



# Missing the Link:

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Why Old Media still doesn't get the Internet

*Taylor Owen and David Eaves*

This month, prominent political blogger Josh Marshall was awarded a prestigious George Polk journalism award. While recognition for his blogging comes as no surprise, that the accolades originated in the hollowed halls of traditional print journalism marks a notable moment in the decade old battle between “old” and “new” media. Today the battle is still being fought increasingly, but quietly, between the print and online departments of newspapers around the world. But the divide between “new” media of blogs and “old” media of newspapers is largely mythical and increasingly being bridged by practitioners like Marshall. What we can learn from them is essential to the future of print journalism.

However hard newspaper editors and journalism may complain, it is clear that blogging is here to stay, and that the practice of journalism has only benefited from their proliferation. Unfortunately, despite its exponential growth, blogging continues to be misunderstood by both technophiles and technophobes. For the past decade the former have maintained that blogs will replace traditional journalism, ushering in an era of citizen-run media. Conversely, the latter have argued that a wave of amateurs threatens the quality and integrity of journalism—and possibly even democracy. Both are wrong.

Blogging is not a substitute for journalism. If anything, this past decade shows that blogging and journalism are symbiotic and mutually beneficial. Admittedly, many in the newspaper industry have been loath to embrace emerging technologies. Most have been reluctant and highly conservative in adopting online strategies. As a result, few have generated sustainable revenue or successfully fought the decentralization of news content creation.

The consequences of this misguided strategy were exacerbated in a recent issue of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, in which Robert Kuttner, a seasoned traditional media hand, argued that a print-digital hybrid model, one that simply transitioned content and advertising assets online, would save the newspaper business. This approach, and the highly flawed analysis that underlies it, misses the tremendous opportunity embodied in internet-based journalism. What’s more, in lieu of bridging the tired paradigmatic chasm between the rhetorical positioning of old and new media, Kuttner’s article turned a blind eye to the many challenges facing the world of print journalism, further exacerbating the false dichotomy.

Worse still, if this is best thinking traditional media has on how to reconcile traditional print and New Media, then the entire industry is in worse trouble than most people already fear. Kuttner’s piece offered no innovations and his grand prescription—the print-digital hybrid

model—simply advocated reproducing print content on proprietary web pages and adjusting the advertising revenue model. This however is *already* the online strategy of almost every major daily. In most newspapers the online revenue generated by this strategy has yet to compensate for falling print revenue, and it remains far from certain that it will succeed, especially once print media's core market, baby-boomers, stop buying newspapers. To avid news consumers such as ourselves, his central message—that times are tough, but don't worry, we're on the right track—is deeply troubling.

This piece is thus an effort to bridge the divide perpetuated by Kuttner's analysis. To both remind the newsprint journalism industry of the challenges posed by New Media as well as articulate the enormous opportunity being created. It is one thing for an outgoing generation of media barons to misunderstand New Media and what it means for their business. It is quite another to have this perspective shape the choices of a generation whose careers will be shaped by New Media.

The future of traditional news institutions in a New Media world is far from certain, but they can survive if they correctly identify their core competencies and are ruthlessly disciplined in shedding or altering everything else. New Media is good at many things, but not everything. Our research indicates that the New Media's weakest attributes happen to be the things traditional media does best. However, by failing to understand and focus on these core competencies, traditional media risks losing sight of its real value. Capitalizing on their narrow, but critical, utility could provide direction to the struggling industry.

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So what is going on? And what should traditional media do about it? In order to ascertain this we will first outline seven lessons traditional newspapers can learn from New Media and the internet. Charting this landscape will enable us to identify the core competencies of the newspaper industry. Drawing from these lessons we will then outline three principles that must frame a competitive strategy to ensure traditional media's survival. Despite fatalistic predictions, traditional media's survival is both important and possible. However, success will require substantially more dramatic changes than those prescribed by traditionalists such as

Kuttner.

## SEVEN LESSONS FROM THE NEW MEDIA LANDSCAPE

### *1. Blogging is a medium, not a practice.*

All too often, those in the print media pejoratively label everything written online as ‘blogging’ and consequently dismiss the competition as a mob of ‘amateurs.’ Unfortunately, this definition is premised on both quantitative and qualitative errors.

The quantitative problem is a miscount of the competition. The numbers certainly sound impressive: over 70 million blogs, 120,000 created daily and 1.5 million new posts every day (about 17 posts per second). This is a tremendous amount of content. But not everyone who publishes content on a blog competes with journalists. Blogging is merely a medium, a tool that allows content to be published online easily, and at little or no cost.

Consider another medium, such as books. Hundreds of thousands of non-fiction books are written every year. Do print journalists compete against all these books? Obviously not. Some, although relatively few, are journalistic in nature. But even here it is unclear if print journalists *compete* against these books or if journalistic books increase interest in journalism and the print media. Like books, blogs are merely a medium. Journalism, in contrast, is a practice that some people use the medium of blogging (or books) to disseminate. It is true that blogging may facilitate a different type of journalism (as do books), but let’s not confuse the medium with the content. Blogs are just the new pen and paper; it’s what’s written on them that matters.

Needless to say, not everyone with a blog is producing journalistic content. As the notorious ‘Gawker’ website once declared—“until we get off our asses and out of bathrobes, we are not competing against journalists, we are just making fun of them.” More importantly, it isn’t helpful to try to distinguish between journalistic and non-journalistic *bloggers* because, as we shall see later, people don’t read blogs like they do newspapers. What is relevant is the number of journalistic *posts*. Consequently, the first quantitative cut should be one that reduces the total number of posts down from the total published to those that are journalistic. While this number is unknown, it is certainly less than the 1.5 million (and growing) daily posts. However, even a relatively small fraction (say 1%) would still yield 15,000 posts, a number that rivals the total number of newspaper articles published daily in most major industrialized countries. Journalists may not be competing directly against millions but they do have some

new competition. Furthermore, an increasing number of those writing online are out of their pajamas by noon.

The qualitative error made by print journalists is to assume that they are competing against the average quality of online content. There may be 1.5 million posts a day, but as anyone whose read a friend's blog knows, even the average quality of this content is poor. But this has lulled the industry into a false sense of confidence. As Paul Graham describes: "In the old world of 'channels' (e.g. newspapers) it meant something to talk about average quality, because that's what everyone was getting whether they liked it or not. But now you can read any writer you want. Consequently, print media isn't competing against the average quality of online writing, they're competing against the best writing online...Those in the print media who dismiss online

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Take, for example, our previous number of 15,000 journalistic blog posts (again, this being 1% of all blog posts published daily). Now let's say that only 1% of those posts, or 150 posts, are of high quality. This is more articles than in an average issue of the *New York Times* (NYT). Just as the NYT does not compete against every local newspaper editorial, it is not competing against all journalistic content on the internet. It is competing against the very best content on the web. The problem, as we shall discuss shortly, is that unlike a world in which people only read their local newspaper, the internet makes it easy for large numbers of people to locate and access the very best online content, no matter how obscure. More interestingly, the early adopters

of blogging tended to be technically savvy people. As more mainstream writers and ordinary citizens take to blogging, the range, diversity and quality of posts will improve. Finally, the number of blogs doubles every 300 days. This problem will not go away. The situation is going to get much worse, or depending on your perspective, much better.

## *2. Aggregators and bloggers are the new editors.*

Many have correctly pointed out that generations Y and Z will become their own news 'editor-

aggregators'. This is a critical development and important insight, but one that has dramatic implications. There is really no reason to believe that aggregators will respect the division between the online versions of print media and the rest of the "wild web." As David Weinberger points out in *Everything is Miscellaneous*, what makes the web interesting, compelling and democratic is that data doesn't get organized based on where it came from, but on how interesting each individual reader believes it to be.

This is a perfect example of how traditional media's model blinds it to an effective reassessment of its utility and strategy. Accepting the reality and implications of online aggregators would mean accepting that the role of newspaper editor is under threat. For many traditionalists, this challenge to the pantheon of journalism is simply too much to bear. However, competition in news aggregation is real, evolving rapidly, and transformative.

This new competition can be seen as two interrelated, but quite different internet-based phenomena: Aggregators and bloggers. Algorithm-based aggregators, such as Google News and Delicious, and human-run websites such as Drudge and The Huffington Post provide powerful alternatives to the newspaper editor. Indeed, as Paul Graham notes, "The NYT front page is a list of articles written by people who work for the *New York Times*. Delicious is a list of articles that are interesting. It is only now that you can see the two side by side that you can see how little overlap there is." This is, of course, subjective. The implication, however, is dramatic. Aggregators, both human and algorithm, don't care where content is from and so can draw it from virtually anywhere. This capacity to ferret out the best content from across the web and deposit it on your computer screen begs the question: if you could choose to read the best articles drawn from a pool of 100 authors vs. a pool of 1.5 million, which would you choose? Can any editor compete?

The second threat is the very networked nature of the internet itself. The web's interconnectedness allows news items to spread virally as opposed to centrally. Younger readers increasingly read articles found through links from blogs. This does not mean that the news itself is written by bloggers, although that too is increasing. Instead, it is their community, not the editor of the *New York Times*, that influences their reading. This is not simply a quirk of the net. It turns out that readers like

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choosing their editor. And now, because the blog format allows readers to forge relationships with authors/editors, they can. Take for example, our relationship with the prominent political blogger Andrew Sullivan. While we have never met in person, we know his perspectives; we know his biases; and we have lived through his daily struggle with the Iraq war. It is this personal connection that keeps us, and his 80,000 daily readers, coming back. Who we don't know is the editor of the *New York Times*. Indeed, the top-down dictatorial process of traditional media establishments is designed to prevent us from ever getting the chance to. As everyone knows, traditional media editorials are anonymous.

Consumers now have a choice. Use aggregators and a blogger community to draw content from over 1.5 million posts every day, or rely on faceless editors who can choose from 50 pieces. This isn't some hypothetical world of tomorrow. Aggregators are the new editors.

### *3. Free markets are good fact checkers.*

One oft-repeated critique of blog journalism is that it is not subject to the same rigorous fact checking procedures used by newspapers. Without experts, researchers and editors, how can online content be trusted? Journalists accustomed to the structured and hierarchical nature of a newsroom probably can't imagine how the 'wild web' can yield reliable content. However, it turns out that the internet's principle attribute—its 'open source' nature—makes it a surprisingly good fact checker.

The point is not to undervalue the utility of traditional fact checking. There should be no doubt that the mechanisms in place in most major media outlets results in a product that is far more trustworthy and accurate than information available on the average blog. However, there are also limits to the single-source fact checking model. As good as a 21 year-old Ivy League intern

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may be, they'll never be as clever or as knowledgeable as the combined fact checking capacity of thousands of readers. The internet provides both the research tools to fact check and the technological opportunity for knowledgeable readers to comment on other people's work.

Open source fact checking works in two interconnected ways, both bottom-up. First, anyone anywhere can comment on a piece, analyzing contradictions, typos and factual errors. In short, an online writer's audience is also

her editor and fact checker, providing feedback with which she can update and refine her work in real time. Second, good posts filter their way up through the blogosphere. In order to make it to the large blogs and aggregators a piece must first be seen by hundreds, if not thousands of readers—all of whom are evaluating, judging and commenting. The process is brutal, ruthless and market driven. However, once a post starts getting picked up, its readership might reach tens if not hundreds of thousands of readers within days. In such cases the content is generally as compelling and accurate as what can be found in any major daily. This is the world of open source fact checking, and it may be the most undervalued attribute of New Media. Together, we would argue that these two pillars of open source quality control rival the best professional fact checkers.

Media companies need to adapt to what many software engineers have known for years—much of the best, and most reliable, content is now open source. Much like the large entrenched dinosaurs of the software world, traditional media has been hesitant to embrace the clear merits of this model. Online collaboration is significantly more than the sum of its parts. It creates, promotes and filters content better than any one source ever could. It may be messy to the uninitiated, but it works.

#### *4. Newspapers: great creators, poor distributors.*

Newspaper editors generally feel confident that given the opportunity most journalists would prefer a column in a traditional daily than on an online-only forum. This confidence rests on the credibility of traditional media, which allows writers to put a recognizable brand on their work and provides them access to the marketplace and to a particular audience. But the online world is maturing. Already eight of the top fifty news web pages are New Media sites. The credibility gap is shrinking. Over time writers will gravitate to those places that either pay the best, or more likely, ensure their work reaches the most (or the right) eyeballs. Andrew Sullivan, the aforementioned blogger, epitomizes this future. In response to an opinion piece we wrote in 2007, he wrote, “What would I rather be doing? A lucrative op-ed column or a blog that racked up 3 million page-views this month? Put it this way: no regrets.”

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Sullivan is merely pointing out a cold hard fact: the distributive capacity of the printed page, or a restricted newspaper's website, is a fraction that of New Media sites. Even newspapers that do share their content freely, such as the *Washington Post*, will remain burdened by their expensive print assets and won't be as financially competitive as their New Media competitors. Compared to the online world, newspapers have a costly and severely limited distribution model.

For over a century newspapers have vertically integrated content creation with content distribution. Benjamin Franklin pioneered this strategy in America's early years. As a printer he forged one of North America's first media empires, publishing content such as news stories, almanacs or flyers—to ensure his printing presses were constantly busy, and profitable. Prior to the internet this integration also made sense to consumers. Readers needed a channel (in this case the newspaper) which made content easy to digest. The challenge is that newspapers have performed these two functions—creation and distribution—for so long that people often conflate them, believing them to be a single activity. They are not.

The *New York Times* is a great content creator. But what advantage does it gain by continuing to serve as a distributor? In the old model, distribution channels competed against one another, so it made sense to monopolize your channel's content. Today, there is only one channel, the internet, and it is hard to imagine anyone owning it. It is true that alternative channels, like the newspaper, remain familiar to some people, and is probably still more portable than the best electronic devices, but these are not long-term advantages. As older readers stop reading and better, more portable technology allows people to surf the internet from anywhere, what is the competitive advantage of being a newsprint distributor? The answer is... very little. Investing in the print medium (or worse, creating custom mini-computers that can only read your content, as the *New York Times* has done recently) is an expensive distraction.

It is understandable that newspapers lament the passing of this old, cozy world. But they should take heart. Distribution was always exogenous to traditional media's real value. New Media may deliver content more effectively and efficiently than newspapers, but then, why would traditional media *want* to compete on distribution? All those resources, employees and infrastructure can now be redirected towards what newsrooms really care about—finding, reporting and talking about the news. If you are a newspaper that loves the news, and you are willing to let go of distribution, this is the start of a golden era.

### *5. Objectivity is condescending*

Blogs do more than just report or opine. They often do both. For traditional journalists this is an anathema—something they claim they never do.

For better or worse, many readers want more than objective facts. They want informed, intelligent commentary mixed in with their news. The print newspaper's practice of separating editorial from objective news was never real or viable. Readers, particularly the media savvy Gen Y and Z, are smart enough to see through and appreciate the perspective and voice that comes with bias and opinion. Maintaining the illusion of objectivity requires a control over production and dissemination that is unnecessary, time-consuming, and expensive.

The NYT's decision to put opinions behind paywalls represented a misunderstanding of this artificial division between news and editorial. It also took them out of the online discourse. An elitist attitude may rationalize that this doesn't matter, and to a certain degree, it may not. But the move is akin to saying, "I'm leaving this crowded discussion for my own private room so that I can be better heard." The underlying assumption is that intelligent content can't be heard in a crowded room where everybody is screaming. But we've already discussed how bloggers and aggregators are excellent at locating the best content on the web. Thus, as online political discussion became increasingly important, the NYT's isolation ensured it became less and less influential. Unsurprisingly, the NYT's opinion pieces are no longer behind a paywall.

Sealing off content, particularly opinion pieces, makes little sense for other reasons too—talk is cheap. Which only begs the question: why pay for it? People will only buy content they can't get elsewhere. This means highly specialized, niche content that is constantly updated. It's not clear what that space is going to be, or even if it will exist. But it is probably safe to say that political commentary isn't going to be in it.

Generation Y is perhaps the most news savvy generation in history. Having grown up inundated with media, its members naturally pull out and separate editorial content. This means they don't have a problem with it being there in the first place. Indeed, this accounts, in part, for the popularity of *The Daily Show*, which regularly mocks the editorial perspective Old Media pretends doesn't exist in its news pieces. Like Jon Stewart, Gen Yers simply do not accept the pretense that media is objective. Now that *is* condescending.

6. *Nostalgia is not a growth model*

Only baby boomers are nostalgic for newsprint, and they are not a growth industry. Sure, there are some holdouts. But these are generally students of the Columbia Journalism School, not those they hope to write for. More seriously, media traditionalists often cite two examples—incidental reading and ideological objectivity—to explain why physical newspapers will and should remain the main distribution channel for print media. However, the purported value of physical newsprint simply doesn't hold up to scrutiny.

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Scanning the pages of a newspaper is indeed a virtue. It exposes readers to articles they might not seek out, broadening their range of news and opinion. However, this process is no different from what happens online. Links, aggregators and email steer readers to a far broader range of articles than they could conceivably imagine by simply flipping through a newspaper. Indeed, the internet enables this incidental reading better than newspapers. Take the BBC website, where any given article has links to related pieces both across the internet and in different sections of the site. A political article might cause a reader to click on a link to a related piece in the Science/Nature or Africa

sections. Once there, they are confronted with an array of 'incidental' headlines. The tunnel syndrome argument simply doesn't hold weight.

The other oft-cited example of the value of newspapers is that they prevent readers from falling into self-selected ideological silos. The argument follows that, when left to their own devices, innocent readers will gravitate towards the poles of their ideological bias. What they need, and should pay for, is a physical entity that provides them with a limited, but 'healthy', range of information.

This argument ignores the fact that many newspapers operate as ideological poles themselves. The *New York Times* clearly favors the left whereas the *Wall Street Journal* appeals to the right. More importantly the internet, unlike print media, provides tools to overcome these silos. Not all content delivered through an aggregator will be consistent with a reader's perspective (indeed, one can imagine a customized aggregator that specifically targets news pieces that

challenge its readers). More importantly, the internet gives readers the freedom (and safety) to select content from a broader range of perspectives. Most liberals wouldn't be caught dead with an issue of the *National Review* in their hands, and when was the last time you saw a pinstriped Wall Streeter reading the *Nation*? But thousands of liberals read the Corner (the group blog of the *National Review*). This is because the ease, speed and anonymity of the web *stimulates* exploration that the physical world prohibits. In addition, many posts are written in response to other pieces, to whom they inevitably link (imagine the *Nation* sending readers to *National Review!*). Neither traditional nor New Media can single handedly mediate or resolve political difference, but at least New Media links the poles to one another, rather than creating isolated playgrounds where pundits can safely take shots at one another.

While sometimes seen as nostalgia, these arguments are simply a proxy for a deeper set of concerns felt by elites who fear the day the unkempt masses are finally freed to choose and read what they will. Controlling your customer has a never proven to be a sustainable business strategy, and for a business deeply concerned with freedom, it is disturbingly anti-democratic.

### *7. Newspapers' decline is a sign of democracy, not a symptom of its death*

A recent Columbia Journalism School panel on the future of the newspaper industry ended with a solemn and bold pronouncement: "If print newspapers disappear, it will be a fundamental threat to our democracy."

Such statements made many of New Media participants roll their eyes—and for good reason. Are newspapers really a precondition for democracy?

This type of irrational hyperbole discredits traditional media's claim to rational objectivity. Newspapers are not a precondition for democracy—free speech is. This is why the constitution protects the latter and not the former. It is also what makes the internet important—it provides a powerful new medium through which free speech can be transmitted. As we argued earlier, the internet offers its own democratic way of filtering content, allowing what people think is important, relevant and interesting to be aggregated and heard. It may be messy and far from perfect, but then, so is democracy.

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Newspapers, in contrast, are many things, but they are not democratic. They are hierarchical

authoritarian structures designed to control and shape information. This is not to say they don't provide a societal benefit—their content contributes to the public discourse. However, how is having a few major media outlets deciding “what is news” democratic, or even good for democracy? The newspaper model isn't about expanding free speech; it is about limiting it to force readers to listen to what the editor prescribes. When is the last time you had an opinion piece or letter published in a newspaper? There are many more voices in America that deserve to be heard aside from Ivy League educated editors and journalists.

The “necessary for democracy” argument also assumes that readers are less civically engaged if they digest their news online. How absurd. Gen Y is likely far more knowledgeable about their world than Boomers were. The problem is that Boomers appeared more knowledgeable to one another because *they all knew the same things*. The limited array of media meant people were generally civically minded about the same things and evaluated one another based on how much of the same media they'd seen. The diversity available in today's media—facilitated greatly by the internet—means it is hard to evaluate someone's civic mindedness because they may be deeply knowledgeable and engaged in a set of issues you are completely unfamiliar with. Diversity of content and access to it, made possible by the internet, has strengthened our civic engagement.

Far from a prerequisite, traditional media is to democracy what commercial banks are to capitalism. Are banks necessary for capitalism? No. Have they sped up its growth and made it more effective? Definitely. But could some better model emerge that performs their functions more effectively? Absolutely. Much like claiming “you'll never get by without me” rarely reignites a relationship, fearmongering and threatening your customers won't bring readers back. This approach merely demonstrates how scared old media has become of its readers, their free speech, and the type of democracy they want to build.

## **CARVING A NICHE: THREE STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES FOR THE NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY**

This article is not the first, nor will it be the last, to aggressively critique traditional media. However, unlike the work of our techno-utopian contemporaries, our critique should not be seen as a jubilant celebration of a dying industry. Traditional media has served society well, and with the right attitude and adjustments, could continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Unfortunately, there is no magic bullet that can guarantee the success of the newspaper industry. The internet will create a broader, more diverse market than ever imagined, and the strategies necessary to succeed within it will need to be equally diverse. That said, based on the seven lessons outlined above, we believe that any successful initiatives will be bound by three principles.

*Principle One: Concentrate On the Core*

To be successful in this new era, print media may be forced to make a choice: Are they content creators or distributors? For many traditional media institutions the default choice has been distributor. Content has been outsourced to freelancers and the newswires. That is okay; distribution is a valid choice, particularly for more local newspapers. However, this choice also comes with significant risks. The newspaper medium may be relevant for another 20 years, but beyond that, what is currently a steady decline will likely turn into a cliff—and that’s presuming some cheap new portable technology isn’t adopted sooner.

The more exciting possibility is for newspapers to transform themselves into “real” aggregators. As was discussed earlier, newspapers are already, in essence, news aggregators. They just limit what they aggregate to staff writers, available freelancers and what they pull off the wires (which is pretty generic). Why not draw content from across the web?

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If, however, traditional media institutions want to become creators, then they must create an exit strategy from distribution. This should be welcome news. Good newspapers have always been defined by the quality of their newsroom, not the quality of their distribution network. For example, the *New York Times* is known because it provides a high baseline starting point for content—a quality guaranteed by its brand. Non-branded content can get to this level of quality, and even surpass it, but it takes time for a piece to filter up through the internet’s open source fact-checking process. In the internet era, this is an advantage. What a newsroom can do is “elevate the starting line.” They can create reliable content that is branded as fact checked and sourced, faster than anyone else.

Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel have remarked that “[i]n the end, the discipline of verification

is what separates journalism from entertainment, propaganda, fiction, or art.” We agree. But this only gets journalists in the game. They still have to perform once there. And this means participating in the open source evolution of content. Newsrooms should supply content that others can use or build upon. Imagine a news article that a journalist manages for 2-3 days, posting good comments and redrafting the piece once or twice to reflect new information and corrections. This is a remarkably different model of content management, but it would likely be far more engaging. To succeed, though, traditional media will also have to both respect its readers and open up.

*Principle Two: Respect the Long Tail of News*

In an era of web traffic based measures of advertising and readership success, it must be asked, if hits are the sole metric, then why not feature soft porn on the *New York Times* website? The answer, of course, is that the *New York Times* is in the business of news, and pornography is not news. However, the line between entertainment and news is becoming increasingly blurred, and is in part driven by the highly flawed most-emailed or most-read article rankings that most newspapers include on their web pages. These measures assume that all internet users are the same, and that the goal of any site is to attain traffic from anywhere. This is simply not the case. The goal of a newspaper should be to improve the quality of their traffic, not the quantity. This means, first and foremost, resisting the temptation to gain hits by adding tabloid content to their websites.

A few points are important. First, quality reporting is increasingly a “long tail” business. The days of a handful of papers and networks dominating the market are over. What does this mean? As we have discussed, readers will reach a newspaper’s website through a vast number of mechanisms, including searches, recommendations, links, and so on. If the paper’s article is good, they may go somewhere else on the site. But the odds are that they will only return if there is another unique piece of content on the site that attracts them. This means that reported articles online are competing for readers in a very different way than a print paper. They want the person interested in the specific article, not the person interested in the entire paper. Luckily, there are many more people who want to read one article than would commit to reading an entire paper. The strategy for targeting them is completely different, though.

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Dumbing down one's content to increase traffic will only drive these long tail news seeking readers away. Worse, such a strategy forces papers to compete with entertainment, gossip and tabloid sites, which receive ten times their traffic.

Second, advertisers are increasingly concerned about the quality rather than the quantity of traffic. Again, if the sole valuation of ads on a newspaper's website is number of eyeballs, then they will lose out to the hundreds of sites that will always receive far more traffic. Competing against the Google homepage for advertising revenue is neither realistic nor an appropriate model, as the two provide entirely different services. It is the quality and specificity of the eyeballs that are newspapers' advantage in the online advertising game, and becoming a tabloid will only degrade that readership.

Third, if the goal is to attract educated readers who value quality reporting (i.e. ideal newspaper customers), then a website needs gatekeepers. In the wild west of the internet, it is links that drive and direct traffic. Good links, from quality sites, will make or break the type of traffic any news site receives. Central to this marketplace of referrals and links are bloggers.

Many newspapers fail to grasp that bloggers are their most avid readers. Bloggers are much more likely to read a newspaper cover to cover (or link to link) than an average, or even above average, reader. Not only does this make them good customers, it makes them important gatekeepers. If you are interested in driving up the quality of eyes that reach your site you'd better be prepared to engage, not alienate them. After all, it's their links that drive traffic to old media's sites and may cause people to (occasionally) buy their newspapers.

Traditional media has for too long treated its readers as uninformed and unintelligent. Most readers, especially younger readers, deserve more respect. What's more, the long tail of news requires it. The print media should stop editing their content down, or silencing distinct voices. The former makes the content less interesting in a world where access to good content is easy. The latter prevents readers from making columnists and reporters part of their network or community. In the day when old media controlled the channel, readers tolerated limiting their connection to a faceless editor. Today, they can have, and therefore want, much more.

Finally, respecting your readers means not trying to scare them into submission. The world has changed; now move on. Over-inflating the role of newspapers serves no one's interests. It distracts journalists and editors from their real work and alienates their readers.

*Principle Three: Be Open*

The power of the internet is its openness. Trying to stay isolated on the internet requires swimming against a torrent. Why not go with the flow?

First, traditional media should keep its content free and accessible. People read what they can link to. By preventing your material from being linked to and read, you are essentially pulling it off the market. To charge for online content, you need to offer something not available in the 1.5 million posts published daily, as well as the free content available in free dailies and New Media sites. This is increasingly untenable.

Second, traditional media needs to become more permeable. The staff writers of the *New York Times*, while certainly talented, are not the beginning and end of news. Pretending that they are is laughable, and their customers know it. Consequently, simply recreating newspapers online won't work. Americans may be interested in living in gated communities, but they don't want to surf within them. Web pages that interlink with others are more likely to be visited because readers will know that in addition to the base content or analysis, they will also be pointed to interesting material, both within the site and outside. Isolated news pages will invariably remain just that—cut off.

Finally, allow your readers to edit and comment. As we mentioned earlier, traditional media has a competitive advantage in elevating the starting line of content quality. However, no matter how esteemed the *New York Times* brand may be, its edge is diminished every second its content remains unedited and in isolation. The brand lets you move your starting line forward, but to maintain your lead, you'll have to let your readers participate in the content's evolution. And why not? It will keep eyeballs on the news page (and consequently the advertising), improve content, cultivate loyalty and build community, all while leveraging an essentially free resource.

It is worth noting that the quintessential counterexample to this strategy is the *Times Reader*. Far from a progressive solution, it is succinctly emblematic of the problem. By remaining closed, both in terms of interconnectedness and the ability to edit, the NYT is trying to create a walled garden in the internet—a (small) place where people can roam around its content virtually. AOL tried this strategy about 15 years ago, and where did it lead them? The problem with walled gardens isn't that they keep the wild internet out, its that they keep their readers trapped in. This misses the whole point of the internet—it is a place where people go who want to roam free and be able to chase after content that interests them. To believe that the NYT can

compete with all other news content would be hubris, if it weren't so naïve.



While the previous section outlines three admittedly broad principles we believe should guide the transformation of the traditional print news industry, they do not provide a prefab template, and for good reason.

The type of transformation necessary for survival in the new media landscape cannot be predefined. It will involve creative solutions that have yet to be developed, using technology that in many instances is on the distant horizon. This unavoidable reality reinforces the need to think about the industry in a fundamentally new and open way. The major newspaper

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***The major newspaper companies must stop acting like Ford, and start behaving like Mozilla.***

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companies must stop acting like Ford, and start behaving like Mozilla. It is only by drawing on the wisdom of crowds, both for content and distribution, that these hierarchical organizations will adapt to an interconnected world.

There should be no doubt that this will require dramatic restructuring and experimentation by established companies who are not used to, or structured for, taking risk. This may very well prove to be the fundamental impediment to the industry's renewal. Ultimately, what makes all this hard is not that the strategy must change (that is hard enough) but that the values embedded in many traditional media institutions need to evolve. A new operating philosophy is required.

What is encouraging is that these values aren't necessarily new to either journalism or the media industry—in fact, they are the very principles upon which American newspapers have been founded for over 300 years. While these values have remained important, they have increasingly been offset by the business demands of a centralized and closed distribution model. The principles that we feel are required for success in the new media world (focusing on quality content, respect for readers, and openness) are not new. This stuff is in your DNA. The internet allows us to go back to the beginning. Hurray.

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