photograph or phoning in to a radio show. They are all steps along the road, but the movement is all one way: the public give the media their material, which just gets repackaged and shoved back out at them. But if audiences come to believe that they are being taken advantage of, at the very least they will stop sharing their pictures and stories, and at worst they may resent the companies they once trusted.

Real participation is a two-way conversation. And the media has an intrinsic problem with conversations because, historically, the television and the printing press have not answered back. Viewers have been treated as passive consumers, but you can't have a conversation if you don't engage with your audience, and if you don't respect your audience, engagement is impossible.

The media need to open their eyes and start looking at what is in front of them, uncoloured by their own assumptions and biases.

When the media see sites such as Wikipedia, they immediately see a flawed and unreliable news source; what they fail to see is a thriving group of people enthusiastically adding information to a community venture for the benefit of strangers. When the media look at Flickr, they ask questions about provenance; they fail to see the millions of people sharing millions of photographs and creating communities based on imagery. They look at classified advertising sites such as Craigslist, and just like music sharing, they think people use it because it's free; they fail to see that people flock to Craigslist because of a sense of trust that develops within a community. When they look at podcasting, they see time-shifted radio; they fail to see the time-shifted conversations.

Why is this? It's because they believe that all media must be mass-media, and they are stuck in the one-to-many broadcast model. They are so obsessed with producing content for a passive audience to consume that they don't notice the fact that not only do the audience produce their own content, but also that they expect to.

So what does the media need to do? Ideally, go back to the beginning, to fundamentals. The media need to re-evaluate their relationship with their audience. They also need to listen, to their audience, to the experts, and to those isolated voices within the industry who understand the internet.

But most importantly, the media must learn to respect their audience and to reciprocate. When someone takes part in a media project, what are they getting for their time and effort? Without reciprocation, without respect, no participatory media project has a future.

Is it hard? No. Some media organisations are already doing it. Some people within the media already know what is going on, and what comes next. And if they can do it, so can everyone else.

*Suw Charman is a blogger-for hire and blog consultant*

**The digital revolution**

By David Nicholson

**SHOULD YOU BE AFRAID?**



PHOTOMONTAGE: JOHN ROONEY

With its stratospheric rise from zero to zillions, Google represents the most obvious and pervasive threat to the livelihoods of journalists, divorcing information from content, putting advertisers into the vision of consumers without the diverting periphery of editorial.

Mobile digital content may appear to be a similar threat, along with blogging and declining circulation figures for print publications of all kinds.

But are there still reasons for journalists to be cheerful? Many at the top of the industry remain convinced that the bark of the digital age is worse than its bite.

For example, while digital technology has put all kinds of means of distribution into the hands of companies and individuals, from corporate websites to blogspots, this doesn't have to mean less work for journalists. It could well mean more. Companies increasingly want their websites to resemble the more credible and authoritative sources of information, aware that the public has become tired of empty marketing rhetoric.

There is a growing demand for content that is independent, objective and well-written on corporate websites — something that is best provided by journalists rather than in-house copywriters or marketing people. Purists may have to swallow their professional pride, anxious that they are taking the corporate shilling and diluting their standards, but they have to consider: is writing an article for a company that sells cornflakes materially different from writing for a company that sells advertising, i.e. traditional print media?

There is always an agenda — traditional print media companies want to attract readers who will be appeal to their advertisers, while corporations want to attract website visitors who will want to buy their products. It is a difference of degree — one step removed rather than two steps — but it doesn't have to blur into the dreaded world of PR. All journalists have to understand their employers' agendas and work within them.

At a conference earlier this year at the Judge Business School in Cambridge, a collection of big-hitting media execs chewed over the prospects for print media. "There will always be a need for journalists, but they will need new and different skills," said Carolyn McCall, chief executive of Guardian Newspapers. While the means of distribution are certainly going to change (notably from print to online), she reckoned that we live in exciting times, where trusted brands such as *The Guardian*, with its pool of experienced, talented writers, will still be in high demand.

While blogging may seem to be a dire threat to journalism, it has begun to attract advertisers, who will pay to have their banners on popular blogs. This represents a massive new potential income stream for journalists. Although most bloggers are boring (hence the term 'kittyblogs' because of their tendency to waffle on about their pets) or highly specific, a well-researched, intelligently written blog such as the Drudge Report can become a cottage industry in its own right. It takes balls, but in a fragmented labour market where permanent jobs are dying out, the future may lie in this cheap, easy and accessible digital entrepreneurialism. Blogging, as arch blogger Bill Thompson said at the Cambridge conference, is "the first tremor of a giant cultural change".

Only a small percentage of the world's population has the talent and aptitude for journalism, whereas a very large percentage has the appetite to consume it. The digital revolution should mean, in the end, that good journalists have access to a vast market of people hungry for their product, cutting out the exploitative layer of the traditional publishing industry.

As Ivan Fallon, chief executive of Independent News and Media, pointed out at the Cambridge conference, print journalism has survived the advent of radio and television, just as cinemas have survived the advent of videos and DVDs. The global appetite for written news, information and entertainment is more likely to increase as the number of channels of distribution proliferate, just as more people, not fewer, go to football matches now that you can watch them on TV, online, on your phone...

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## CENSORSHIP

# The net tightens

Everybody is interested in the internet — especially dictators, reports **Julien Pain**

**THE INTERNET** has revolutionised the world's media. Personal websites, blogs and discussion groups have given a voice to men and women who were once only passive consumers of information. It has made many newspaper readers and TV viewers into fairly successful amateur journalists.

Dictators would seem powerless faced with this explosion of online material. How could they monitor the emails of China's 130 million users or censor the messages posted by Iran's 70,000 bloggers? The enemies of the internet have unfortunately shown their determination and skill in doing just that.

China was the first repressive country to realise that the internet was an extraordinary tool of free expression and quickly assembled the money and personnel to spy on email and censor "subversive" websites. The regime soon showed that the internet, like traditional media, could be controlled.

All that was needed was the right technology and to crack down on the first 'cyber-dissidents'. The Chinese model has been a great success. The regime has managed to dissuade internet users from openly mentioning political topics and when they do, to merely recycle the official line. But in the past two years, the priority of monitoring online political dissidence has given way to efforts to cope with unrest among the population.

The internet has become a sounding board for the rumblings of discontent in most Chinese provinces. Demonstrations and corruption scandals, once confined to a few cities, have spread across the country with the help of the internet. In 2005, the Government sought to counter the surge in cyber-dissidence.

It beefed up the law and drafted what might be called "the 10 commandments" for Chinese internet users — a set of harsh rules targeting online editors. The regime is both efficient and inventive in spying on and censoring the internet, and other governments have unfortunately imitated it.

## The internet's jailers

Traditional 'predators of press freedom' — Belarus, Burma, Cuba, Iran, Libya, the Maldives, Nepal, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam — all censor the internet now.

In 2003, only China, Vietnam and the Maldives had imprisoned cyber-dissidents. Now more countries do.

A score of bloggers and online journalists have been thrown in jail in Iran since September 2004 and one of them, Mojtaba Saminejad, has been held there since February 2005 for posting material deemed offensive to Islam. In Libya, former bookseller Abdel Razak Al Mansouri was sentenced to 18 months in prison for making fun of President Muammer Gaddafi online.

Two internet users have been jailed and tortured in Syria, one for posting photos online of a pro-Kurdish demonstration in Damascus and the other for simply passing on an emailed newsletter the regime considers illegal.

A lawyer has been in jail in Tunisia since March 2005 for criticising official corruption in an online newsletter. While a UN conference was held in Tunis in November 2005 to discuss the future of the internet, this human rights activist was in a prison cell several hundred kilometres from his family — a grim message to the world's internet users.

Censorship of the web is also growing and is now done on every continent. In Cuba, where you need permission from the ruling party to buy a computer, all websites not approved by the regime are filtered.

The situation has worsened in the Middle East and



PHOTOGRAPH: REUTERS/STRINGER/CHINA

**Li Xinde, one of China's small band of internet investigative journalists, speaks during an interview in Beijing in February this year and says muck-raking campaigners like himself are undermining the country's barriers to free speech every day**

North Africa. In November 2005, Morocco began censoring all political websites advocating Western Sahara's independence. Iran expands its list of banned sites every year and now includes all publications mentioning women's rights. China can automatically censor blog messages, blanking out words such as 'democracy' and 'human rights'.

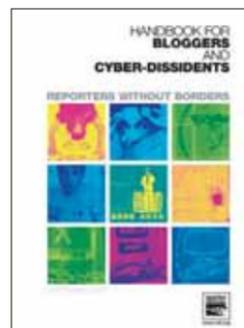
Some Asian countries seem about to go even further. Burma has acquired sophisticated technology to filter the internet and the country's cybercafés spy on customers by automatically recording what is on the screen every five minutes.

## Complicity of Western businesses

How did all these countries become so expert at doing this? Did Burma and Tunisia develop their own software? No. They bought the technology from foreign, mostly US, firms. Secure Computing, for example, sold Tunisia a programme to censor the internet, including the Reporters Without Borders website.

Another US company, Cisco Systems, created China's internet infrastructure and sold the country

**"Far from showing the way, many countries that usually respect online freedom, now seem to want to unduly control it"**



**Reporters Without Borders last year published a Handbook for Bloggers and Cyber-Dissidents, which can be downloaded free from the RSF website. The book provides practical advice on how to set up a blog, and, importantly for independent journalists working in repressive regimes, provides guidance on maintaining anonymity online, circumventing censors' online filtering systems. To download a copy of the handbook, visit [www.rsf.org/rubrique.php3?id\\_rubrique=542](http://www.rsf.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=542)**

special equipment for the police to use. The ethical lapses of internet companies were exposed when US company Yahoo! was accused in September 2005 of supplying the Chinese police with information used to sentence cyber-dissident Shi Tao to 10 years in prison.

China is now passing on its cyber-spying skills to other enemies of the internet, including Zimbabwe, Cuba, and most recently Belarus. These countries will probably no longer need Western help for such spying in a few years' time.

Democratic governments, not only the private sector, share responsibility for the future of the internet. But far from showing the way, many countries that usually respect online freedom, now seem to want to unduly control it. They often have laudable reasons, such as fighting terrorism, child sex and cybercrime, but this control also threatens freedom of expression.

Without making any comparison with the harsh restrictions in China, the internet rules recently adopted by the European Union are very disturbing. One of them, requiring internet service providers to retain records of customers' online activity, is presently being considered in Brussels and seriously undermines internet users' right to online privacy.

The US is also far from being a model in regulation of the internet. The authorities are sending an ambiguous message to the international community by making it easier to legally intercept online traffic and by filtering the internet in public libraries.

*Julien Pain is head of the internet freedom desk at Reporters Without Borders, [www.rsf.org](http://www.rsf.org). This text previously appeared in RSF's 2006 Annual Report. ©Reporters Without Borders. Used with permission*