



Online journalism: are newspapers in the recycle bin?

Will newsprint be rubbed off readers' fingers permanently or will online journalism form a partnership with its older sibling?

Online journalism has been making big dents into the ego of the competitive world of news production and earning bonus points because of the three big "I's".

Immediacy: the lack of deadlines that lets the online newspaper break news as soon as it takes place.

Interactivity: the ability of the reader to actively engage with the content.

Integration: the capability to include all aspects of other media – audio and visual.

These are the business cards of an elite club that exists only online and shuts the door in traditional media's face.

Neil Sanderson has been editor of the *New Zealand Herald* online since it began in 2000 with people simply uploading content from the newspaper.

For Sanderson online journalism is the genetically engineered younger sibling of traditional media.

"Online incorporates the strengths of many of the traditional media," he says.

"All we offer is the same as the paper, text and pictures, but 110,000 people look at it each day.

"It is instantaneous. Radio is still on the edge because you can have someone on the end of the phone talking, but when it goes on the web it's written down with pictures and links, so it is more complete.

"Because newspaper is text based it is all on the record and you don't get any of the 'I heard this thing on the radio but I'm not quite sure...'

"Like newspapers, we have the space to develop a story. We can run a 5000-word story.

"But online can go beyond a paper. There is no page count, there's room for anything. You can keep on going down the page.

"Online you have the contents indefi-

nitely. People can search for things more effectively using our search engine rather than sorting through piles of the *Herald*.

"Neither broadcast nor newspapers have world-wide access. But people all over the world are reading the *New Zealand Herald* and other online newspapers because they stumble onto headlines when using search engines."

It is these aspects that are presenting a serious threat to the traditional media market.

One of the most persuasive arguments in the battle of old versus new media is the changing use of media.

Robert Pittmann, chief executive officer of America Online, says people will be attracted to information that is easily accessible.

"What's winning here is content that is more convenient," he says.

"I'm sure some people don't bother to buy the paper any more. They read it on the web," says Sanderson.

"People need time to make it worth while to pay for the whole paper, but to get the top three headlines for the day it's better just to go to a website," he says.

Taking this one step further is the

advent of RSS (Real Simple Syndication) feeders, where readers can choose what kinds of news they want delivered to their email inbox from a variety of news sources.

One example of this is FishWrap, set up by students of Massachusetts Institute of Technology to explore the possibility of a personalised newspaper.

Profile keywords are used to construct a daily news and information site from news stories filed into the database from Associated Press, Boston newspapers, Knight-Ridder and Zagats Restaurant Guide.

However, this brings us into the real argument that – despite all the new technologies, capabilities, media and information options that online journalism presents – it may not be the ideal option it is sold as.

Clifford Stoll, an engineer and author of the book *Silicon Snake Oil*, says although the internet is sold as delivering information, it is really delivering data.

"Unlike data, information has utility, timeliness, accuracy, a pedigree. Editors serve as barometers of quality, and most

of the editors' time is spent saying no," he says.

Norman Pearlstine, editor-in-chief of *Time* magazine, agrees with the need for moderation on the internet.

"When you buy the *New York Times* or the *New York Post*, you commit to a predictable quality of information.

"You understand what you are getting. We're not yet sure of consistent standards on the internet."

The foundations of print journalism were laid when Johann Gutenberg first published the *Bible* on the printing press in the 15th century.

Sanderson says that in some areas print is still the master and online media is the student struggling to learn its ABCs.

"Newspapers have flexibility in how they display content. Online you have to squeeze every story into the same template. Papers can have one story or five or one big picture."

"Online is locked down and constrained. You are not going to remake a front page for one event. You would spend the rest of your life debugging the site.

"Newspapers are very good on complex graphics if they are trying to explain something. We don't have the ability to give that much detail easily."

When comparing online and traditional media it seems the jury is still out, and it is likely to remain that way until one can claim domination of the market.

"It's changing with generations," says Sanderson.

"Yes, for my parents reading a website would be vastly more difficult than walking down to the letterbox to pick up the newspaper. But for me walking into my study and wriggling the mouse is a lot easier than having to walk to the letterbox."

— Fiona Peat



Podcasting: it's journalism for the masses

Podcasting, a new means of publishing audio and video broadcasts on the internet, is the latest development in an online media revolution, according to *NetGuide* magazine editor Nigel Horrocks.

Podcasting enables anyone with digital recording equipment and internet connection to distribute their audio and video creations to a potentially global audience.

To listen to a podcast, you use podcatching software, such as iPodder or Doppler to identify the podcast's internet address (URL) and download it. You then copy it to your digital media player and sync it to your portable music player.

You can even choose to subscribe to your favourite podcasts so your podcatching software automatically downloads any new material that becomes available.

Unlike "traditional" internet streaming, which requires users to watch or listen to a broadcast in real time, podcasting allows you to listen to it whenever and wherever you want.

By subscribing to various podcasts you can create your own radio programme or playlist.

"Every morning I download amateur radio broadcasts and listen to them on my iPod on my way to work," says Horrocks.

Podcasting, blogs and other forms of citizen journalism enable ordinary people to become media programmers.

"The doors of entry to journalism have been opened to people with no training," Horrocks says. "It means more voices can be heard and more viewpoints expressed."

Although podcasting's initial appeal was that it allowed ordinary people to distribute their own radio shows, these days it is also being used to distribute videos, commentaries, educational material, speeches...

Horrocks says podcasts are proving a great breeding ground for creativity.

"Many people are trying interesting things, like recording conversations on

buses. And it's a great way for unsigned bands to get their music out there."

But it's not just wannabe DJs and musicians riding this new technological wave. Major media corporations around the world, such as BBC Radio, National American Radio, Australia's ABC News and a few New Zealand radio stations are also getting in on the act.

Although podcasting is not yet quite as ubiquitous in New Zealand as it is overseas, Horrocks believes it's only a matter of time before it will be.

Of course, people need high-speed internet connections to access podcasting. This is why, says Horrocks, the increase in recent years of people with broadband has coincided with the success of online media.

While podcasting has been lauded by some as a threat to conventional radio, Horrocks says podcasting is more likely to revitalise than ruin the industry.

He cites Jack FM, a new radio format rapidly gaining popularity in the United States.

Jack stations' eclectic playlists are har-

vested from a library of about 1200 songs – about six to 12 times the number of songs most conventional FM radio stations feature.

Most Jack stations do not have real-life DJs, relying on a continuous stream of music or computerised "DJs".

"The programmes resemble an iPod on shuffle," says Horrocks.

Whether or not Jack-type stations catch on here, Horrocks says conventional radio stations will have to accommodate podcasts, just as newspapers and magazines have had to change to accommodate blogs.

In recent months, major media organisations have included amateur podcasts on their websites simply because the podcatchers have captured useful information their own staff haven't.

Horrocks doesn't pretend to know where this media revolution will lead. His only certainty is that the media landscape will change.

"A year ago no one had heard of podcasting. The digital revolution is changing so fast no one can make any safe predictions."

— Lorna Thorner

