

# Configuring convergence

Southern African websites  
looking at American experience

by  
Guy Berger

New Media Lab  
Department of Journalism and Media Studies  
Rhodes University  
Grahamstown 6140  
South Africa

## **Configuring convergence**

Southern African websites looking at American experience

Isbn: 0-86810-379-9

September 2001.

Author: Guy Berger

E-mail. G.Berger@ru.ac.za

[Http://journ.ru.ac.za/staff/guy/](http://journ.ru.ac.za/staff/guy/)

Publisher: New Media Lab

Department of Journalism and Media Studies

Rhodes University

Grahamstown 6140

South Africa

The author expresses gratitude to:

Roland Stanbridge for my first web inspiration;

Rhodes University and Prof Ian Macdonald for my sabbatical research leave on which this work is based;

The Fulbright Commission for my sabbatical scholarship to the USA;

Richard Cole and Richard Beckman for hosting me at University of Chapel Hill, North Carolina;

The National Research Foundation for funding this publication;

Fern Greenbank for proof-reading;

Jeanne Berger for encouragement and support.

# Configuring convergence

Southern African websites looking at American experience

## Contents:

Preface	5
1. Quest for a King	7
2. Companies converging	27
3. Business models for news websites	36
4. New media, old media relations – negotiating separation or union	63
5. The multi-skilling debate	87
6. Supervising your staff – and your seniors	97
7. Using the medium	108
8. Conclusion	135
Bibliography	142



# Preface

I want the Web to win. Africa's news sites on the Internet need to succeed and survive. They're a small guarantee against global marginalisation, and a critical intersection across our continent's domestic divides.

But the outlook is not good. At a conference I went to in Berkeley in April 2001, a venture capitalist had this to say: "If I were to make a speech on when there'll be investment in new media again, it would be a rather short topic." The alarming closures and retrenchments at news websites in the USA are sending scary signals to our fledgling efforts back here.

Starting and growing media enterprises of any sort in African conditions has never been easy. Long starved of investment, our cyberpublishing now faces even greater pressures as old media – newspapers, radio and TV – try to make ends meet under mounting threats. Advertising is shrinking, local costs are rising and currency falls are fuelling the price of imported production factors. Consumers have less cash to spend. Governments are giving even greater problems in some cases.

Will we still be here in the morning, and in what condition?

This booklet suggests the way forward is for new media to converge with selected partners, old media and new.

Here's hoping this helps us make it through the night.

Guy Berger  
Grahamstown, September 2001



# 1. Quest for a King

## *Look over the hill*

Many media have grasped the Net-tle, and been badly stung. But the collapse of dot.coms is not the end of the Internet. Despite the doom and gloom, there's a reconfiguration taking place which will see Internet media survive beyond the crash. That's not a high profile phenomenon, compared to the publicity about the problems of Web-ventures. But it's interesting to re-wind to understand how people are reacting at present, and why exaggerated hopelessness today has supplanted the excessive hype of yesterday.

Three years back, when new media was still on the rise, it seemed that old media, and in particular newspapers, were paralysed not only by a perceived fear of imminent death, but also by premature mourning. Initially, there was shock and denial that this upstart Internet could begin to undermine old media: after all, it was simplistically argued, you couldn't read the Web while sitting on the toilet. And how could this medium reach Africa's masses when literacy, electricity and telecoms hadn't spread beyond an elite?

This disbelief about the Web gradually gave way to anger as indeed Internet use escalated globally. Old media then belatedly began to engage with this "Johnny-come-lately", usually by setting up online offshoots. In time, this response evolved into a kind of acceptance, and in many cases substantial resources were committed to establishing a significant presence of old media on the Internet. The future was promising.

Today, far from killing off old media, much of new media appears to be in danger of becoming extinct. And it's now the turn of the webworld to be going through a similar process of premature mourning. To be sure, there is a genuine dread of death amongst many websites. But in some ways, the associated denial and insecurity conceal a deeper fear – not of dying, but of flying. Having come close to crashing, the question is how do you fly, and where do you go, in this current context? The answer, in brief, is that you have to go forwards as part of a flock, and you have to accept that – for a long time yet – old media will stay at the helm. This conclusion comes from looking at the past in order to see the future.

### ***Look back in wonder***

There's a well-known movie theme where an alien from outer space would come to earth and ask to be taken to the leader. In the 1990s, the reverse happened. Earthlings went to cyberspace and posed the same question there. For many years, the mission that confronted Web wanderers was to find the "killer" formula for domination on the Internet. As there was no one in this new frontier but themselves to point out the way, a certain amount of debate developed amongst these cyber-travellers.

### ***Bowing to King Content?***

"Content is king", ventured some visionaries as against a "techie" approach back in 1994 when the WWW first really took off. Content, they said, was what ruled the Internet – good content on a website would make people come. If you were King Content, you could somehow tax these visitors. The system would make money – lots of money. The Web as a whole would grow to become the



biggest media platform the world had ever known. So the websites went up. If you were an "old media" player, you probably waited a while with a dose of incredulity, and then took a belated gamble and put some content online in the hope of joining the royal family. The notion was that if you threw a good-enough party online, people would come. Part of this scenario did come to pass; the guests arrived – but they didn't bring their wallets. They wanted free information. Worse, they also showed themselves to be quick to keep moving on to all the other great gigs just a click away. The question of who would foot the bill remained – so the model lost some of its credibility because it had no sustainable revenue source.

### ***Can community conquer all?***

The analysis then shifted to trying to get visitors to stick around at a site at least long enough to attract some advertising. The question then became one of catering to netizens wanting not "the action" but rather "the interaction". Internet users, it was diagnosed, were not interested in dead content, but in live exchanges with each other, with the people producing the content, and with the content itself. So, if you could build online communities then you had the recipe for success. "Community" was the magic formula for stickability: i.e. the way to get people to spend time with your site and keep coming back even though there were more and more sites to tempt them away. Interactive potential was the name of the game – and the basic equipment was a chat forum. The mission was to make people feel welcome.

Concomitant with the notion of community, there was also a celebration of the individual; sites were exhorted to offer

personalisation and customisation for each person visiting. This was big in the USA, but even in South Africa you could choose your language and local news and weather, plus your interests, on sites like news24.com, mweb.com and i.Africa.com. From a business point of view, all this was seen as the way to get enough consistent eyeballs for advertisers to be attracted. Community did work in many cases, but unfortunately for much old media in southern Africa and elsewhere, very few of their websites were good at doing it. Exceptions were the *Mail & Guardian* online, which still today has a loyal community of online readers who post in its forums and which goes out of its way to prompt participants to respond to topical questions. The *Namibian* online also has a vibrant community section, and also offers e-mail facilities and interactive polls.



Saturday, September 1, 2001 : Published in Windhoek : Republic of Namibia  
[Advertising Opportunities](#) : [Traffic Statistics](#) : [Sign Our Guestbook](#)

## **SFF shooter 'not guilty'**

The advantage of providing e-mail addresses and capabilities, of course, is that this glues users to you by greatly raising their switching costs should they consider seeking the same service from other sites and spending time there rather than with you. This kind of "lock-in" is one of the key new economy principles recommended by Shapiro and Varian in their bestseller, *Information Rules*.

Community was supposed to deliver advertising. And a lot of non-media companies did this better than old media that went online. After a time, it became evident that these upstarts looked as if they would eat the advertising breakfast of traditional media. In the USA, Monster.com became the place to go for job seekers wanting career advice and opportunities. As such, the site was able to corner the market in job advertising. In South Africa, iafrica.com, coming off no previous old media base, was fast building community and pulling in the traffic, with M-web hard on its heels. This kind of development was a spur to many newspapers worldwide to put more resources into web publishing. If important advertising could migrate to cyberspace, newspapers needed to go with it.

This meant for many newspapers, as Tony O'Reilly of Independent Newspapers explained, putting classifieds online not only as an additional income generator, but also as a defensive strategy against predatory sites. In South Africa, newspapers had already suffered from television taking their national display ads, leaving them only with classifieds, retail and some local ads. So, it was not surprising that Independent and Naspers each merged the class-ads across their groups' papers. At one point 40 percent of traffic to Independent's site, www.IOL.co.za, was reportedly going to class-ads (Manoim, 1999). At the News24 site, however, only four percent of the 260 000 unique visitors to the site a month went to the classifieds. And only five percent of the ads on the site were the result of dual purchase with print. Still, elsewhere many newspapers recorded much higher success levels (Bogart, 2001). The overall sentiment in all cases was well put by the *Boston*

*Globe*: "With our own website, we thought we could better protect our all-important classified advertising base. If we were to lose business to online efforts, we said, then let us lose it to ourselves." (Taylor, 1999).

The trouble for everyone is that revenues from classifieds and other online ads have still not been enough for profitability. And the financial bean-counters aren't convinced that community is going to deliver.

Another problem is that "community-creation" does not come cheap. In the USA, Knight-Ridder contracted a community-pages service called Koz, and offered free site hosting to community organisations. But they found very little increase in overall traffic through their newspaper sites to these community pages. As the economic climate worsened, so the deal with Koz came to an end – leaving the danger of alienated community organisations in its wake. Koz itself filed for bankruptcy in 2001.

The overall lesson of the "Community is King" period is that community is indeed a force to be reckoned with, but it still has not succeeded as a revenue model. Across the Web, millions of people came to the communities, but the ad industry remained absent.

### ***Will commerce come out tops?***

In the quest for a sustainable model beyond content and community, a third approach emerged stressing that "Commerce is King". In this view, people would especially come to sites that enabled them to bid and buy. Much more, their transactions could also be a source of revenue for a website's moneymen impatient

for returns. The view was that the Internet was ideally suited to commercial transactions. People could not only read a site's reviews of the latest music CDs, and talk about the topic through online discussion groups; with only a credit card and the click of a mouse, they could also buy the music directly. So, the buzz was to look at applications and utilities: things that people could actually do on, and with, the Web at a price that you could charge, or a cut you could take. The beauty of this model was that it was simultaneously a means to attract people and a way to get money. E-Bay with online auctions is one of the best examples.

This approach refined the notion of community. Along with the notion of broad, "horizontal", communities of potential consumers, there was the recognition of specialised "vertical" ones – in which, for instance, an industrial supply chain could coalesce and trade online. In South Africa, Primedia's company Metropolis set about establishing dozens of these "vertical communities". The plan was that rich specialist news – about chemicals, mining, lab equipment, telecoms, etc. – would attract enough businesses to create a viable transactive network. B2B (business-to-business) communities came of age alongside the B2C ones (business-to-consumers).

But the commerce model, even when refined and combined with the creation of different kinds of communities, had its limits. For media, there was a potential conflict of interests: how could you balance independent editorial coverage of stories (like a new insurance product being launched) when your site stood to gain – or lose – a commission on sales generated by that self-same story or even from a clickable related advert next to it?

More troublesome from a viability standpoint was that people were slow to spend online, in part due to concerns about their commercial security. Further, as even Amazon.com found, it also proved hard to undercut the prices and delivery infrastructure of bricks-and-mortar retail business. Consumers buying books through Amazon had to add on the cost of postage to their orders, meaning there were usually only minor savings to be made on the Web. In addition, for people whose geography meant little inconvenience to go shopping physically, there was less incentive to shop online. Worst of all, in Africa, there were too few people connected to really constitute a market even for the B2B sector. After two years, Metropolis threw in the towel.

### ***Could channels be the key?***

Around the same time as hopes rose about e-commerce being the champ of the Web, another approach was also being tried out. Web-wizards are nothing if not creative, and they came up with yet another conception of what would be boss of the Internet. This was the slogan: "Channel is king". The idea here was to be the portal, or gateway, to the entire Web. It meant that surfers would start via your site when they began surfing. There would be destination sites on the other side of the gateway, but if you controlled the entry channel to get to them, you would have it made. The insight of this model to media companies was the recognition that on the Internet you were not just competing with traditional media operations, but the plethora of business, government, NGO, porn, personal, sports, poetry and every other type of site you could think of. As the portal to all these, everyone would come via your place en route to the Web, and you'd surely then get enough traffic

to attract significant advertising.

Sites like Yahoo positioned themselves to be almost one-stop shops in this regard, offering as much as possible before a person jumped off and proceeded to one of the destinations. Yahoo and its emulators offered everything from weather, e-mail, website-hosting, chat, e-postcards, romance, instant messaging and even news. Certainly, to have the best search engine for the Web was seen as one way of achieving portal status. Internationally, search engine sites proliferated. In South Africa, Johnnic e-Ventures invested in Ananzi.co.za, while M-web tried to breath more life into "Max", its search tool. And an important variation on channels also came into being.



### ***Cyber-cities to catch the cash?***

Going a slightly different route, and aiming at becoming more specialized mini-portals, a lot of American newspapers expanded their online news sites to become components of far broader entities involving city-wide data-bases online. Instead of only being the website of a newspaper like the *Charlotte Observer*, you needed to become Charlotte.com – a much wider information and services business. The same applied to the franchise of Kentucky.com, Atlanta.com, Roanoke.com, etc. The Knighttridder.com initiative in the USA is the most prominent example of this thrust, using its 32 newspapers to create 38 "virtual cities". The model here is that these spatially-referenced portals will not only attract people, but also generate a percentage of – for

instance – tickets to events that are sold through their site.

This was part of the thinking behind the *Boston Globe's* Internet strategy. "We needed to be not just online, but a BIG part of the Internet, particularly in our region. When we began at the Globe, we set a goal for our new media efforts, expressed very simply: to support, defend and extend the franchise of the *Boston Globe*." The company thus decided to build a regional site for news and information built on partnerships with other organisations, even competitors like radio and television stations, other print publications including magazines and newspapers, as well as museums, community resources like libraries, etc. The result was some 60 partners on Boston.com. More than 70 percent of content page views are of content they have developed or got from third parties, as opposed to the newspaper online. (Taylor, 1999).

Not many old media enterprises in southern Africa followed this route, due largely to a lack of vision and a lack of resources. However, in South Africa, the online *Daily Dispatch* positioned itself early on as a cyber-resource to Bed and Breakfast accommodation in East London. Naspers drew content from two local newspapers and promoted local Internet development to initiate a promising virtual village in the Western Cape's Helderberg region.

In Tanzania, ippmedia.com has grouped content from its nine newspapers, plus TV and radio outlets, along with business and tourism databases, in an effort to be the information gateway to the country. These versions of the channel strategy are not without merit. In some cases, they were complemented by a third variation on the theme.





[www.ippmedia.com](http://www.ippmedia.com)

[Local](#)

[World](#)

[Business](#)

[Sports](#)

[ITV](#)

[Radio One](#)

[Special](#)

LOCAL NEWS

WORLD

BUSINESS

SPORTS

TELEVISION

RADIO

SPECIAL

TODAYS WISDOM

## MAIN NEWS - ENGLISH

Sunday, September 02, 2001

### Mitumba shoes force Bora into flip-flop production

The Managing Director of Bora Industries Ltd, manufacturers of flip-flops, has said unless the



### *Carry the signals?*

A related idea to controlling the Channel was to become an Internet Service Provider. Indeed, in the USA, the AOL company for a long period combined its dominant position as an ISP with playing the role, first, of an alternative to the Internet, and subsequently, as a portal to it. The ISP business, however, is a very different one to the media business, and very few media enterprises have taken this route. On the other hand, for an ISP to play the portal card effectively takes content, and so ISPs like M-web in South Africa were quick to buy up the e-M&G, electronic version of the *Mail & Guardian*, as well as to provide access to content produced by newspapers within the Naspers (now Media24) group. Faced with banking group ABSA offering free Internet access in South Africa during 2001, M-web restricted these news content offerings to only those dial-up subscribers on its books, showing the vulnerability of its model – even though ABSA’s model has huge questions about its own viability.

Nonetheless, it is probable that the loss-making e-M&G would not have survived without having been bought by M-web.



The prospects of this kind of situation being widely repeated in southern Africa are limited and so hopes of finding ISP sugar-daddies for the online news sector as a whole are unrealistic. Consumers thus far have been prepared to pay for Internet connectivity, but don't seem very keen to cough up extra for content.

### **Constraints**

There were also limits to thinking that Channel or Cybercity could be king. First, if you're pitching for portal power, there's only space for a restricted number of royals. The whole idea of becoming a portal is that everyone else remains a destination site. But while a portal like Yahoo may succeed in attracting sufficient traffic to attract advertising in viable volumes, what would happen if all the destinations beyond it were in danger of going out of business? The portal model clearly is not a solution for the bulk of them. And even where it worked, the portal model picked up some problems. Thus, some search sites became discredited because

they began to sell key terms and to produce search results based on sponsorship rather than merit. Findings from searches there placed a buyer's site at the top of the list.

In short, the Channel approach is not the final answer to the survival and growth of news on the Web. The biggest problem is that it takes serious resources to construct a portal, and the financial returns have not been commensurate with the spending because the admen have still stayed away. Meanwhile, time is running out to see some financial returns.

### ***CCC is in charge?***

Faced with increasing monetary pressures in the past year, a new emphasis has begun to emerge: "Community-Created Content is King." People sat up and noticed that the music-sharing exchange, Napster, had attracted 60 million users (in the days before US courts ordered the site to clamp down on music piracy). Napster's site itself provided no original content, only a platform through which surfers contributed to the network. The attraction of this model is not only the potential to build very big communities of interest, but also to palm off the costs (and risk) of content production and sharing onto them. Visitors are enlisted not just as consumers of content, but also, indeed primarily, as producers.

In this manner, Amazon.com successfully recruits volunteer book reviewers, although the quality and independence of the contributors is often questionable. A similar basic model operates on slashdot.com, a US-based site for techno-junkies which has even succeeded in getting its editing costs passed on to its fans. There, a quality control process appoints regular users as editors, who in turn vote for what content should go to the top of the site.

This basic model was followed by a host of other sites, like blackplanet.com, plastic.com, epinions.com and more. The ultimate model here is held to be a "self-organising site", where no editorial intervention or oversight is needed at all. Everything is regulated by users interacting with each other via the technology. The limitations of this model, however, were clear from the start. Much as it may serve as a cost-cutting exercise, it does not solve the problem of income generation – especially on sites where it costs money to provide quality content such as professionally gathered and produced news.

It is the case that, as expressed by Irwin Manoim, founder of the online *Mail & Guardian*, journalism needs the Internet, but the Internet does not need journalism. "Why," he asks, "spend hefty resources on journalism when you can reach audiences at almost no cost by knocking up a chat forum?" (Manoim, 2000). That's precisely the point: community-created content is not a model that entails resourcing online journalism.

### ***Who really calls the shots?***

After all these C's – content, community, commerce, channel, cybercity, carrier, CCC – you probably need a good dose of another C ... i.e. Vitamin C. But there is yet one more C which has become stronger even as most other contenders to the throne continue to struggle. The hopefuls have lots of strengths, but they all have a common weakness – also involving a C. In short, their limit is that they are too webCentric. In other words, after this long search to find the King of cyberspace, it has now begun to sink in that the quest was misplaced in the first place. The reason is that the Royal Person is not online.

To find the King of the Internet, we have to look wider than the Web. And what we then discover is that the King is not only boss of cyberspace, but also the Governing Principle of the whole domain of media. In short, he rules supreme across all media – not just the Web. His majesty goes by the name Convergence. If you want to be non-sexist, and if you'd therefore prefer that the monarch be female, no problem. But whether Convergence is to be King or Queen, there is only one sovereign out there. Whether we like it or not, Convergence rules.

It is under the patronage of Number One that the pretenders to the throne – content, community, commerce, etc. – will in time thrive online. But this will not be in isolation of relationships with convergent subjects in the "old" media. This is because the lesser C's nonetheless constitute a crucial part of the royal family and power apparatus (playing the part of prince, princess, duke, baron, etc.), and like His Highness, most also have a presence in both new and old media. What the overall reign of King Convergence means is that they have to work more effectively across the divide. In turn, this means that, increasingly, no single platform, be it online, on-phone, on paper, on-air, will succeed unless it is part of a cross-media empire that pays respect to the royal clan across the board.

### ***Convergence does not kill***

The common thread of convergence is therefore the coming together of things that were formerly apart. It covers all the forms and fruits of interlinking new technologies, processes and practices. Originally, in the context of technology, the term was applied to the connecting of computers and telecommunications –

a joining that ultimately gave birth to the Internet. Convergence applied to new media has sometimes been used to refer to the merging of content, community and e-commerce potential, which is something not possible in old media. More recently, there is a focus on the convergence of contactability and mobility – the Internet "untethered".

What has made this all possible is the digitalisation of data, a phenomenon with profound social significance. According to Arthur Sulzberger Jnr, publisher of the *New York Times*, which has one of the leading sites on the Web, "the digital revolution may well be the most significant convergence between science and daily life since electricity." <http://www.naa.org/presstime/0005/nmi.html>

## The New York Times

ON THE WEB

---

UPDATED SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2001 5:05 PM ET

[Personalize Your Weather](#)

---

Thus, convergence especially in the form of the Internet, but also CDs, digital television and cellphones – has been held responsible for producing a mania for news on demand, massive choice, interactive offerings, and true multi-media. In short, convergence has caused the current extent of converting news into a commodity.

Mesmerised by these developments, many people have thought that the result of all this convergence is that there will in future no longer be distinct media platforms – for example, that television and newspapers will merge on the Internet as a new kind of electronic media animal, turning old media into dinosaurs



contemplating extinction. They're right that there will be such a merger, but they're wrong if they think this will replace the existing divergence where people consume media in separate forms. While convergence brings traditional media together, and while it does create a new one in the form of the Internet, this does not destroy the old. In years to come, there will continue to be times – just as there are now – when it's most convenient to have information received only as sound. At other times, we will continue to find it most efficient to read text and still pictures presented in page layout, especially when we're dealing with abstract information. If you're a couch-potato, you'll long be enjoying full-on entertainment via one-directional, audio-visual programming (Botero, 1999).

One difference ahead may be that these packages of content may come via, and appear upon, different devices to those we know today. They may arrive on handheld cellphone-like devices, electronic paper, intelligent TV sets, or desktop computers. They may ride upon wired or wireless signals. But they will still fulfil the distinctive classic functions of radio, print and television, even though they will all be electronic and digital. For the next 15-20 years, the only main difference from the past will be that in addition to these separate specialised media and their current physical forms, there is now – and will continue to be – the extra option of seeing them all combined in a multi-media package where the sum is greater than the parts, and where the integration of text, graphics, layout, audio and video all contribute to the effect. In short, convergence means true multi-media media, but there will still continue to be the single-emphasis packagings with which we are well familiar.

Contrary to rumours, therefore, the power of convergence does not mean the death of divergence. Even on the Internet, the majority of sites are far from carrying multiple media formats, let alone integrated multi-media. So convergence is not a "killer app". What it does do is stimulate processes like converting content between formats, like radio news for cellphone delivery. And it enables the fusion of formats too. These processes are part of the bigger mission of convergence to co-ordinate and foster co-operation between the distinct media platforms, blending production processes, spreading costs and maximizing revenues across the totality.

### ***New media to old***

In sum, King Convergence rules all media, whether they exist separately or together. And while he won't wipe out the separate sectors, he wants them to collaborate a whole lot more — with each other, and with the funny new Web kid on the block. In fact, the King has even reined in some of the arrogant new media ventures who are now beginning to realise they are not a breakaway medium from "old media". Like the prodigal son, many have been slinking back home, acknowledging that they are not a vanguard of a multi-media universe that will replace everything that came before it. We understandably think that the move of the past five years has been from old media to new, as newspapers and broadcasters have gone online or on cellphone. But a fair amount of new media is now reverse engineering itself to output into old media platforms and formats. Convergence loomed as a catastrophe for old media, heralding their closure or collapse. Not so. Today, while "old" media continue their extension into new



media opportunities and platforms, there's increasingly the case of "new media" expanding back into old platforms – pure websites deciding to start magazines, radio stations, syndication services, etc. This new-to-old is a kind of counter-chronological convergence. Examples of it are:

- In the USA, online magazine Salon.com has launched a radio show.
- Media news website Inside.com, now part of the Brill network, launched a bi-weekly magazine.
- C-Net Web-radio is now also on AM in San Francisco.
- In South Africa, using MP3 files, SAFM puts out on radio an audio programme that is originally produced for the website of the US media foundation, the Freedom Forum.



The underlying regime of convergence decrees that just as newspapers and broadcasters have to acknowledge they are part of a broader news business, formerly Web-only media companies now have to start seeing themselves as part of bigger media enterprises. In the words of expert Nora Paul, formerly of the Poynter Institute, "Mono-media is dead. The creative product of your newsroom is going to multiple platforms. The packaging of the news product has to be multipurpose – for broadcast, the Web, the cell phone, the PDA, the bathroom mirror." (2000a)

### ***Conclusion***

The crisis facing online media has discredited attempts to find autonomous solutions for viable news websites in cyberspace. It has also brought to the fore a far more fundamental tendency –

that of convergence. What this means is that media enterprises – of all types – that until recently were stand-alone single platform operations, are more and more seeking and finding partners in other media companies. And this is a trend that is not going to stop, because it raises the stakes of intra-media competition, which in turn compels even more coming together. Convergence is also gathering momentum in the face of increased competition from non-traditional media companies, and its effect includes closing some of the distance between these and what we usually see as media.

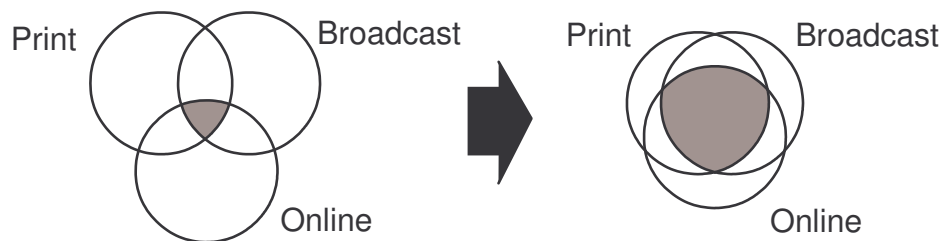
The power of convergence is that while not all distinctions are obliterated, there is a marked coming together. This is often seen only in terms of technology, in the forms of digitalisation and Internet protocols. But it also has a lot of other dimensions — from ownership, revenue, promotions, newsgathering, editing and distribution. It is true to say that while technology makes much convergence possible, it does not cause convergence. Nor does technology exhaust the possibilities for convergence – which is a process much wider than technological considerations, and one which spans collaborative activities where technology is not even a factor. What really drives convergence is not the technical but the economic. If Convergence is King, the Economy is God.

The upshot of this power is that convergence is an unstoppable global trend about interrelationships between formerly separate, and even rival, players. "Convergence is not an experiment; it is the future of the news business, and it's time to prepare for it," says analyst David Cole (Giner, 2001).

## 2. Companies converging

### ***Adding value to the sum of the parts***

Analysts like Juan Antonio Giner (2001) define convergence as the middle phase between diversified media, and integration. For them, *Convergence* represents *co-operation* between print, broadcasting and online. *Integration* is the subsequent phase where there is *fusion* into a single multi-media newsroom powering an "information engine". This is graphically represented as follows:



These distinctions are useful, although this booklet uses the term convergence more loosely to cover the whole spread of relations between different media platforms, from basic alliances through to mergers and fusions. It's a matter of degrees on the same spectrum. Thus, when old media began establishing a presence in cyberspace, this was a form of media convergence – even when they set up websites as separate ventures with scarcely any communication between each institution. When these sites started finding outside partners in order to grow into portals, that too was a form of convergence. But almost independently of these kind of old-new developments, the same quest for partners has been happening in old media itself, i.e. between newspapers, television stations and radio outlets. Convergence, then, is not just

about old and new media; it's about all media. All these collaborations represent an attempt to fight off competition, to cross-promote media holdings, and to try help share costs. They cover revenue sharing, cross-ownerships, content sharing, joint production, and more. The intended rationale is that  $1+1+1 = 5$ .

According to analyst JK Gentry, at February 2001 there were 50 media partnerships and affiliations that fell under the category of convergence taking place in the USA, about half of which were "doing it in a major way". He adds: "It's much more than a trend. It's a movement." (Fung, 2001:154; Wendland, 2001).

### ***Going it alone = going out of business.***

What has highlighted convergence as the law of this period, is the recent widespread pulling back of struggling websites in to their "legacy" parent enterprise. According to analyst Alyson Oldham, "the majority of online publications are currently operating separately at enormous expense and negligible returns. Convergence is inevitable because the economic model behind the separate online operation is unsupportable in the long-term."

This is not only the case with online publications, but also applies to the websites of news broadcasters, for whom one expert recommends closer ties to their parent medium plus partnerships with newspapers and other media in the community. (Bergman, 2001).

Michael Golden of the *New York Times* declares: "We have adopted a new vision based on the fundamental premise that we are serving one audience in a variety of ways. There can no longer be a separate print strategy and a separate broadcast strategy and

a separate Internet strategy. Instead we will be guided by a single strategy that unifies all our actions and focuses on the information marketplace." (<http://www.wan-press.org/ce/previous/1999/congress.forum.99/dl.congress.html>)

In short, the year 2001 could mark the end of news sites thinking about themselves exclusively as Web operations, predicts JD Lasica (2001b). He cites the editor of Inside.com, Michael Hirschorn, who says: "You have to start with a brand that you need to deliver in different forms." To this we can add the observation that while the *New York Times* coined the famous slogan "all the news that's fit to print", nowadays, that newspaper, along with many other media players, is thinking about "all the platforms fit to publish".

With this approach, convergence is not only about media partnerships that are old-old based, nor only about old-new. They include both of these and new-new as well as non-media players. And they operate across a gamut of permutations involving print, TV, radio, Web, cellphone and Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs).

Lisa Rabasca (2001) writes that though the Internet didn't invent convergence, it certainly fuels its spread. She gives the example in the USA of Journal Communications launching Onwisconsin.com which draws content from a newspaper, a TV station and two radio stations. Her point is that once there's sharing of content on the website, it's not a big jump to start sharing content directly between the contributors. As a result, after three months of Web collaboration, old media editors and producers in Wisconsin began exchanging content with each other.

What often jumpstarts this kind of convergence is a change in

ownership. The overall imperative of capitalism tends to be towards convergence of ownership – otherwise known as a tendency towards monopoly or at least oligopoly. In the widest terms, the quest is to own the platforms, the content and the delivery mechanism. This has seen joint ventures such as Microsoft partnering with NBC in setting up a 24-hour news TV station and a very successful website optimised for Bill Gates' Internet Explorer, both branded as MSNBC and working in close tandem with each other. The AOL-Time Warner merger in 2000 is an attempt to leverage the advantages of cable TV pipelines into US homes, combining Internet service provision with a mass of content through this channel.

Internationally, questions are raised about the impact on content when there is central control derived from common ownership. Time-Warner last year unilaterally stopped delivering ABC TV programmes to its cable subscribers. ABC, which is owned by rival Disney, had been arguing for a better programming schedule for Disney programmes that competed head to head with Time Warner programmes on the cable. The dispute highlighted how control of a delivery channel can be used to discriminate against vendors of competing content. It is in trying to avoid this kind of situation that the regulatory authorities in the USA have insisted that AOL-Time Warner not use their pipes into people's homes exclusively for their content. The question of the impact of convergence on content diversity is therefore a real one.

There are limits in many countries on cross-ownership, and this means limits on the extent of convergence. Yet there is still a great deal of partnering and collaboration that can, and does, happen,

short of converged ownership. And in many cases, media companies might not own broadcast and print platforms and content in the same markets, but they still have many different media holdings which offer convergent opportunities. In the case of South Africa's SABC, this giant media enterprise controls content across numerous outlets, all of which it owns. Convergence at SABC has been largely at the level of producing content, where an integrated news operation services numerous channels and where platforms are cross-promoted to audiences. In addition, SABC's reporters have acted in a bi-media capacity, producing for both radio and TV. SABC has also gone outside itself to reflect convergence in a partnership with Vodacom in cellphone audio-news service, Newsbreak, and in SAFM's co-operation with I-Touch in delivering SMS messages promoting the Media@SAFM programme.

### ***Cross promotion***

One of the most common manifestations (and benefits) of convergence is in cross-promotion between a company's holdings, or between partner companies' products. Examples from the USA are:

- At the Sarasota *Herald Tribune*, which partnered with Comcast Cable and started a 24-hour cable TV news channel, there is real benefit. Thus, 39 percent of the paper's readers tune into the TV channel because they read about a story or programme in the newspaper. On the other hand, 30 percent of the TV channel's viewers go to the newspaper to read about a story mentioned on TV. "There is no question that we've extended our reach," says publisher Diane McFarlin. "For me, this is all about technology. Technology gives us the ability to deliver news in different ways and to inform the public better than we ever have before." (Skene, 2000)



- The Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel* began working with the broadcast stations owned by parent Journal Communications. "Because we're sharing, we get more credit," says Editor Martin Kaiser. "They reference us rather than just take our story." He adds that newspaper readers use television as a tip service. "They may hear something and then go to the newspaper because they realize it will have more information. ... I don't see a downside." (Rabasca, 2001)
- Keith Wheeler, an *Orlando Sentinel* deputy managing editor, says his newspaper's recent research has also found that in their partnership with a TV station that one medium helps drive news consumers to other media. (Wendland, 2001)



Again there are questions about how such synergies impact on content such as when cross-promotion begins to drive journalism. This seemed to have been the case even within one medium in the USA with CBS news giving inordinate coverage to the CBS entertainment programme Survivor. Even cross-promotion that is honest upfront raises questions: it can become a form of empty (and ineffective) booster-ism that is based not on the merits of what is being promoted, but on blind corporate loyalty.

The Poynter Institute's Al Tompkins argues further that there's



no real benefit for media consumers in being told by a television station that "tomorrow, the newspaper will report so and so" or to be told by the newspaper that "tonight channel X will report such and such." In his view, the media companies benefit from that kind of cross-promotion, but the customer probably doesn't. The point is arguable, but certainly promotion for promotion's sake is likely to lend credence to his complaint.

And there's another danger. This is that news media's invaluable credibility assets can be compromised when cross-promotion becomes crass commercial sell. As one commentator observed: "They also see using each division as a trampoline to promote each others division. That's not journalism". (Ken Auletta, *New York Times*, 15.3.2000).

Where convergence entails cross-ownership, the quandaries of cross-promotion become even more intense. *Los Angeles Times* TV critic Howard Rosenberg poses the dilemma about his paper being bought by the Tribune company which also owned a local TV station. "If I praise Tribune properties, will it be because I think they're worthy or because we're family, and I have my own financial stake at heart? If I fault competitors of Tribune properties, will it be legit or chauvinism? And conversely, if I'm critical of Tribune properties, will it be deserved, or will I be overcompensating to show my independence?" (Hickey, 2000).

In Dallas, convergence-driven cross-promotion has turned into cross *no motion*. The *Dallas Morning News* used to be accused of being soft in its coverage of a local TV station because both were owned by Belo. Once an actual partnership agreement was signed between the paper and the station, it was decided that there would

be too much of a conflict of interests if the paper criticised TV coverage. On the other hand, it would also be queried if the paper criticised other stations' programming. The result was to drop TV criticism from the paper altogether. Convergence can, after all, kill some things.

Although these kind of controversies are not insurmountable problems, they do show some of the questions around convergence. The King's rule is not entirely benign.

***Conclusion: the issues.***

As will be analysed later in this booklet, convergence is an extremely complex thing – affected by factors like leadership views, ownership structures, and histories of collaboration or rivalry. There are also factors like the compatibility of cultures, type of medium, proximity of enterprise, staff views, and economic viability. Additional matters that are important to signal here concern the extent of convergence in a given relationship. For example, if convergence is a spectrum, what constitutes a "mere" *confluence* of efforts as distinct from a stronger and more fundamental *collaboration*? And to what extent is convergence an alternative to competition, or does it allow for nuances like "complaboration" or "collabetition"? How is convergence planned and managed? Where does it stop?

Another critical question is, who wins in convergence? Is there a planned prioritisation of benefits along an agreed scale? Do some partners (eg. a website) end up as a poor cousin in the relationship? Is it like the situation where it was said that in getting into bed with media mogul Rupert Murdoch, only one partner gets screwed? Which medium gets the credit – and the cash? What are

the requirements for equal partnerships?

And finally, the big issue for journalists is what happens when convergence goes deeper than revenue-sharing, cross-ownership, content sharing and cross-promotion issues? What does it mean to have convergence in newsgathering and production?

### **3. Business models for news websites**

#### ***Getting the fundamentals right***

The dot.bomb fall-out means that many Web operations worldwide are faced with having to close down. Others have to cut back and retrench. Very few are being allowed to continue operating at current losses. The cutbacks abroad have killed thestreet.co.uk, APBnews.com and NBCI.com. There have been mass retrenchments at BS.com, Tribune Interactive, CNBC.com, CNNinteractive, Foxnews.com, nextmedia.com (Hong Kong), tvb.com (Hong Kong), etimes.com.tw (Taiwan), Ft.com and the LA Times. (Fung, 2001:34). In South Africa, online staffs are shrinking as well, and pioneer stand-alone newsite Woza had the plug pulled during 2001.

Convergence could be the formula that rescues media, especially new media like websites, in the face of this downturn and in the face of the increased competition within the media industry as a whole. (This is not even to mention competition from direct-mail marketers, websites that deliver unmediated and unabridged content, or the time-grabbing leisure industry.)

"Everyone right now in media is looking at developing strategic partnerships that will enhance their ability to deliver information to customers," says Rick Rogala, general manager of Tampa's TV station which is in a converged relationship with a newspaper and website. "Businesses are constantly looking for strategic partnerships. The fact that this is happening in our business, it's

not new to the business world." (Bowles, 2000).

Convergence, however, is not a magic wand for new media. On its own, it does not guarantee that new media – having lost money on their own – will suddenly find a new revenue model. Certainly, being cross-subsidised by old media is not a sustainable solution, even if the losses are put down to marketing or advertising costs of a parent platform. A media company should not think it is breaking-even on the Internet simply if its advertising revenue is able to cover its marginal Web operating costs. As one expert argues, the cyber-operation should include a proper share of the newspaper's own editorial and administrative expense. (*newspaper techniques*, p.158. Sept 2000). In other words, notwithstanding convergence, the challenge still remains for Internet media, as with the other media platforms (old and new), to cover their own real costs. The big difference with convergence is that by working more closely together, or to use the jargon "smartly", they ought to find synergies that make this more possible than previously.

Sad to say, one of these synergies is not necessarily the saving of money, at least in the short term. In fact, convergence costs cash. Enterprises may have to hire extra people to shepherd information from one media platform to other media platforms. There are the costs of creating technological compatibility. And so on. The aim of convergence then needs to be primarily to generate revenues. It's first and foremost a business investment principle, not a savings one, though in time some savings may emerge.

For convergence to work, it cannot be random. It depends on a deep analysis of what the real business of a media institution is.

There is a danger that a rush into convergence can lead not only to money-losing activities, but also to an unstrategic dispersal of focus. This would run counter to the logical global trend of big conglomerates unbundling and concentrating on their core business. The trick here is to define what this core business is. If in your case it is seen as newspapers rather than news, then you may have a problem in the same way that the railways used to think they were in the rail business, and did not think transportation. Of course, train transport was overtaken by companies that offered better modes of ferrying people and products from place to place. The long and short of it is that newspaper companies have to see themselves as media companies — and more especially as news companies. The same challenge of definition of the business applies to a broadcaster. Radio and TV stations are often in far broader businesses than news, but journalism is still a distinct and definable sub-business within them.

However, to be a news company does not mean that you have to be in every aspect of the news business. It's a matter of your niche within this. And you might leave the field to others in certain areas. You might say, for instance, that information about careers or sports is not going to be your central business, so you can then supply your minor coverage of these topics to people who are in this niche without them competing with you. The point about convergence is that it is about making "smart" partnerships.

To be "smart" is to concentrate on core strengths and purposes. One example here is that although leisure and community-creation businesses are part of newspapers historically, these are arguably

not the primary thing. For a newspaper's relationship with a website or a broadcaster, then, it makes sense to concentrate on synergies at the level of the information and news businesses. And within this, a niche needs to be narrowed down. There's no point in a newspaper trying to become a 24-hour online newsagency just because the technology allows it. Rather, it's necessary to examine who is organically best placed to do breaking news – like radio stations and news agencies. The question then is whether to partner with them, or whether to complement their roles. From the vantage point of broadcasters, there may be, for example, partnerships with the music industry, but the journalism side of the business does not intrinsically mix with the entertainment side. So here too, the focus of news convergence is on relationships with others in the information arena, and the kind of niche that is selected within this.

To sum up, what's needed is for the basic convergence mission to be clear about the business, and this in turn impacts on everything else that you do.

### ***Consider branding***

Possibly the major synergy made possible by news business convergence involves exploiting the brands. This echoes the way that Richard Branson pioneered the name and logo of "Virgin" as synonymous with quality service and lifestyle choice, rather than it being tied exclusively to a particular product.

In cases of merged or singly-owned enterprises, the leveraging of the overall brand between different news platforms is easier said than done. In cases involving separate entities, it's even more complex. The paradox in convergence is in sharing and coming

together, even integrating, but still keeping the value of the distinctive brands. Brands are not built in a day, but experience has shown some short-sighted discounting of existing brands in favour of trying to launch entirely new ones. In the USA, Pathfinder was such a new brand that encompassed – but failed to exploit – distinctive, well-known and valued brands like *Time*. New Century News Network was another similar failed initiative. In South Africa, Independent Newspapers tried to build www.IOL.co.za as the aggregation of the contents of its many newspapers around the country, but in 2001 the company was back to figuring out how to cross-pollinate IOL and the familiar local names of *The Star*, *Sunday Tribune*, etc.



Similar considerations have applied to South African company Johnnic's online activities (NetAssets as the aggregation of content from *Business Day* and *Financial Mail* amongst others) and to Naspers' News24 (melding content from *Die Burger*, *Beeld*, *Natal Witness*, amongst others). Whatever the formulation, it is clear the news business in the age of convergence, cannot overlook the big



issue of branding.

A critical part of branding is what values are deeply signalled. Especially on the Internet, news organisations need to differentiate themselves from non-journalistic organisations that have encroached on their turf. What this means, according to analyst Mindy McAdams, is that "if news organizations fail to promote and defend the press' 'brand identity' as a reliable, honest gatekeeper that makes sure the people know what they most need to know, then there will be nothing to distinguish the news media from the e-commerce sites, personal home pages, and self-serving public relations vehicles online." (Outing, 1999).

Manoim (2000) makes the important point that every second e-commerce site can and does offer news. He adds: "But it is news without an editor, and therefore news without responsibility. The cybermall needs to know which reports are reliable." If they get it right, news websites can really benefit from their unique brand qualities but also by pumping these up with the power of cross-media branding.

### ***Strategise audiences***

A website without visitors is a dead website – as dead as a newspaper with no readers and a broadcaster sans audience. Convergence can help drive traffic between them all. And no matter the business model, most websites usually want all the traffic they can get.

The good news is that even while investors are deserting dot.coms, the number of Internet users continues to grow. According to a recent report by the Pew foundation, one in three

Americans go online for news at least once a week. (Pew, 2000). Further research by the Lyra company, shows that for American users, the Web continues to come out on top in terms of importance to news consumers, and usage patterns. The researchers also asked: "if you had more free time available to you, what media would you spend more time with?" The biggest group, 46 percent, said that they'd spend more time using the Internet.

Importantly for any old media thinking they've survived the attack of new media, the lesson is that they can't return to the stand-alone pre-Web world. Thus Lyra's research shows that when asked which media American Internet users most "look forward to using" and "enjoy," the Web wins in a head-to-head comparison with newspapers by 80 percent to 15 percent. When asked which media is the "most important" part of their daily routine, respondents chose the Internet over newspapers, 64 percent to 22 percent. Even when asked which medium provides the "most important information to you," the Internet beat newspapers, 43 percent to 40 percent.

As the expert Steve Outing, author of the online column "Stop the Presses", concludes: "Internet usage is increasing; satisfaction with the Internet as a news/information medium is rising; and consumers appear undaunted by the doom-and-gloom coverage of the Internet and continue to use it more and more." He points out that the biggest media Web sites get millions of users each month. Jupiter Media Metrix figures show that MSNBC.com and CNN.com each get more than nine million. Since time available for people to consume news is finite, obviously those online media users are

taking time away from other media (Outing, 2001a). The lesson in this is that just as online can use offline partners to promote its offerings, so offline media should be looking for online partners who can send some of the traffic back again.

What drives the most online traffic? In the USA, some people say sports and local information – even when this is not prominently displayed on front page. "Every TV website that does well has a substantial local news commitment," says Bob Pepper, author of one study. (Bergman, 2001). The Pew report gives a different picture of Americans going online for:

- Weather 66 percent
- Science/health news 63 percent
- Technology news 59 percent
- Business news 53 percent
- World news 45 percent
- Entertainment news 44 percent
- Sports news 42 percent
- Political news 39 percent
- Local news 37 percent

Although the true situation is probably a mix of the various findings, it's not without interest to African sites that Pew, at least, shows a good score for interest in world news (45 percent). For our continent's own websites, what seems to drive traffic is not weather and sport, but politics. For example, the Zimbabwe *Daily News* online estimated that 70 percent of visitors in 2000 were coming for the politics and elections coverage (Deve, 2000). This is not unique, nor is it surprising, given the democratic contestations around the continent.

All this audience activity shows that online news is far from dead

on the consumers' side, even if the monetary underpinning is not exactly alive and kicking. And consumers want even more. Statistics show that American surfers also want robust search capabilities as well as comparison-shopping services and advertising that matches their interests. (Runett, 2001). News websites will need to evolve if they want to keep these audiences in a competitive environment. Further, it is estimated that by 2003, 71 percent of American businesses and 33 percent of households are expected to have broadband connections. (*newspaper techniques*. P. 36. Jan 2001). This not only makes video possible on the Internet, and therefore a lot more competition for websites in general – it also means that those news sites without video will increasingly play catch-up.

What does this all mean for Africa? The exciting thing about online media is its transcending of spatial boundaries. In many cases, the majority of visitors to a site are not local. Rather, they are people who lived there, have visited or will visit — or who are just interested in information and stories about the place. For example, the online version of the UK's *The Times* has more than 75 percent of its readers outside Britain (*newspaper techniques*. April 2001. P8. Ifra news). Of course, it's a different question of attracting eyeballs from the First-World to African content. But at the very least, just as a large part of the *Times*' traffic comes from British expatriates abroad, so Africa has a huge diaspora which can be serviced.

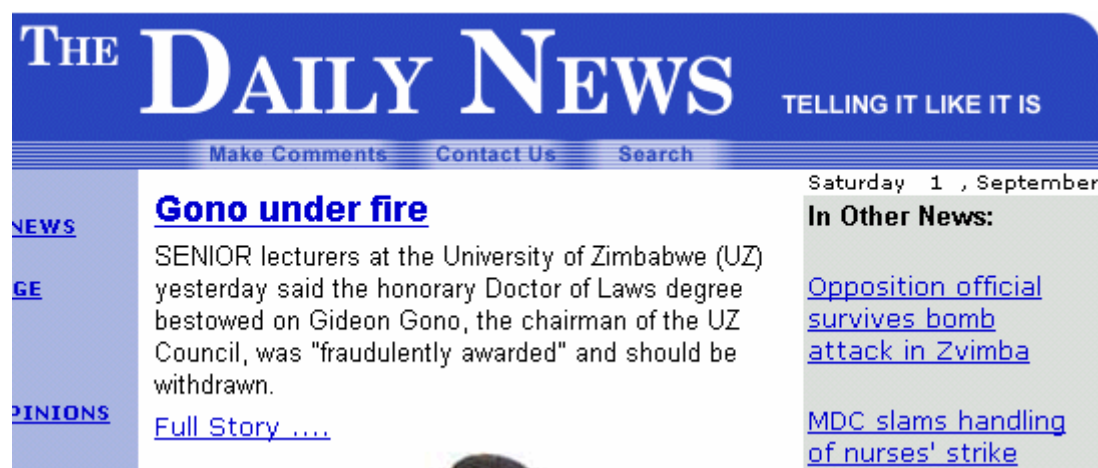
As noted by Anthony Olorunnisola (2000), African emigrants in the diaspora are largely well-educated individuals with a hunger for news. Like Bastian (1999), he notes that many have access to

Internet and that they already use e-mail and many websites to construct virtual ethnic and national communities as part of their social networking and negotiation of new cultures within their adopted countries of residence. Olorunnisola urges African media to increase their interaction with these constituencies by identifying such networks and providing them with information that will assist their engagement with their new environments. In addition, he suggests keeping them engaged with African affairs back home, thereby reversing brain drain and widening the domestic political debate.

#### **AFRICA'S DIASPORA: A NEGLECTED MARKET**

"Overall, the current use of the Internet by content providers in Africa is lackluster. The reluctance of many to invest in domain ownership may be more indicative of late adoption of the full capabilities of the Internet than the lack of awareness. There appears to also be an underestimation of the unprecedented access to a global audience that the Internet provides. The absence of local and foreign advertising on sites that contain African content may also indicate two connected factors in the current mode of Internet presence. First, African media are yet to fully tap the Internet as a resource that should also enable increased participation in a global economy. Secondly, the indirect connection to a global economy that the universally positioned African emigrants represent is either being ignored or overlooked. In particular, the absence of protocol for direct interaction between the content providers and visitors to their web sites limits the level of interaction that is encouraged. As a collective, African media organizations currently 'lurk' on the Internet." — Anthony Olorunnisola, Penn-State-University.

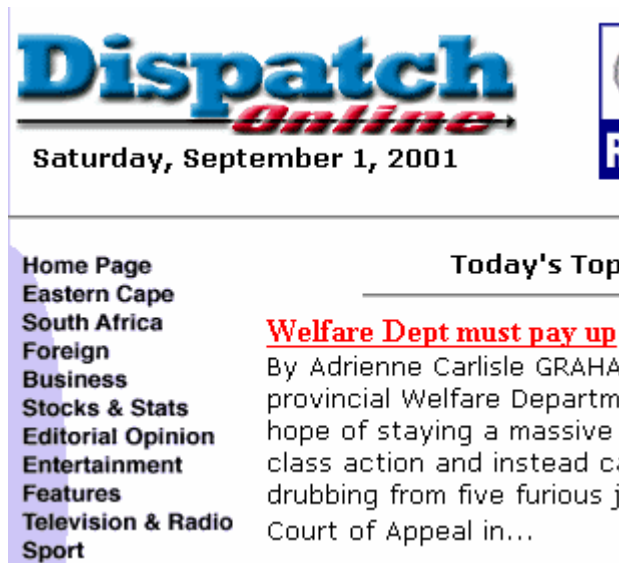
In short, there are audiences out there for African content online. The Zimbabwean *Daily News* is just one of many African websites that confirms more than half of its traffic coming from North American browsers (Deve, 2000). Lesotho's *Mopheme* online says it is most popular amongst Basotho nationals studying, working or living abroad (Lawrence, 2000). And even if the continent's own domestic surfers are few, they are typically also an information-hungry, relatively well-heeled and e-fluent elite. News websites in Africa could attract many more of this local constituency, including from other African countries hosting both individuals with pan-African interests and as members of continent's own internal diaspora.



### ***Bang the promotions drum***

Audiences for news websites exist, but how do they know Africa's sites are out there? Promoting and marketing websites for traffic is a neglected activity of many websites. The fault lies partly with parent media which do relatively little to drive readers, listeners or viewers to the site. There are exceptions, including laudable initiatives like South Africa's *Daily Dispatch* and the *Namibian* newspapers featuring regular columns by their

webmasters. A number of newspapers also publicise e-mail letters, online forum debates and responses to cyber-polls. Broadcaster SABC concludes its TV news with the URL for SABCnews.com (and the number for its new media cellphone audio news service). But a lot more could be done, including promotion in cyberspace itself.



Too many websites naively believe that if their content is good enough, people will somehow find it and visit. The content indeed has to be good enough to warrant return visits, but the challenge is to get the first visit. There are numerous directories of online media that African news websites should have their URLs on. Peter Zollman produced the following list for "the digital edge" (see [http://www.digitaledge.org/monthly/2001\\_07/searchoptions.html](http://www.digitaledge.org/monthly/2001_07/searchoptions.html)).

- [www.newspaperlinks.com](http://www.newspaperlinks.com)
- [www.thepaperboy.com](http://www.thepaperboy.com)
- <http://usnewspapers.about.com/blpapers.htm>
- [www.ajr.org](http://www.ajr.org) / <http://ajr.newslink.org/news.html>
- [www.mediainfo.com/emedial/](http://www.mediainfo.com/emedial/)
- [www.newsdirectory.com/](http://www.newsdirectory.com/)
- [www.ecola.com/news/press/](http://www.ecola.com/news/press/)

- [www.refdesk.com/paper.html](http://www.refdesk.com/paper.html)
- [www.onlinenewspapers.com](http://www.onlinenewspapers.com)
- [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)
- [www.kidon.com/media-link/index.shtml](http://www.kidon.com/media-link/index.shtml)
- [www.worldwideneews.com](http://www.worldwideneews.com)
- [www.researchville.com/news](http://www.researchville.com/news)
- [www.Abyznewslinks.com](http://www.Abyznewslinks.com)

He also recommends you ensure you are listed in general Web directories as well as major search engines. You can find them individually at [searchenginewatch.com](http://searchenginewatch.com). Some like Yahoo will charge you to be actively considered for inclusion, otherwise you just have to hope they'll look at your merits at some undefined point in the future. Looksmart, Inktomi and Goto also offer paid listings. There are services that will submit your address to numerous engines, like [webpositiongold.com](http://webpositiongold.com). A helpful free submission site is <http://www.wump.com/freesubmit/>. There is also [Addace.com](http://Addace.com), which has both a free and a premium level service. Zollman's final suggestion is that when you have a really major story, get someone to notify all major directories and newswebsites, because they will probably link to your site.

Getting the traffic on your site is one thing; making money out of it is the critical other. What revenue sources are there?

### ***Attract the advertising***

According to most observers, the prediction is that Internet's revenue model in the coming years will be two-thirds advertising. As Don Shaw (1991) has shown, no matter the medium that comes on the historical stage of the USA, the proportion of GDP that goes into media as such (advertising and subscriptions) does not increase. In other words, although the total pie may grow, the



advertising slice has to be shared by ever more media takers. In other words, we can expect greater competition for advertising between media platforms, even if – and in the current economic climate, that is a big "if" – the overall volume increases in line with economic growth.

It is likely that advertisers will come around to embracing the Web, and it will be because they have to do so, not because they discover a liking for the medium. It will be for the reason that cyberspace is where many, many people – and niche audience markets – are already and increasingly will be. But there will not be a mass exodus of advertising from existing old media platforms. Instead, in line with convergent thinking, advertisers can be expected to spread and synergise their placements across different media – just as they have been doing ever since radio, TV and magazines began to offer viable different platforms to the reach and role of newspaper vehicles. As this scenario develops across all platforms, including new media, so will the financial pressures grow against stand-alone media enterprises unable to exploit advantages of cross-media advertising sales. All media dependent on advertising should be looking to convergence to keep a share of adspend.

How does the Web compete for advertising in this context? After taking a battering in recent times, news sites are now bending over backwards to give advertisers something better than conventional banner advertising. Uganda's *Monitor* newspaper online was even giving away free ads last year, in an attempt to acclimatise advertisers to having a presence on the site (Musoke, 2000).

# SUNDAY MONITOR

[Chat Room](#)  
[Talk Back](#)

ON THE WEB

Kampala, 02 September 2001

[About Us](#) [Chat Room](#) [Directory](#) [News Archive](#) [Mail](#) [Mart](#)

<p>Search the site <input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="Go"/> <a href="#">Advanced Search</a></p>	<p><b>Today's News</b></p> <p><a href="#">Chopper probe wants Mbonye, Katto prosecuted</a></p> <p>The commission of inquiry into the... of MFI 24</p>	<p><b>Breaking News</b></p> <p>The news will appear here when the page has finished loading.</p>
---	---	--

In the USA, the C-Net and USAtoday websites have this year pioneered new formats that are much more in the viewer's face than the standard banner ads. These are "skyscraper" columns, or big "monster" boxes in the centre of the page. In addition to their novelty, these allow the advertiser to communicate a lot more information – even interactively. There is also nowadays increasing use of pop-up ads and interstitial ads (which appear in between screens or while the user waits for a page to download). (The 'wallpaper' adverts, where corporate logos featured in the background of the page, seem thankfully to have fallen from favour). Much of this loud advertising may be offensive to surfers, but if that's the way the revenue model is going, they will not have much option as long as they want free news. Some ad content of course may actually be appreciated by users — such as that which is relevant, rich and interactive, and which don't have to sidetrack you off site for deeper information.

Another advertising strategy being developed in the USA is on-demand marketing e-mail. Outing (2001e) describes this as an opt-in e-mail service, where site visitors can request marketing information on personalised specific topics. As he points out, however, this requires attracting enough advertisers to make it

worthwhile, else a user might request something and get no response.

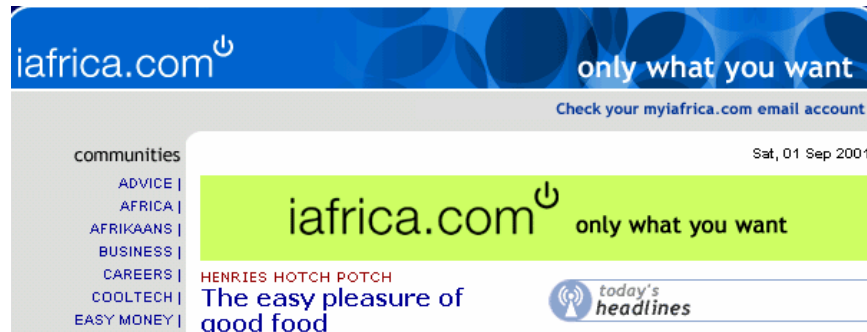
Exit advertising is another kind of advertising that might also be exploited. This shows departing site visitors other sites or commercial offerings. Thus, as people leave your site, you recommend something else they might be interested in – and you earn some referral money in the process. Outing (2001e) describes a business called ClusterTraffic that sets up "clusters" of Web sites on various topics, with each site within a cluster adding a few cross-referral scripts to its pages in order to participate. It's a variation on the web-ring model. The sites within a given cluster participate for a fee in ClusterTraffic, but if the system gets traffic up, perhaps revenue can be generated from other advertisers. Another company called Exit Exchange has a network in which participating Web sites include code on their sites that creates an advert in an additional browser window. These ads don't get seen until the user closes the main browser window. No doubt even more creative tactics to promote web advertising will continue to evolve.

Predictions by Forrester research are that although advertising will still be around two-thirds of revenue mix for websites in the years ahead, it is thought there will be less emphasis on direct sales generated relative to page impression ratios, and more on the marketing impact and branding given to clients. (Ifra trend report 96). This prospect raises the sister revenue stream of selling sponsorships and branding opportunities.

### ***Secure sponsors for some of the content***

Faced with revenue pressures, a large number of news websites

have gone the route of getting sponsors for specific content. In South Africa, iafrica.com runs special features paid for by the particular industry or company covered.



There are different opinions on this revenue stream. USA Today.com does not allow news to be sponsored, only functionality data like weather information. The danger is that a sponsored content model can endanger the core value of journalism, and thence the credibility of the site as a whole. And while users might often be interested in upfront and explicitly-labelled sponsored content, and while the revenues thus earned can help support the site as a whole, by definition this corporate-sponsored journalism is not the heart of an online news-based business. In short, sponsored content has a place, but you can't get all your news sponsored and stay credibly in the news information business.

### ***Sell your content***

Newspapers have long commiserated over the fact that people won't pay for content online. The delivery of news and information services over cellphones cheers the hearts of many executives because consumers do pay their phone bills at the end of each month. But much as that is a viable business, it does not solve the problem of sustaining news on websites where users are reluctant

to fork out.

Except for the *Wall Street Journal*, almost all papers which have gone online have resorted to giving away their content, or at least a valuable part of it, free. Part of the problem is the "information wants to be free" culture of the Internet, another has been competition from sites that offer free what you wanted to charge for. Now that few, if any, online newsventures are making sufficient income from advertising to cover the free offerings, many companies are looking once more at the pay-for-content possibilities. So, will it work to go from free to fee?

The mega-portals, it would seem, are the players who may be able to make mega-money off advertising, but for most news websites, especially those without niches that have riches attractive to advertisers, there will be a need to consider offering a limited free service, and levels of paid premium content.

Coming back to convergence, one suggestion is to do a package deal and charge one fee for all platforms: print and online, as happens at the *Financial Times Deutschland*. In Rochester, Minnesota, the *Post-Bulletin* has decided to close off most its online content except to paying print subscribers, who will get access to the paper's Web site as a value-add, including Web-original content, plus access to an 11-year archive of newspaper articles. Non-paying Web users will see only headlines and classified ads.

This accords with another economic principle relevant to the information industries – selling several slices of the product to a range of audiences at a range of prices (Shapiro and Valerian, 1999). This model in turn means not trying to offer as much as

possible to as many people as possible, but to concentrate and specialise in unique areas. And it means doing things like the NYtimes.com which charges for access to its crosswords and archives. The trick in such strategies, as Beau Dure points out, is to be pro-active in marketing the archive. Instead of passively charging occasional researchers for access, a dynamic news site will frequently create a page of relevant archived articles related to an important breaking story. In addition, topical pages with lists of for-fee archived articles can be created for industry sectors (useful for local businesses), for major local companies, for sports teams, etc. (Outing, 2001b).

For many African websites, this is still way ahead because the challenge for now is to get an archive in the first place, or to upgrade existing ones into indexed and searchable database format rather than HTML-stored files. Linked to the archive issue is the searchability of many African websites. Given the mindset of many surfers seeking information, this is an important matter requiring attention. These things cost money, but they can also attract special funds from the variety of international projects seeking to get Africa better integrated into the Internet. If Africa's archiving problem can be solved, the resource can then begin to be leveraged into various revenue possibilities for its websites.

Besides the archive, what else can be sold? Frederick Lane III (cited by Outing, 2001c) says Web publishers need to better define the value that consumers get if they are to pay for content. If a news site tries to sell monthly Web subscriptions, is the value of the offering really that much better than what consumers can get from traditional media (or elsewhere online for free)? Lane says

too often there's not enough value to make the sale appealing. Just as paid video is an attraction for sex sites, so too could adding valuable video content to mainstream news sites make them stronger. In time, African websites could secure a revenue stream from such offerings, not least in the field of cultural and wildlife content aimed at tourists. Eyes ought to be kept open to partners and opportunities even at this early stage.

Leaving video aside, what kind of textual content is "sexy" enough for news websites to sell? Lane says you first have to see what sets your site aside from everyone else's, and then build on that value. In his view, what helps make a site compelling is interactivity and community. Just as porn actors on paid sites offer interaction with their customers, Lane suggests that news sites also facilitate direct user-journalist and user-celebrity interaction (e.g., live chats with a coach or athlete). Certainly, news websites have the leverage to deliver access to big names through online events. In 2000, the *Washington Post* online scheduled a chat session with Zimbabwean opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai. There's no reason why the country's own *Daily News* couldn't do something similar.

At the same time, as news sites explore charging for content, it needs to be noted that even the *Wall Street Journal's* site, *wsj.com*, was still losing money in 2000 even though it had half a million paying subscribers. In fact, 60 percent of the revenue from the site was coming from advertising. There is also an argument that if they had gone free, they would have had even more advertising. The *Financial Times* (UK) in March 2001 was giving away its archive free, saying that it made more from advertising to visitors



there, than from selling access to them (Fung, 2001: 273). In Uganda, the *Monitor* online managed only to sell 300 paid subscriptions when it had a purely paid model, but it claimed enormous traffic figures after it went free (Musoke, 2000).

According to one study, four out of five newspaper websites of 70 papers in the USA are selling some form of content, but they are not making much at this point in time. Most are selling archives, but realising less than \$500 a month from this. Only four percent are selling pictures and audio (Outing, 2001b).

The question of charging for content is not simple, because it entails not just overcoming consumer resistance, but also setting up a cost effective and secure billing system. Incentives like those of CD and video clubs could be tried, suggests Larry Dotson. An example would be to offer two free article downloads when a Web user agrees to buy three articles. The user feels like he or she is getting something for nothing, and gets used to buying articles online. (Outing, 2001c).

Changing to subscription overnight even for part of the site is not a good idea. Introducing free but compulsory registration, however, might be a stepping stone in this direction.

The DallasNews.com site has recently begun requiring users to register and supply information about themselves if they want full access to the site. Initial response saw a drop off, but numbers swiftly climbed back up again. The data gained helps the site market itself to advertisers, and one third of those who signed up agreed to receive information about their hobbies. The move could also be an ice-breaking forerunner to selling access to some of the content. Already, the site has announced plans to charge for some



of its e-mail newsletters. (Presstime 8/14/01;  
<http://www.naa.org/presstime/0109/nmi.html>; 05/24/01.  
<http://www.naa.org/presstime/0105/nmi.html>).

As another transitional strategy towards charging for content, Steve Outing (2001b) suggests considering the shareware approach. The idea is that you explain to users of your site that the service costs money and you are therefore requesting an up-front, voluntary subscription fee. Those who don't pay can still get your content free – so you don't lose audience numbers and hence your advertisers. At least, however, you can bring in some subscription revenues. A related idea of calling on consumer goodwill is put forward by Carl Natale, who suggests calling for payments towards covering particular stories. If enough money is raised, the reporter is assigned and the resulting article is then e-mailed to contributors and posted on the Web. (Outing, 2001b).

In another twist to incentivising subscriptions, webzine Salon.com recently offered a paid-for service that not only included extra, exclusive content, but also an ad-free user experience. This strategy can, however, offend advertisers, and indeed end up losing more revenue than it generates (Outing, 2001b).

### ***Buzz the business consumers***

Another outlet for selling content is not direct to consumers, but to businesses. In fact, in the USA a number of hitherto-free online publications like Variety.com with valuable business content have begun charging subscriptions because most users can in turn charge these to their companies. In South Africa, Johnnic electronic publishing sells I-Net Bridge feeds to companies like banks. Such B2B operations could be even more enhanced by

partnerships amongst the mass of players with information in a market. For instance, an aggregated search and alert service that e-mailed businesses when their names were cropping up on a range of news sites could be a profitable venture.



Syndication of content to old – or other non-competing new – media platforms is also increasingly a strategy being used by webnews operators. Selling content to, or through, companies offering paid information services on cellphones is another route. According to Outing, SMS is already a significant revenue source for news sites, especially in Europe.

As touched on in the previous chapter, a limited revenue possibility is trying to sell premium content to ISPs. Outing (2001f) advises, however, that sites will probably have to offer aggregated-content services to ISPs, because these companies won't want to deal with lots of e-publishers. In addition, most ISPs have not really been in the content business previously, so they need a lot of persuasion that they can gain an edge by doing so.

Another suggestion reported by Outing (2001f) is to sell to

search engines, which, as they stand, tend to be too slow to carry fast-breaking news stories. In this regard, the Web news industry has a saleable product which could enable search engines like Yahoo or Ananzi to generate more traffic for themselves. The "headline-scraping" model operates in a similar way, where an entity like Moreover.com aggregates current headlines in one site. The difference is that the click-throughs there drive traffic to the original providers. That's not a B2B sale, but it is a kind of B2B convergence that can be a win-win formula. It is something that news sites could better exploit.

### ***Catch some e-commerce***

The e-commerce revenue model for news online changes the historical relationship where media have been a purely informational middleman between buyers and sellers. It means they now become brokers via online transactions. Again there are significant technical issues, as well as factors related to the size of the market, and the kind of business the media enterprise sees itself as being in. Convergence in the form of partnerships may be more appropriate than a news operation itself becoming a transactional business. The *Namibian* and the e-M&G are interesting examples here. Their sites include a travel section that describes tourist destinations and offers online booking through a partnership with the safarinow.com site. A portion of the revenue comes to them.

There are concerns about how well the news and e-commerce businesses mix, as indicated in the previous chapter. Is it appropriate to have a music review on a news website where the site earns commission on each CD sold through its pages by click

through? Steve Outing amongst others has pointed out the problem. When no money is involved, a critic can review obscure groups. When money is at stake, which CD is likely to be reviewed? Notwithstanding these problems, which can be managed through clear policies, transparency and trustworthy brands, the e-commerce revenue model will likely become a serious revenue stream in the bigger news companies over time. African websites will ignore this at their peril.

### ***Work with wholesalers***

Outing (2001d) says it seems inevitable that many news sites will soon start charging for content. According to him, there's a problem in this: "There will be so much paid content on the Internet that with the exception of the top publishers, no one else will make much money selling their content." He cites the experience of the cable TV industry in the USA, where consumers were not prepared to pay 20 different suppliers for 20 different channels, but they would buy a combined bouquet. Most of these TV channels therefore had to recognise strength in unity and that they would make their money by sharing the customer's monthly subscription. Similarly, Outing (2001d) argues, news sites should band together and offer a package. He concludes: "if e-publishers try to go the paid-content route alone, they'll fail. If they want to get Internet users' money, they have no choice but to ally with competing publishers, offer a multi-site subscription package and share the money among themselves. There's too much content and too many "channels" on the Internet for individual-site sales to bring in more than small amounts of money."

Outing predicts the rise of central content aggregation agencies

to sell content on e-publishers' behalf. He predicts that this will be done by a major portal site (like Yahoo!), an online content transactions company (e.g., Qpass or Clickshare), or a Web content syndicator (like Screaming Media).

For African media, services like AllAfricaNews.com, and AfricaOnline.com are doing exactly this, and many southern African enterprises (on- and offline) supply them. But these two companies are not the limit of the market. Content can be sold singly or collectively to a wide range of customers. For example, a Malaysian commercial initiative was set up in August 2001, called the "Smart News Network" and aiming to counter First World reporting on developing countries. Although it draws from only government publications at this point (*Namibia Today*, Zimbabwe's *Herald*, Botswana's *Daily News*, and South Africa's *Bua News*), the venture might be an opportunity for independent media houses as well. (<http://news.excite.com/printstory/news/r/010819/11/net-media-smartnews-dc>). We should be on the lookout for more such possibilities including syndicating to players ranging from IPS and Pana through to CNN and BBC.

### ***Develop revenue streams***

Besides models like becoming an Internet Service Provider, some possibilities exist for news websites in becoming a designer and host for other websites. Going further, groups like iafrica have gone into selling their software systems, plus specialised content, as "private labels" to big corporations like Transnet and put their own branding "skins" onto the product. Such companies then add some own content, and become instant online contenders. An operation like the *Namibian*, which has developed valuable in-

house software for building both their site and their archive, could exploit this asset as a revenue stream in southern Africa.

### ***Conclusion***

There is no easy route to business viability for news websites. What does seem clear is that it can't be business as usual if they are to survive. By exploiting convergence, Africa's online initiatives need to find ways to boost brands and build audiences. New ad strategies, sponsorship deals and paying customers for content have to be found. Critical to all this are partnerships and collaborations — between the sites, and between them and old media operations. How they all begin working more "smartly" is the subject of the next chapter.

## 4. New media, old media relations: negotiating separation or union?

Of all convergent relationships, one of the most complex is that between old and new ventures. American media trainer Bob Carr warns that the most successful companies are the slowest to change. (Decotis, 2001). But given the question mark over new media ventures, there's probably a window of opportunity in terms of restructuring how things are. One of the biggest issues is to construct new and better relationships. These might entail a hierarchy, but they should nonetheless still be based on a recognition of the important – though different – role that each side can play in developing the strength, reach and impact of the whole endeavour. The aim is to get Web, broadcast, print and other platforms to work together to the optimum advantage of the total media effort. For people passionate about news websites, the success of this project could make the difference to the survival of their own threatened platforms.

### ***Unequal integration doesn't help the whole***

Nora Paul (1998a) points out that in the beginning of newspapers setting up online sites, the Web was just a "little twig off the mighty oak of the print product". In the USA, there were two views about relations between the two operations. One stressed merger (as at *Chicago Tribune* and *Orlando Sentinel*); the other said complete separation (as at Cox newspapers). Media researcher John Morton puts it like this: "One school says that

Internet sites are extensions of newspaper or broadcast operations and all you need are folks who'll massage and re-purpose information to make it suitable for the online medium. The other philosophy suggests you have to create original material from scratch with your own staff and your own resources ..." Morton adds that the second model now seems to be falling by the wayside. (Lasica, 2001a).

Earlier, however, it was the first – the integrated – model that was discredited. Convergence in the form of integrated operations, and the website as a simple "shovelware" extension of the parent medium, acquired a bad name for good reasons. Often the core partner lost as the weaker Web sucked its lifeblood and gave nothing back in return. And instead of being a win-win relationship, it was lose-lose, because the weaker also remained a Cinderella. Web sites struggled to get sustenance from their parent or "legacy" medium and lacked any independent capacity to fly as a force in their own right and utilising their own specific strengths. Even in more recent cases of convergence, as in Tampa USA, where a newspaper, TV station and website have joined up, the newspaper staffers feel the TV station has benefited most from the convergence. It has access to all the print content now, whereas before it only had 12 reporters of its own. The website (TBO.com) meanwhile still relies entirely on the print and TV newsrooms for its news – sometimes having to beg for content. It can contribute relatively little to the success of the other ventures. The result is that the newspaper staff feel they are unwilling partners, because they get very little benefit. (Fung, 2001:159-9).





The danger is exacerbated when the parent medium sees an offspring website as a competitor, and indeed in some respects this perception has a degree of validity. But focusing only on this aspect means that relationships become those of rivals, rather than colleagues. It creates situations where people at the parent medium keep their stories close to their chests and retain the credit. If they give them to the website, they feel they're the proverbial turkeys voting for Christmas – giving content away to a medium that makes no secret of wanting to steal both their audiences and their advertising. To put it mildly, this kind of convergence and its unequal terms have not been a recipe to maximize returns on the relationships.

### ***Apart = better***

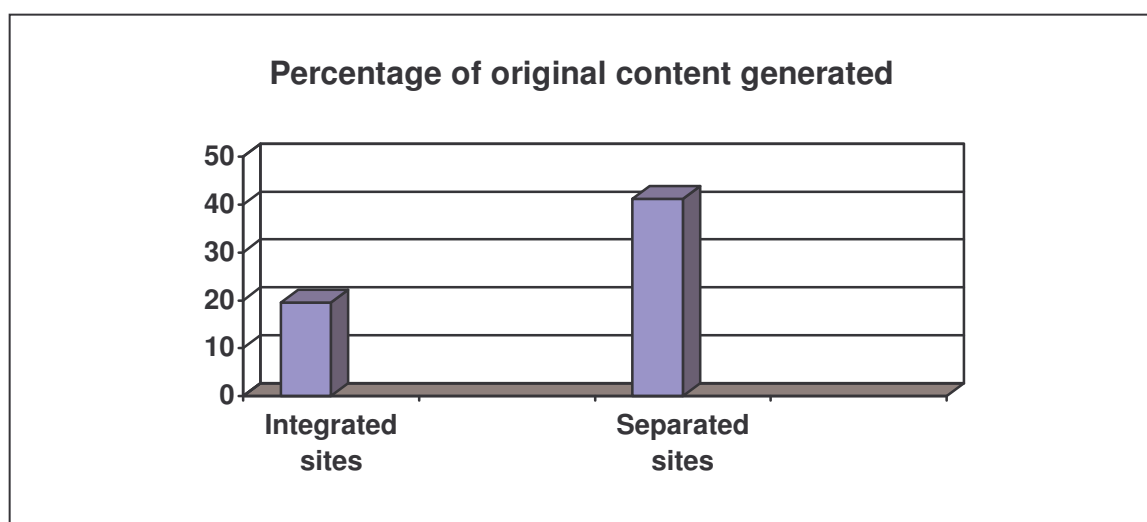
In the face of these inequalities and this adversarial potential, many news websites have been keen to hive off and go it alone. In the USA, managers like Peter Winter, president of Cox, have supported this, arguing that convergence can hinder the autonomous development of new media. (Botero, 1999:19). That view is echoed by another Cox staffer: "Without a separate unit,

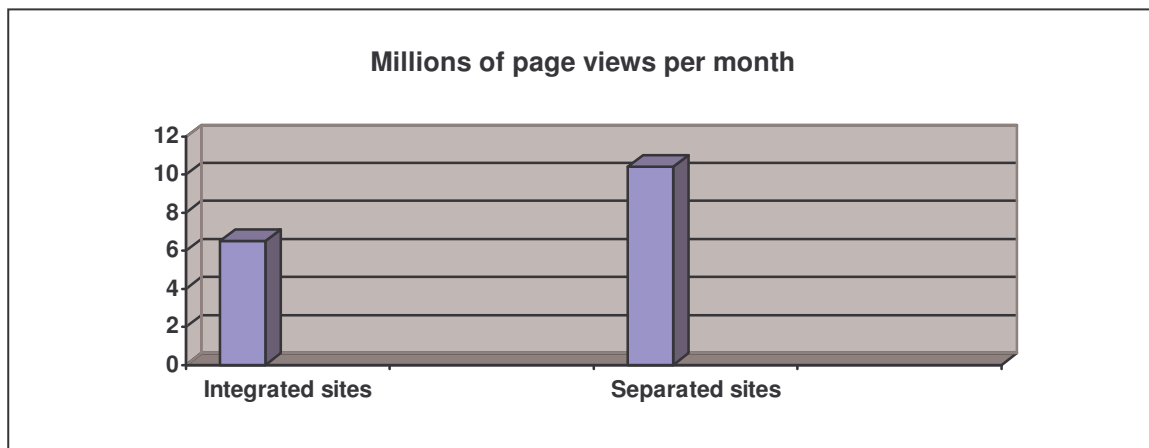
we were sure to be bound to the old product paradigm" (Parker, 1999).

The concern has been that the legacy of the parent medium gets visited upon the child, stunting its own potential. Even today, the Knight-Ridder corporation believes that it made sense to put its digital assets in one organisation, with one strategy and one set of goals (Lasica, 2001a). It is also this kind of reasoning that led companies like the *New York Times* to consolidate their more than 50 websites within one business unit called Times Company Digital. In South Africa, the originators of IOL, news24 and I-net Bridge respectively felt that pooling online assets made for stronger products.

According to a study by Clark Gilbert, separated sites have indeed been able to do more original content and get increased volumes of traffic, as compared to those sites that remained integrated.

He produces the following two tables to illustrate his findings:





Gilbert also poses the question: "Might there be a strategy to separate first, let the product and business develop and innovate, then move to reintegrate? Perhaps." He goes on to throw down two challenges:

"First, if you're not separated from the print business, do you feel you have been innovative enough to discover and grow with this evolving market? Look hard, because the data says it is very difficult to do this inside your existing organization.

"Second, if you are separated, have you preserved the option to reintegrate as these businesses move to greater convergence?" (Gilbert, 2001).

These findings that newspapers with separate Internet divisions have more innovative websites findings are echoed in a report by Forrester Research. But Forrester did add that small newspapers that integrate Internet activities had shown themselves to be more efficient. (*newspaper techniques*, April 2001, p. 62). The point is that separation – which has often entailed special investment and duplication of staff and systems – is expensive. Separation of operations has also meant that the partners involved are less

willing and less able to seek synergies. The effect has been very far from a converged scenario with a newspaper supplying news for a television station, a television station reciprocating by reporting for and with the newspaper, both contributing to a website, and the website in turn producing its own material that can feed back into the other two platforms.

The lesson is that while separate online news operations have their advantages, there is also a price to pay in terms of the resources required and the opportunities lost. Unsurprisingly, the pendulum is now swinging back to integration.

### ***(Re-)integration***

An integrated approach to media operations lends itself to African culture which tends to be more holistic than Western culture. On the continent, singing, dancing and drumming are typically not separate activities, just as there is also not a fixed distinction between cultural spectator and performer. If media integration can lead to similar all-round enrichment, plus better resource utilisation, this is certainly a reason why it should be embraced in Africa. However, the pattern in southern Africa to date has leaned more towards separation. (Sadly, where Web operations have been part of the newsroom, they have usually been such fringe affairs as to be barely visible).

In South Africa, big players Independent Newspapers, Naspers and Times Media (now Johnnic Publishing), set up their web initiatives in separate ventures and even separate buildings. Zimbabwe's *Daily News* simply e-mails its content to a third party computer company that cuts and pastes it online. Lesotho's *Mopheme* does much the same. Partnerships between broadcast,

print and online are undeveloped.

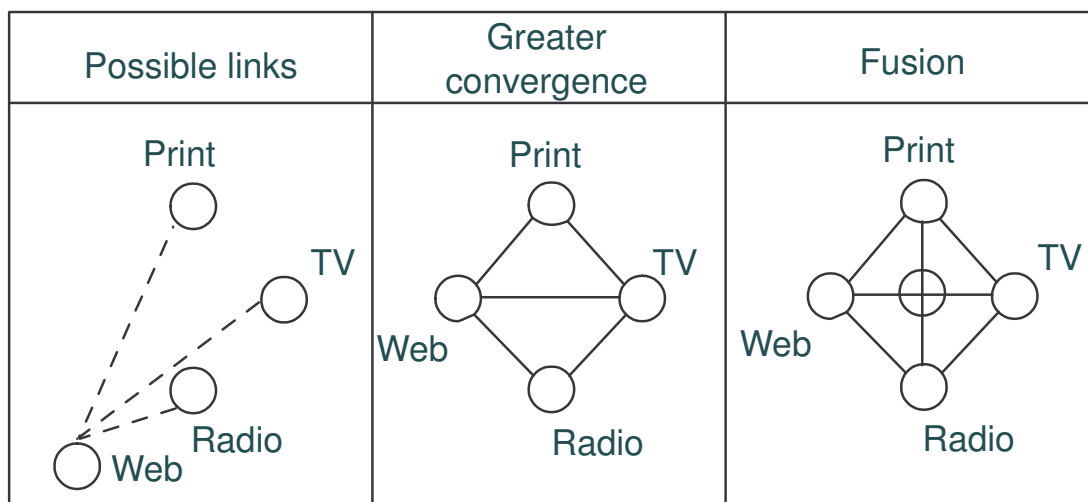
A segregated arrangement does allow for dedicated concentration and development, but it also naturally encourages people to think in boxes and discourages them from leveraging the strengths and resources of the others. In the USA, Nora Paul (1998a) has noted that only 20 percent of newspaper websites had reporters in the main newsroom contributing special material to the online operation. She commented: "When you consider that almost 60 percent of the website operations surveyed have fewer than two employees, it's clear that tapping the talents of the print newsroom to contribute to the new online presence is going to be very important." That call for synergy was way back in 1988 and it largely went unheeded. Integration, or re-integration, from 2001 onward is likely to demand this.

As Simon Fung writes: "Instead of having different newsrooms serving different platforms, the new trend is to have one single newsroom serving all platforms – the convergence of newsrooms. This is especially the case where a media group concurrently owns TV, Radio, newspapers and Web sites." (2001:154). And according to American observer Eric Meyer, we can expect to see the near total-elimination of separate staffing for online news sites at traditional news companies. "Online will become just another edition just like the out-state edition, driven from a common database." (Outing 29).

The route to this greater integration goes through various degrees and works-in-progress. Tampa's organisational chart shows different newsrooms with different reporting lines, and distinct budgets. (Fung, 2001:157). According to the operation's TV

news director, Dan Bradley: "We are merging the collection and dissemination of information, but we are not merging newsrooms. There may be some stories we choose not to share, but I think that will be rare. We will each have to make our own editorial decisions. There may be times when we disagree. We have to stay independent, but I think we can do that and share our information." Full convergence of the newspaper, TV station and website would eliminate three journalism staffs and merge them into one outfit to feed all three products. But Mike Steele, the holding company's director of new-media content, says: "We're a long way from this. We may never get there, and frankly I'm not sure we should." (Rabasca, 2001).

Drawing from Juan Antonio Giner (2001), we can represent the trajectory of newsroom convergence as follows. The model starts with four separate platforms that have their own newsrooms, with the Web drawing from one or more of the others (TV, radio, newspaper). It reduces to four operations when the Web is brought back home to one of the parent platforms. The culmination is one newsroom servicing all – Web included.



Developments are not quite as neat, linear or end-point oriented

as this diagram would suggest. One survey in the USA found a much more mixed picture last year: 55 percent of Web editors worked directly under the newspaper editor, and three out of five Web staffs were housed in the main newsroom. (*newspaper techniques*, p.158. Sept 2000). But the basic conceptual differences are still valuable to make.

Whatever the degree, the key question in integrating, or re-integrating, operations is whether the parent or dominant medium rigidly takes priority at the expense of the Web, or whether a more flexible and long-sighted approach sees the two, or three, or four, as respected contributors to the whole. Converging news production is about productive relations between the players, whether this leads to full-scale integration or not.

### ***Prerequisites for crafting convergence***

Implementing an integrated direction is a highly complex business, covering many bases. For the relationships to grow into marriages, a multi-faceted lobola (dowry) is needed. Here's a checklist of essentials (drawn from Gentry, 2000:31):

- Quality leadership commitment and vision.
- Strategic thinking, critical thinking, creative thinking.
- Adequate communication within each partner.
- Adequate communication between each partner.
- Proper planning and co-ordination.
- Processes to create a sense of ownership of the process.
- Understanding of the needs and values and culture of each organisation.
- Appreciation of each other's products.
- Strategies and incentives to encourage and reward common efforts.
- Sufficient training and education.
- Evaluation systems.

At the centre of much of this lies the issue of cultures, and what it takes to build a new and syncretic way of thinking and working. Old and new media coming together produces a hybrid — or perhaps, a cybrid — culture and this needs to be worked on.

### ***Cultural clash, co-option or co-operation?***

An organisational structure based on separation can foster ghetto-isation, and integrated convergence has to overcome the resulting professional and institutional divisions. There is also the problem of the platforms generally having distinctive social differences. Carl Crothers of the *Winston-Salem Journal* whose newspaper is creating a newsroom that will include print, broadcast and the Internet, says: "The problem is, and we've seen it here, the cultures are very different. And that's a huge thing." (Bowles, 2000). There is the particular problem of integrating or re-integrating separated websites with old media, which is typically a move from a fast paced environment to a slower one with different deadlines, priorities and decision-making timeframes.

Dan Bradley of the TV station in the Tampa convergence operation, advises: "Whenever there are two or more cultures in play, there are different languages, skill sets and work patterns. The challenge is to learn the nuances of each and leverage the best they offer into a unified operation. Give ups are hard, and things become territorial very quickly. The overriding goal must be to build a new model, not protect the status quo." He points out that the end result will certainly be a more complex culture than it would have been. En route there, he suggests stressing the commonalities: the shared journalistic values. "It is critical that everyone accept the fact that we produce for our customers, not



ourselves. Once you get to that point, you can help everyone see the product in the same terms the customers do.... The consumer moves effortlessly from print, to broadcast, to on-line. The consumer sees how the various media fit together. Now we need to get journalists thinking in the same manner." (Gentry, 2000:35)

Summing up, it can be said: "Internet is a substantially different medium to a newspaper in publishing cycle, etc. As a result, expertise in one medium will not necessarily translate into the other. Where two discreet editorial groups exist, these differences generate friction that is difficult to resolve. Where the groups work together, friction may be lessened, but there is the risk that one or both products could suffer if content is treated in a homogenous fashion." (Murdock, 1999). The next chapter deals more with this risk to diversity, here the focus is on managing integration.

### ***Being digital – but being human***

Whatever the degrees of integration or separation, convergence is profoundly about people. And just below the dazzling digital possibilities are personal issues like insecurities, ambitions and rivalries. According to Howard Tyner, executive editor of the *Chicago Tribune's* multi-media newsroom, the majority of journalists there just "want to put out a newspaper and screw the rest of that stuff". He complains that an integrated structure pressures print reporters and editors to divide time, attention and news budgets. "The question for me is, how I can make my newspaper better?" (Skene, 2000)

Dealing with these genuine problems comes down in part to leadership. "The convergence message has to come from the very top level of a company," affirms Keith Hartenberger of the Tribune

company (Gentry, 2000:32). Top leaders have to help print and online employees engage with each other across the digital divide (Boyd and Skene, 1999).

Even simple cross-promotion between platforms needs a champion or it does not work properly. In situations where the Web is one of the platforms in a cross-promotion arrangement (eg. with a core-business newspaper or broadcaster), it usually gets very little exposure on sister/parent platforms. Thus, convergence needs a person who ensures that cross-promotion is regularised and effective.

Tampa has a multi-media editor to promote cross-platform content sharing, and much of his job is described as shuttle diplomacy. He also has to ensure that cross-media is not seen as his responsibility alone as opposed it being everyone's. (*newspaper techniques*, p 20, Jan 2001)

The import of this is that converging culture can't stop at the leaders. Rather than having editors cajoling erratic co-operation from traditionally separated departments, media enterprises need to set up cohesive teams that encourage an appreciation of servicing different platforms. And this takes time.

Coming from the vantage point of the website, Rusty Coats, online editor at the *Star Tribune*, Minneapolis, advises: "Insert your online editor into the decision-making process and focus your staff so that you have an 'online cheerleader' who wants to get more stories in (on the Web)." (APME news, winter 2001, 31). Early adopters of technology in the traditional newsroom need to be identified and worked with. And journalists frustrated with space or airtime constraints in the old media need to be won over to

become Web enthusiasts. Web-editors report that often the photographic people are the most co-operative because they like to get a whole portfolio of pictures online.

So, anyone involved in trying to engineer convergence has to pay particular attention to the people factor. However, while people are indeed critical to convergence, it is clear and realistic objectives, plus well planned and managed systems, that enable them to work together to make it happen.

### ***Process***

The answer to many of the human problems in convergence lies in process. Depending on the degree of convergence, by no means does this phenomenon have to mean there is collaboration on every story. Industry experience suggests that plannable, visible, community campaign type stories and investigations lend themselves to this. Collaborations should start small and gradually scale up, rather than be fast-tracked from the top. Convergence should ideally build on contacts and previous joint projects, and be voluntary. A written agreement may be useful.

Communication is central. To ensure that some platforms are not neglected, places like Tampa have a central desk where all are represented. In WBOC-TV in Salisbury, Md., a banner was hung in the newsroom saying "Does WBOC.com know?" These kinds of activities help develop and manage convergence.

Additional advice for web editors is to make it easy for people in your partner medium to give you information – it does not have to be perfect before it gets to you. Even just ringing you with a little extra info means that you can merge it with a background or wire

agency story and make it seem like something new.

**How bad can it get?**

“A newspaper in Australia hires a TV-trained cameraman and producer to do video newsgathering for streaming off its website, and winds up with material that looks and sounds no different from an evening television news report. A regional newspaper in France places great importance on establishing a one-to-one relationship with a regional television channel and winds up with a small TV studio in a corner of its newsroom and absolutely no interaction between print and broadcast journalists. A major news event occurs in Turkey that local media rush to cover, and at least 10 journalists competing for positions at the scene are from various print, TV and Web divisions of the same media group despite a programme intended to co-ordinate the company’s coverage. An innovative training programme at a Brazilian newspaper teaches photographers how to shoot video but the newspaper declines to buy any video cameras for them to use. A British newspaper appoints a multimedia editor to co-ordinate print and online news-handling, yet Web aspects of story presentation are not discussed at daily news meetings.” *newspaper techniques*, January 2001. p 13.

The logical thing is to devise and set up systems for regular content sharing, and not let the convergence depend only upon personal contacts. This puts the initiative on the way to a convergence that is convivial rather than conflictual.

## ***Techno talk***

Process and system also entail a technologically-driven "content management system". In part, this entails an editorial intranet component, which in turn needs a super-search capacity. It can – and should – also provide for what is called Digital Asset Management (DAM) supporting all media formats and types, including still and streaming media. There have to be features like adequate storage, indexing capabilities, security, user-friendly navigation systems and interfaces, and various applications.

### **What is content management?**

“At its core, content management is the separation of information – text, graphics, audio, and video – from its representation on a device, such as a computer screen, Web TV, Palm computer, newsprint, or other formatted display. This separation is usually accomplished by placing content objects and template designs into a database and invoking a computing engine to combine them during the publishing process. My personal definition also adds the ability to receive content from third parties into the system, apply workflow roles and rules to assure content completion, and a timely publishing process that distributes content to all platforms and distribution channels.

“Content management goes beyond the Web. The Web is but one channel for reaching consumers of content. Car radios, cell phones, PDAs, and Internet appliances of all shapes and forms will continue to drive the need for multi-channel distribution of what's important in peoples lives.

“As (Web) writers and editors divorce themselves from actual page layout and html coding, they will find that their roles move from html fiddlers to content and distribution channel managers. Instead of thinking about how the page holds content, they'll think about how viewers of their content consume information through their distribution channels.” — Gary Gunnerson, (Decotis, M. 2000. [www.poynter.org](http://www.poynter.org)).

Like a bank, content management technology has to deal in different currencies. (Sebastian Holst of Artesia Technologies. *newspaper techniques*, p 22. July/August 2000).

Content management systems these days trumpet the use of XML (extensible mark up language) – a media-neutral language for tagging elements of data. Currently, many such systems are not so much XML databases as merely programmes that import and export XML formats. However, XML is the shape of things to come. Already, international newsagency Reuters has been driving NewsML, an applied XML, which is becoming a universal standard for packaging and distributing multiple media content. NewsML will also make it easier to collect, manage, archive and search for news.

When convergence gets to the point of content management technology it is into serious business integration. It is also into serious financial expenditure, and African media can only hope the price comes down in the future.

### ***Limits of technology***

There is some thinking in the USA that this kind of content management technology will solve the cost and skills problems of multiple-media newsgathering and dissemination. The notion is that through computer software, "platform-agnostic" content can be automatically converted or cut up for the needs of different platforms. The same text story, for instance, could be sliced by computer so as to send the headline as an SMS to a cellphone, post the headline-plus-blurb to the Web, do an audio-conversion

for an audio-news version on a phone, and deliver the full text to the newspaper ready for layout. Technology in this view solves the problem of multi-skilling. It simply doesn't matter what a reporter's specialised reporting skill is – she or he is, from the point of view of technology, one of a mass of undifferentiated content providers.

In its most extreme form, this technician vision even makes any journalistic skills redundant.



At the Media Lab at MIT, they've developed a software programme that allows complete amateurs to provide school sport content that gets converted into journalism. It relies on the formulaic journalism around sports reports: all you need to do is add in the data, and it writes the (hackneyed) sentences for you about who won, and what the chronology of the match was. The Media Lab has also created a programme to automatically annotate newsagency stories, thereby localising them. This technology recognises key words in disaster coverage for instance, and will immediately feed in comparative local information – all untouched by human hand. Thus, a report on a flood in Maputo that appears in a Boston newspaper, for example, can have a paragraph inserted immediately which says Maputo's population is three times that of Boston (or whatever the figure actually is).

The illusion of these techno dreams is that skilled pre-purposing of content for a particular platform can be made irrelevant. If nothing needs to be pre-purposed, it is because everything is re-

purposed. The problem of this model is that it ignores human judgement.

For example, you certainly can automate for a newsagency feed to always take the headline and intro paragraph of the latest-arriving story and put it at the top of your breaking news section of your website. But is that story the most important story for your audience? Maybe the computer just bumped off one that was of far greater relevance to them.

Similarly, a computer can convert text to speech and vice versa, but surely you'd want to edit this — unless you really do believe your audience will be content with a "shovelware" transcription service or a computerised voiced-over script? Likewise, it is possible to put video footage into a database and have clips automatically selected for both Web and for broadcast. But video on a TV set has a lot of screen "real estate" space compared to that which is downloaded as a box on most computer screens. Video that contains a lot of movement or complicated background does not compress well for transmission on the Web. In short, there are problems with the notion that technology will converge humans, and in particular, skilled journalists, out of the picture. The "platform-agnostic" view is a one-size-fits-all model, which dismally fails to recognise the unique needs and strengths of different platforms and the people who can make this happen. Tech has a crucial part to play in convergence, but its role also has limits.

### ***Needed: athletes competent for convergence***

Nora Paul (1998a, 1998b), formerly of the Poynter Institute, has developed a checklist of hurdles facing new media newsleaders working with die-hard print parents. Adapted it for southern Africa,



it highlights the range of obstacles they must leap over if convergence is to succeed.

- **Technological:** The technology used for creating the website is incompatible with that in the newsroom, making collaboration difficult.
- **Logistics:** Your online operation is removed from the rest of the newsroom, leaving little chance to interact. Automated copy flow from the newsroom straight to your team is helpful, but what if it means little need to ever talk to each other? In operations like [www.IOL.co.za](http://www.IOL.co.za), staff receive all content through a programme called Autopilot that sweeps "done" queues of Independent's newspapers at agreed off-screen times (Taylor, 2000). The effect is that people on the IOL site feel that they only take copy, and cannot ask for favours or hassle for anything extra or special.
- **Ignorance:** jobs and job titles in the two media tend to be different; resulting in organisational confusion.
- **Territorial:** Print often feel they need to protect their turf.
- **Cultural:** New media means speed, flexibility, experimentation. Print entails stable operations, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" mentalities, and strong traditions about the way things are done. There is misunderstanding waiting to happen.
- **Ethical:** Print ethics are not always followed online, and there can be differences in this regard.
- **Perceptual:** Print see new media staff as upstart, non-journalists living in an alien techno-universe. The other way around, print staff are seen as dinosaurs and luddites.
- **Motivational:** Each side feels they already have enough to do, and that working together will be exactly that – more work.
- **Half-baked:** When print staff are asked to put e-mail addresses on stories, they are not given guidance about how to deal with the volume of feedback they get. They are expected to work for other platforms without training.

- Generational: Average age in new media is younger than in print media. Ageism can exist on both sides.
- Jealousy: Print may feel that New Media gets new computers, while the latter may feel shortchanged in terms of staffing.
- Big Picture artists absent: senior news executives often don't direct the website; it's a Cinderella left out of the ball. According to Paul (1998a), in a 1998 survey, only 30 percent of American sites said that senior news executives got involved in the site.
- Schizophrenic: The organisation tries to promote the public's use of the site – but refuses to give Internet access to reporters at their desks. As Tanya Accone (2000) notes, even in the biggest newsrooms in southern Africa, journalists' access to the Internet remains a privilege rather than an accepted norm.

Nora Paul suggests that after identifying which hurdles apply to you, the way to surmount them is to:

- Develop or re-develop a clear mission – and communicate about it;
- Provide rumour control;
- Help ease techno-angst;
- Raise consciousness;
- Find out what motivates people's fears and hopes;
- Establish clear procedures, guidelines and policies.

She also suggests the following to news website editors:

- BE THERE. Have at least a desk in the newsroom.
- Insinuate yourself into the flow of reporting and story development.
- Go to news meetings (and don't just sit there, contribute ...)
- Encourage communication and socialise together.

- Invite people to new media meetings.
- Arrange job switches for a month.
- Demonstrate you have the same journalistic values – talk about ethics.
- Instead of concentrating on how material gets from the newsroom to the website, look at the overall system and see how changes can improve work in both areas.
- Educate decision-makers who ban newsroom access to the Web. Find out what they are really concerned about. Show that if people are really wasting time on the Web, the problem is management, not the Internet. Propose clear policies for Internet use in the newsroom.
- Give the newsroom traffic data from the website.

Elaborating on this last point, along with giving other good advice, is Carl Natale, of Central Maine Newspapers Online. He says: "I write a weekly report on hits. I talk about the trends. What stories are read most. Where most hits come from (local or nonlocal). When people read the stories online. Why hits are up/down. Reporters love it when they see their stories make the top 10. It's a one-page report that explains things in plain language. It reinforces that online is a part of the operation. This report goes to all newsroom staffers, the paper's department heads (circulation, advertising, etc.) and of course the publisher."

Natale also compiled the following "survival tips for small online staffs in small newspapers":

- News meetings are critical: an online presence is needed there. Don't just stop at meetings – join in as many newsroom activities as possible.

- Location, location, location: put the online staff in the newsroom, so their work is visible, and so they can communicate.
- Show your special work to the rest of the newsroom.
- Offer training in online research.
- Help to find information – like links for sites that can go with their stories.
- Share feedback by printing out and displaying email you receive.
- He says that this will all pay off as print staffers start including Web journalists in their plans for projects and stories.

Another contributor on the topic of how online can improve relations with offline is Judy Nichols, online editor of *the Arizona Republic/Arizona Central*. She proposes:

- You need a big dog in the newsroom. "You need someone high up in the food chain expressing interest."
- Location, location, location: "Find a piece of prime real estate in the newsroom and homestead it. Absence does not make the heart grow fonder; it's out of sight, out of mind."
- Follow the swarm: "If you want to cross-pollinate, find the beehive. The buzzing starts long before anyone puts the story on the diary."
- Get invited to the party: "Ask reporters to include you on road trips to get video or audio. Go to lunch with reporters."
- A brick at a time: "Show them how to report incrementally. First a bulletin, then a headline and one sentence, then two, then four paragraphs, then a photo, then a longer story, then an updated version."

- Bless the believer, but don't stone the sinner. "Identify people who 'get it' and work with them as much as possible. But don't write off non-believers. We all get Web religion at a different pace."

Much of this advice includes an emphasis on the importance of physical space. This is a matter that merits further attention.

### ***Architecture***

The days of not only logically separate, but also physically separate, news operations are passing. For online operations, the argument is that if you and your website team are not housed in the newsroom, you need a liaison person there, especially in the news conference. The alternative is spending a lot of time resenting and resisting the fact that the newsroom has other things on its mind than the website. But the first prize is to be co-located. This is not only in the interests of the website. It's argued that reporters in the old newsroom need access and a reason to look at what's happening online. There's a suggestion of installing a large and live display monitor showing the website at the entrance to the workplace.

Some initiatives are more advanced than others. At the Spanish paper *Marca*, a combined news team works together on a daily basis and no walls separate the radio, Internet and print staff. "They fill the same space. There are no barriers. We have a lot of talk during the day. The different media editors have plans together," says a company director (Stone, 2001). The experience of Spain's El Mundo online is also interesting. "We have set up again right in the newsroom because we believe that the segregation was a mistaken policy. We are now sufficiently

autonomous, but we are condemned to understand each other and to work not 'for' the printed newspaper's newsroom, but 'with' it." (staffer Mario Tascon, cited in Fernandez, 1999).

In Tampa's case, three institutions WFLA-TV Newschannel 8, *The Tampa Tribune*, and TBO.com, now occupy a new \$30 million building designed to get their staffs to interact. The first floor of the building is television studio space, with an atrium that makes it visible from the second floor where the television and online newsrooms are based. The newspaper newsroom is on the third floor and the fourth floor is home to television management and sales. While many other news organisations in the USA have shared news between platforms, Tampa is distinct in the fact of physically locating them in the same premises. It is likely, however, to be the shape of things to come if old and new media are to optimise relations.

### ***Conclusion***

Whether co-housed or not, convergence raises the question of what kind of relations exist between participating media initiatives. There are problems with unequal integration, but also with strong segregation. Culture and personal factors have to be tackled, systems devised and technology acquired and arranged in its proper place and role. Numerous hurdles have to be surmounted to get good relationships going. The matter of physical space can make a big difference. Managing convergence means managing all these things. No one said it was going to be easy. It's not. But if news websites in southern Africa are going to survive, it has to be done.

## 5. The multi-skilling debate

Convergence – even in a fused newsroom – is not the same as multi-skilling. But it is certainly a trigger towards this. There are degrees of convergence which impact on the degree to which multi-skilling is required. Convergence in some forms is a newspaper reporter appearing in front of a TV camera, and a TV reporter having a newspaper column. It can be print photographers sometimes shooting video, while TV camera-people also take stills. It does not necessarily require any of them to wear a "website" hat when they go about their work. But the way it is supposed to work in a place like Orlando is that "a print reporter may write a story for the Web site in the morning, appear on television to update it at noon, and then bang out the piece in long-form for the next day's edition of the paper. That rolling deadline means that news emits from the *Sentinel* around the clock instead of once a day." (Hickey, 2000).

When CNN decided to pull its website back into the main newsroom, chief news executive Eason Jordan said: "CNN's newsgathering resources will function as one unit to serve all parts of the company, while fulfilling the requirements of each of CNN's networks and services ... CNN newsgatherers must be multi-skilled and meet the requirements of our TV, radio and interactive services. No longer will a newsgatherer work only for TV or radio or interactive. Correspondents whose expertise is TV reporting must know how to write for interactive and provide tracks for radio – and deliver them as needed." (Eason, 2001)

SABC for several years has promoted bi-media skilling amongst

radio and TV journalists. It has been a long and hard slog to develop this, and while the goal survives, its implementation is being re-examined. Meanwhile, in the USA, a different form of bi-skilling is pursued at Bloomberg news, where it is required of reporters that they contribute both written stories and sound. To get reporters into the habit, the news editor sends them reminders about taking along a tape recorder, plugging into the sound board at press conferences, and recording phone conversations. SABC and Bloomberg are each bi-media thrusts on convergence. But it doesn't end with just two platforms. Three dimensional thinking and working is also on the agenda.

Eddie Robinette, editor of newscoast.com, the website of a Florida newspaper, says "Convergence is adding value to all three media (TV, online, print). ... Journalists these days have to know all three to be journalists." (Cole, 2001). The question then is tri-media journalists. For now. As media houses service more and more platforms, so the demands on journalists' skills will continue to rise.

The extent to which such multi-skilling occurs, and the extent to which staffers are having to bite the bullet, varies. In three of the USA's "converged" initiatives:

- The *Chicago Tribune* has print, web and broadcast wings that operate independently, and with dedicated staff, although there are joint news diary meetings. There is widespread sharing of content via a multi-media desk that also does cross promotion, and organises the 'borrowing' of journalists from one medium to another. Journalists decide if they want to take part. The newspaper's photographers do not shoot video. "One worry



among the newspaper folks is that they will be forced to appear on TV. We have said nobody is going to have to do extensive on-air work without training," says Patti Breckenridge, a *Tribune* managing editor. But future hires at the newspaper will be brought aboard with the understanding that they will work as television and online reporters too. Breckenridge says that recent applicants have been attracted to the newspaper expressly because of the convergence.

- The *Orlando Sentinel* involves the lead editors of three different media co-ordinating in advance of newsgathering over who will get what stories and how they can share the resulting content. There is some multi-skilling in the form of newspaper photographers shooting video, organised through a multi-media desk in the newsroom.
- The third model is Tampa, which has more integration. News staff here are required to work across all media, it is not voluntary. A multi-media editor directs cases of cross-media newsgathering and content sharing. There is a "superdesk" responsible for news as a whole, which has a photo representative from the paper and the multi-media editor, and which is based in the TV newsroom. This is not a committee approach, though there remain specialist editors with platform-specific skills for each platform. In April 2000, a monthly average of 40-50 converged items – defined as print, broadcast and Web staff working together to report one story – were appearing on TV and in the paper. (*newspaper techniques*, p 17/8. Oct 2000; Gentry, 2000:31).

In none of these is there (yet) a single news-gathering operation to feed print, television and the Web. The collaboration largely involves only breaking news and long-range stories.

For some people, this kind of cross-fertilisation is too much. USA's *St. Petersburg Times* partners with a TV station, which previews the next morning's headlines during the late night TV newscast. In return, the paper's weather page features the station's well-known meteorologist. Executives from the station and the paper share news tips and explore ways to connect their Web sites. But Paul Tash, editor of the paper, says they are not ready to cover news together. "It's mostly about the presentation of each other's journalism, rather than doing journalism together." He sees the advantage in the present arrangement as being the ability for both companies to maintain separate and independent voices. (Rabasca, 2001).

The full integration model could be taken to imply that everyone is supposed to do everything – service the full range of platforms. The assumption here is that minimum re-purposing would be needed, because multi-skilled journalists can produce tailored content for different platforms. The problem here is twofold: it assumes journalists can wear all these hats, and in the space of limited time also do justice to all the different versions of a story.

Certainly, even going one step forward to multi-skilling is not necessarily easy. One American print journalist faced with the challenge of going onto TV describes her feelings of intimidation when she realised her work would be judged on personal appearance and being able to think on your feet. "I like to put a lot of thought into what I write. So thinking quickly (on the air)

concerns me," Patty Ryan of the Tampa *Tribune* notes. "A 'talkback,' in its purest form, is live. That scares me. If I screw up, I can't backspace. The whole world hears it." (Paul, 2000b).

Ryan evidently has problems with this print-TV multi-skilling. She would react badly to the comment by Jan Bierhoff of the European Journalism Center who argues that besides print journalists needing to learn about audio and video, they will in future also need to know about animations, interactive maps and databases and new narrative techniques. "Multiple media productions will increase in number and importance. The strict division between text, audio and video will disappear in the sense that journalists will have to have operational knowledge of more, if not all, presentation modes ... multi-skilling is almost an understatement to describe the job profile of these omnipotent information professionals" (Jan Bierhoff. *newspaper techniques*, p. 48. May 2000).



Convergence at the level of skill entails a lot of work and a lot of potential problems. According to Al Tompkins (2001), converged newsrooms are constantly confronted with reporters who previously filed a daily story or two for a newspaper or a television station, and are now being asked to file a newspaper story, an online version and a TV story. He says reporters complain that

they have less time to report, double-check facts, or even seek out new stories. "Right now, it is novel," says Tampa TV reporter Lance Williams. "But if two or three times a week they are asking me to turn a TV story and a newspaper story, then I will have a problem. I worry what happens to the quality of the story. When would we have time to go out and report?" (Paul, 2000b).

Neil Hickey (2000) poses the question about whether reporters spreading themselves thinly is "counterproductive, distracting, inimical to deep, thoughtful reporting and analysis". He also cites concerns that reporters might also have to end up reporting to more than one boss.

Problems are also signalled by the *Svenska Dagbladet* deputy editor, Lennart Holmblad: "Do you have one editorial chief for everything, who has to think about various outputs ... whose walls contain an array of digital screens showing what is happening right now with all our material? ... Maybe we need an information flow editor to handle just that complexity. ... Camera use is new for many of the writers. So often poor quality work is being done. The need to embrace the new has not really sunk in. For journalists, several competencies are needed simultaneously, but just how much specialisation is needed?"

A reporter in a converged news operation has to balance reporting demands of a continuing story with the distribution demands of the multiple media platforms. But some reporters are better at the fast-breaking story than the heavyweight interview or think-piece. Some print reporters are not naturals for television, and vice versa. Diane McFarlin of the *Sarasota Herald Tribune* wanted to have reporters trained in multiple media – the one-man

band concept, but she says it never worked very well. "Sightings of such creatures remain fairly rare." (Skene, 2000) Eddie Robinette, editor of newscoast.com, says that of 190 people in the newsrooms of his print, Web and TV operations, only two or three who can really pull off all three. However, Howard Tyner of the *Chicago Tribune* has noted that younger journalists fresh from J-school are often better prepared for multiple media outlets. (Skene, 2000).

A strong stand against multi-purpose reporting comes from Brazilian editor, Celso Pinto. "I will never allow my journalists, who are responsible for the daily newspaper, to work at the same time for the Internet. ...if, after a news conference, a journalist has to run from the room to put a story on the Internet, the airwaves or whatever, when will he have the time to put questions to the person who has spoken, gather opposing views, or follow up what he has just heard? . ... After finishing their work for the daily newspaper, the *Valor* journalists can obviously support the Internet site, give it the benefit of their analyses and their comments. But this may never be to the detriment of the print newspaper." Celso Pinto, editor of *Valor Economico*, Brazil. (*newspaper techniques*, January 2001).

Torne o Valor Online sua página inicial

<b>Canais</b>	<b>:: VALOR NOTÍCIAS</b>
:: Valor Carreira	18:43>> Residências e indústrias c/ metas me terão bônus
:: Valor Digital m	18:41>> Câmara aprova instituição de Código de Ét
:: Valor Econômico	18:40>> Incidente de constitucionalidade não favore
:: Valor Indicadores	18:40>> Petrobras e Enron não sabem como vende
:: Valor Notícias	18:02>> BankBoston mantém financiamento imobili
:: Valor Simulado	setor
<b>Valor Especial</b>	18:01>> Telesp Celular puxa queda no final dos neg
>> Bill Clinton	<b>:: Valor Econômico</b>
>> Pesquisas	<b>DaimlerChrysler decide fechar fábrica no Paraná</b>
<b>Seminários</b>	Marli Olmos e Miriam Karam, De São Paulo e Curitiba
>> Uso do solo urbano	

Compromise proposals have come from a range of commentators. Jim Kennedy, director of multi-media services at the Associated Press, says: "We're not talking about putting all the expertise into one person. We're talking about deploying the right kind of team." President of the World Association of Newspapers, Ruth de Aquino, volunteers: "Good and determined journalists should be trained to dominate all media. They deserve that. Nobody is asking that they display the same degree of talent in print, TV, online and radio. Nobody has ever expected that the reporter and photographers sent to cover a story were equally gifted. Therefore, adapting to new times means journalists should be more flexible, more team-oriented, more multifunctional and more open to learning all formats and all technical languages, even if they do not exercise them on a daily basis. That is how we are going to reach our consumers at any given time through any given medium." (*newspaper techniques*, page 24. January 2001).

Further wisdom comes from Kerry Northrup, director of the Ifra Centre for Advanced News Operations. He believes it is unrealistic to try to build an entire staff of multi-skilled journalists who are experts in all the different forms of news reporting from print and online to audio and video. But he recommends some cross-media training – such as empowering still photographers to carry video cameras, and enabling print reporters to present a story on TV – even if most news organisations need to continue having the services of journalists who are specialists in the various media formats.

Bearing out this point is the experience of TPO.com producer Adrian Phillips. He performs a wide variety of journalistic jobs

including doing video for the site and the TV channel, articles for the newspaper and multi-media productions using Flash software. He aims to be able to switch gears effortlessly from one medium to another, but adds that it helps to have experts on staff in each medium who can add polish to his video, text, Flash animation and audio. (Stone, 2001).

What might make for clarity is to distinguish integration of newsgathering, and integration of production. The two are distinct and also not automatically dependent on each other. At the level of newsgathering, there is multi-skilling and there are also multiple-medium teams. This does not necessarily require integration of skills at the level of production. Different platform inputs from the same producers can be still each re-purposed by a diverse editing operation working exclusively for different platforms.

In terms of production, converged or specialist skills may be needed to transform and edit news — and irrespective of whether the source collecting the news is integrated or disparate.

One of the key issues is what works best in terms of multi-purpose so as to play out a story to differing platforms' strengths, and how the resources of both newsgathering and production can be optimised for maximum effect. A problem of a disjuncture between how the input and output sides of journalism are organised, is that it separates the gathering and editing operations which can lead to schizophrenia and poorer product.

A useful comment comes from Tampa *Tribune* executive editor Gil Thelen who said about the convergence at his establishment: at the start of 2000. "The three media will enter this year larger and stronger than in 1999. The combined staffs will add 10 people this

year. If convergence leads to fewer journalists reporting, producing, and editing weaker journalism, we deserve to lose customers and public trust."

A concern that does need to be addressed, however, is whether the centralisation entailed in multi-skilling (or in multi-purposing the products of a mono-skilled journalist) makes for fewer voices reporting on each story, and there is a diminution of diversity. Perhaps it is a trade-off: if convergence through multi-skilling helps sustain endangered media enterprises, this contributes to broader media pluralism. That can compensate for any narrowing of perspective or homogenising of content that might result from converging the news process. And if journalists are versatile and broad-minded, they can do a lot to promote diversity in coverage within and across all platforms.

In conclusion, the idea of every journalist being able to do everything is fraught with many problems. However, a degree of multi-skilling is possible, and a team approach to certain stories is also relevant if the notion is for input and output phases of journalism to take account of multi-platform publishing.



## 6. Supervising staff – and your seniors

Al Tompkins argues that most convergence efforts in the USA to date are mostly promotional in nature, and only a handful of the enterprises share hourly or even daily news content. Most TV stations, newspapers and online partners still would not think of allowing their stories to be broken on another medium before they, themselves, told the story. He writes: "I think convergence will not work as a business model or as a journalistic enterprise as long as the partners are so cautious about it. Yet, I hear every week from middle managers that their bosses or owners order them to 'get converged' without any real notion of why, what it would look like when we are finished, or how this will help the community."

This is just one of the immense challenges facing what Tompkins calls the 'middle managers'. Somehow, online editors are expected to have all the answers in a brand-new industry. Decotis (2000) says a news website is a job in which the practitioners are expected to have the stamina of a marathon runner, the skills of a diplomat, the patience of a snake charmer, and the vision and drive of a pioneer. He continues: "Online editors have to decide how much news is enough for the website when most of the resources go into the newspaper, magazine, TV or radio station, leaving little for the online product. They are forced to decide every day between shoveling sufficient news online to satisfy the news junkies, and creating enough special, fun, interesting, and different packages, including multi-media, to differentiate the website from the core product."

Online editors have to act as guiding lights for senior product executives, many of whom are new to the Web and work under unrealistic and short-term directives from shareholders. Online news managers are expected to achieve miracles while at the same time working with flat or shrinking budgets.

Managing your managers' expectations of you is also a major part of the job. "The best websites have general manager buy-in, news director buy-in, and corporate buy-in," according to analyst Bob Papper (Bergman, 2001). To get this, and to "manage up", you need to know your boss's needs and what his or her boss's needs are. Chances are that he or she is not necessarily au fait with new media, and is under pressure to produce financial results within an unrealistic investment period.

Tim Stehle, senior director of research at KnightRidder.com, has issued the following challenges to news website editors. To benefit your users, he said, you must:

- Be better than the available alternatives.
- Provide a sense of discovery, new things, and unknown things.
- Provide a local filter for everything and lots of links to local resources. Provide a local website directory, a search engine for your local news.
- Be more inclusive by bringing on a variety of content partners, not all of them paid.
- Be absolutely current.
- Be historic. Old news is worth more than breaking news, which has become a commodity.
- Save users time and effort. Does your website pass the "save a phone call" test?
- Be usable. The site must work the first time and every time. There are no second chances with content and technology.
- Be the Yahoo of your local news market.
- Co-operate with your competitors.

Tired yet? There's more. Irwin Manoim, founder and former editor of the e-M&G, speaks about being "staggeringly overworked." He notes: "It is quite normal for one person to be news and sports editor, reporter and chief sub rolled up into one rather modest payslip and all for very little glory. ... Constant updating is a brutal regime. It means shift work day and night, Saturday, Sunday, Christmas Day, New Year's Day." (2000).

Another commentator echoes this: "Long hours, newsroom connections are part of life at thinly staffed Web operations. ... The job requires someone who is willing to work the long hours needed to juggle multiple responsibilities and have the finesse to convince non-digital newsroom staff to contribute to the cause." You have to edit copy for the site, as well as manage advertising, accounting, billing and tracking traffic. (Price, 2001). Even more stress could be entailed if your website is in English and Spanish as in the USA, or in English and KiSwahili (as at IPPmedia.com in Tanzania). Then you have to do, or monitor, translation along with the editing!

It is little wonder, then, that in the face of these issues, Bob Carr – a trainer with the Gannett company – responded as follows to the question of what challenges were being faced by online employees: "As with many entrepreneurs or risk-takers, they suffer from isolation, criticism, lack of resources, and support. Such a setting may tend to attract people with similar personalities, drives, and needs which further separates them from the mainstream. (Decotis, 2001)

On top of your alleged personality problem, you face the challenge of convergence. Being part of the process of convergence means not just focusing on your website and its

people both above and below you, but on how relationships are managed with everyone outside it. Steve DeGregorio, senior editor for multi-media at Tampa, working with all three platforms, says: "If you believe in convergence and really want it to happen, you've got to plan and coordinate your activities. You can't just leave it up to individuals to make it happen without some structure." You might, for instance, want to lobby for a new position of multi-media co-ordinator which – as at Tampa – bridges the different platforms. That kind of deal could work wonders for you. But it is just part of what is needed.

"Convergence is change. ... Some embrace it, others loathe it. ... Managing the change shouldn't be discounted." These words come from Keith Hartenberger of the USA's Tribune Co. Somewhat optimistically, he adds: "If the effort is led or 'sold' properly and then followed by effective communication and co-ordination to make the partnership work, the change should be almost seamless. Convergence simply becomes part of what an organization does." (Gentry, 2000:32-3).

Advice here is to concentrate on commonalities. "I can't say enough about understanding the cultural differences between print, online and broadcast journalism. They are completely different animals! The good news is that many of the values are exactly the same. All three are committed to accuracy, enterprise and service to the community. But you have to create opportunities for the employees to witness these shared values and allow trust and respect to grow with the ranks of the organizations." (Deb Halpern, WFLA-TV, Tampa, cited by Gentry 34).

More insight comes from John Haile, editor of the *Orlando*

*Sentinel*: "Provide a vision of where you want to end up, and explain in great detail why. But to work out the details of what will be done and how to do it, involve the people who ultimately will have to make it happen. That way, the project belongs to everyone." (Gentry, 2000:32). Karen McAllister, online managing editor at fresnoBee.com says: "We try to make the reporters and editors understand that fresnoBee.com is their Web site and to feel ownership of it. That way, they are more likely to contribute breaking news stories and enhance their stories online with extra material." (Clare, 2001)



A central part of convergence is working with journalists in old media to encourage them to take the view that when they get a story they are passionate about, they can get it out much more widely by working with other platforms. Not all journalists want to do this by any means. Earlier this year, I met the *New York Times*' John Markoff, one of the leading technology journalists in the USA, and asked him if he presented his reportage for multiple platforms given that he probably had more readers on the Internet and on PDAs than in the newspaper. He replied that he wrote only with the paper in mind, and did not even include hyperlinks in his articles.

But attitudes can and do change. Patti Breckinridge, *Tampa Tribune* managing editor, says: "On the newspaper side, about one

third of the staff is excited about this, about one third is watching and waiting to see what happens, and a third, at first, was pessimistic. Now, maybe only 10 percent are pessimistic. Tampa TV journalist Lance Williams gives a sense of why some journalists like convergence. "The last newspaper story I wrote, I wrote on my own time. But the fun part of it is, there are no restrictions on my story. It is hard to write a minute and thirty-second story, but writing for the newspaper is freeing. I can talk about a nuance in a story and not worry about the pictures. Compared to writing for TV, when you write for the newspaper it seems like you can write forever."

The relationship between different platforms does not have to be defensively competitive. For Williams, "I don't think people will see a story in the newspaper, then see it on TV and say, 'That TV story was better than the newspaper version.' They just don't see news that way." All of this is part of what – on the print side – Bill Dunn, deputy editor at the *Orlando Sentinel*, calls the "evolution from thinking of local TV as the enemy to suddenly becoming part of the medium" (Botero, 1999:16). Tampa's experience in this regard is reported by Al Tompkins as follows: "A day that began with the newspaper asking to break a TV story ended with the TV station profiting from the extensive newspaper presence at a big breaking news story. The online coverage took in information from both broadcast and newspaper journalists." He believes that over time the less tangible benefits of convergence can also start seeping through: TV reporters may get a boost in journalistic credibility by having their bylines in the paper, newspaper reporters may get more news tips because people see them on TV.

The most potentially unifying sentiment is expressed by Dan Bradley, news director at the Tampa converged operation. He says the most significant aspect of convergence is that it puts the viewer, reader, or Web user in control of when and how they want to see the news. "The information we gather doesn't belong to us. It is the readers', the viewers', the users' information. We have an obligation to get it out there on as many platforms as we can." And he observes that: "audiences are already converged. A person is likely to read a newspaper in the morning, flip on the TV or a radio and hit the Internet to check something out — all before going to work." (He neglects to add, that if this person is an American teenager, she or he is also equally at home with simultaneous consumer convergence — listening to radio, watching TV and surfing the web at the same time.)

All this said, however, if the contribution to multiple media output is made part of people's performance reviews (another time-consuming activity that the online manager would be required to take part in!), and consequently considered for reward, there might be much more support for convergence on the newsroom floors. Extra payment might also be appropriate, although, unsurprisingly, few American companies propose this. The approach rather is: "Those who can tell their stories in many ways and in many media will find themselves more valuable to their employers, and more effective in the size of their audience that they can reach." (Charlie Meyerson, *Chicagotribune.com*, cited by Stone, 2001). Kerry Northrup repeats this, saying that the average journalist will have more career opportunities to the extent that he or she has an interest and skill in multiple media newshandling. (*newspaper*



*techniques*, p.12 Feb 2000; Oct 2000, p.16).

Part of being an online editor is to plan, hire, supervise ... and recently to retrench direct staff. None of this is uncomplicated. For starters, what really is the minimum staff you need in relation to the viability of the site? In the USA, Gilbert's study (2001) found that separated websites had on average 28 people, integrated only had 16. And the range is huge. The *Colorado Springs Gazette* in early 2001 had five people doing the news part of the website, and 25 doing the portal part plus ad sales. At Roanoke, there were three staffers in editorial and seven in sales.

While some converged media have single teams cross-selling ads, one study reported that half of USA newspapers online had separate ad sales staff. (*newspaper techniques*, September 2000). What works best is a matter for debate, and one in which the online editor will have a great interest.

In South Africa, IOL had only five staffers in December 1998. By September 2000, it was updating 19 hours a day, and had grown to 35 editorial and technical staff – with a total complement (including ad sales) of 120 (Taylor, 2000). There are no tried and tested answers to how many staff you need, only the certainty that there will be fewer than required. The online editor therefore has to spend much time managing workloads and dealing with burn out.

What kind of staff do you need? And how much should they be technical, how much journalistic? Does everyone need to know HTML or photoshop, or are good skills for text editing (read: re-purposing) more important? What kind of editing skills are most needed? If headlines are critical on that front page, and likewise photos, can you sacrifice this quality to a person who is weak here



but great at turning around new stories every 15 minutes? Being a new medium for story-telling, the question also arises as to having journalists with a lot of background in legacy media: can old journalistic dogs really learn new tricks? What balance of re-purposers do you need in relation to skilled multi-media creators? You might decide to do like CNN.com and aim to get a specialised interactivity editor. Such a person might be based in the newsroom, or in features, depending on the orientation of your site.



The online news leader also has to deal with the question of how much do staff, often deluged with data, have to become information managers and how does this come about? Then there is the issue of the extent to which staff also need to be "info-preneurial" and attuned to commercial potential (and ethical risk) in their journalism. Jan Bierhoff notes that many journalists (in various platforms) are nowadays expected to incorporate marketing (commercial) aspects in their journalistic decision-taking process. Especially on the web, there is a blurring of the traditionally strict division between the editorial and commercial responsibilities, and so message and marketing often become integral parts of the job of an online journalist (*newspaper techniques*, p. 48. May 2000). Online editors, themselves, of course must be "marketeers" and e-commerce enthusiasts and simultaneously a role model for professional ethics.

A study in 2000 of 141 news website managers said the biggest staffing needs were mainly for people who could update and maintain time-sensitive material. Next came staffers to edit or re-write text for online. Other skills noted were people who could find external links, headline writers, and fact checkers. Less than half spoke of the need for staff to create multi-media projects, manage chat forums or to do original journalism. Almost all rated the ability to find information on the Web as important, while only 53 percent listed hand-coded raw HTML. There were 45 percent who cited Database skills (such as ColdFusion and ASP) and Adobe Photoshop. (Stone, 2001).

The online editor invariably is also a skills expert and a professional trainer. More than this, she or he is also inextricably tied up with the transformation of the entire media business and/or its partners thanks to new technology. Why this is the case is evident in the analysis of Michael Porter of Harvard Business School. He argues: "As all companies come to embrace Internet technology, ... the Internet itself will be neutralized as a source of advantage. Basic Internet applications will become table stakes – companies will not be able to survive without them, but they will not gain any advantage from them. The more robust competitive advantages will arise instead from traditional strengths such as unique products, proprietary content, distinctive physical entities, superior product knowledge, and strong personal service and relationships. Internet technology may be able to fortify those advantages, by tying a company's activities together in a more distinctive system, but it is unlikely to supplant them. Ultimately, strategies that integrate the Internet and traditional competitive

advantages and ways of competing should win in many industries." (Porter, 2001). In similar vein, Louis V Gerstner, Jr, the CEO of IBM said the consensus now is that e-business is just business. In his report to shareholders last year, he said: "E-business involves more than transforming one part of a company. ... We said the real action, the real work – and the ultimate payoff – involved the transformation and the integration of the entire enterprise, from the customer all the way through the supply chain." (Gerstner, 2000). The point is that the technologies and universe of a media website will ultimately spread to the rest of the company in all its operations (not just journalistic), and they will be integrated through such a common network.

Lastly, for online editors, there's the need to keep yourself, your staff, and other stakeholders (like a partner or parent newsroom and your managers) up-to-date and strategically abreast of developments. You've got to keep an eye on the fast-moving competition, and keep up. In the USA, this would mean, for instance, noting that some of the larger news websites, realising the popularity of local news and information, are beginning to zone, providing tailored information for counties, cities, and towns. In other words, they're heading towards personalised news. What do you do? You have to think of ways to match this, or else it's match over for you.

A key part of this is growing the talents of yourself and your team. "Training and retraining is also a critical part of the venture. The main issue is the ability to effect cultural change and get all staff to realise they are operating in a multi-media business." (*newspaper techniques*, p.158. Sept 2000).

# 7. Using the medium

## *Strategic story-telling*

As news production moves towards a more integrated model, and the number of platforms serviced continues to proliferate, the question becomes how to juggle all the competing claims for content. If news managers are involved in content convergence, they need to see beyond the current pecking order of platforms. What today is either a flagship medium or a vulnerable toddler, is not guaranteed to be such tomorrow. This is because amongst the different platforms – TV, radio, phone, electronic billboard, online, print, PDA – none can be held up as long-term King. That role is reserved for Convergence. For a media institution or alliance to give permanent privilege to servicing television rather than radio (or vice versa), or to a newspaper rather than an offshoot website, is simply shortsighted. It imposes a straitjacket that fails to appreciate the power of the combination of services to all these platforms within a broader bouquet at the disposal of that media operation or partnership. But how does the combination produce the goods?

The conundrum posed by convergence is that:

- We can't afford different reporters dedicated exclusively to servicing single platforms in a bouquet of outlets — it is too much duplication.
- We can't get everyone to do everything — and even if they could, we would still have to get around the problem of prioritising which platforms get served in what order.
- We can't bypass these two problems with technology — that would simply homogenise content by treating platforms in a supposedly neutral and undifferentiated way.

The challenge of convergence is therefore to find a strategy to

integrate newsgathering and production efforts for different platforms, without compromising the specificity of each platform and the needs of the specific audience characteristics that go with them. Going back to basics, we should recognise that journalism is not in fact about media platforms first and foremost. The business seen as a whole is not about filling airtime with sound and video. Neither is it about sourcing content for the Web, or about getting enough words and pictures for print. Journalism is about realistic and truthful story-telling in the public interest. The challenge now is to figure out how this mission spreads across all platforms. In a nutshell, convergent journalism is about how stories can play best on and across all platforms at your disposal.

This requires editors who are adept at planning, co-ordinating and prioritising. The mindset here is moving away from unequal partnerships between platforms, but also avoiding the trap of entirely separate operations. It is directed instead towards strategic and scalable story-telling. It's deciding what messages play in what way, and when, on which medium. This requires knowing that it is not worth putting a brilliant but inarticulate newspaper writer in front of a TV camera, just for the sake of convergence. The same goes when there is a print reporter who is super-telegenic, because the decisive question really is whether TV is the most appropriate medium to convey the particular story at hand. Convergent journalism means taking account of the observation by Paul Tash, editor of the St Petersburg Times: "What makes a good television story is often very different from what makes a good newspaper story" (Bowles, 2000).

Neil Chase of CBSMarketwatch.com puts the issue well: "Some

stories are better told with 20 digital photographs and 20 captions and a one-paragraph lead. Some stories are better told through a 1000–word story. Some stories are better told with a television interview with the person involved and the reporter just shutting up ... You need to be able to look at a story, know enough about all these different media to make choices and decide how to cover this story." (Kees, 2000).



It may be that certain types of stories lends themselves best to non-streaming media. For example, census statistics do not make for good television or radio. But such a story entails both detailed analysis and an opportunity for an audience to manipulate the data themselves, and a medium like the Web offers this through text and graphics and interactivity and audiences can digest it all at their own pace. Print, of course, can also do some justice to the complexity of such a story, but probably less so than a good Web version. With the Web's multi-media capabilities– interactivity, audio, video – census statistics news can be that much richer, points out Bo Hok Cline of MSNBC.com (Skene, 2000).

Most stories of course can – and should – be told across all or most platforms, because audiences will access these at different times and places and for different purposes. The trick is to decide which platforms are the optimum outlets in terms of both story-telling and audience relevance.

To give another example where streaming media is very powerful: when vigilantes burnt a prominent drug-baron to death in Cape Town in 1998, the breaking news might have been best delivered as streaming live audio (sent via the reporter's cellphone) on radio, and/or as text on the Web and cellphone. It is the video imagery that's strongest in this particular story, followed by the still pictures. The moving images would have been a big thing to stream on TV news and to put up for on-demand download on the Web. Broadcast reporters and photojournalists covering that incident thus needed to be aware of how their coverage could (and might well) play across time, and across platform. Accordingly, and bearing in mind their skill sets, they ought then to have given graduated attention to how they would file. So, the need in such cases is for nimble and flexible journalists, operating with a holistic view of the full range of platforms in the enterprise for which they work.

What makes it possible to manage such strategic customisation in covering stories for several platforms is that – unlike the druglord example – most news is either prescheduled or otherwise generally predictable in basic outline. This means, therefore, that coverage can be pre-planned. In this way, it is usually possible to say in advance what stories are best put on what combination of outlets and with what deadlines, and on this basis how journalistic

resources should be effectively deployed. So convergence requires editors who know when to use a journalist with depth in a single medium, when to send bi-skilled, tri-skilled or multi-skilled individuals, or when a team incorporating a range of specialist expertises should be sent.

In the USA, multi-skilled teams (as distinct from multi-skilled individuals) are usually deployed with regular, very visible community outreach projects or investigations. Similarly, the most recent party political conventions in the USA were well used for productions where broadcast, print and cyberjournalists sometimes shared the work, sometimes worked in each others' areas, and sometimes concentrated only on tailored coverage for their own specific platform.

In other words, it is not a case of trying to get all journalists to be jacks of all trades and at all times, but of deploying the right kind of resources for the range of tasks as these are anticipated. It also means that not every story has to go on every platform, and so it is not necessary to produce for every format. The point underpinning all this is to prioritise stories, not platforms. While platforms can't be neglected and left with empty slots, and while they need a basic level of service, this ought to be just basic bread and butter. Adding the honey to the sandwich means being able to shift staff resources around platforms as appropriate to their skills, the particular content and the particular audience. This does not mean that hugely complicated and taxing decisions have to be made on the fly at every news planning meeting. There are systems and templates that can be developed for categories of stories. These can be formalised without becoming rigid and boring formulas. A



set of protocols and routines can be created where you know what staff allocations to use for specific types of stories with specific timings, for specific platforms and specific audience features.

### ***Scooping yourself***

One of the perennial issues relating to sharing content between different platforms is which one breaks the big story. One commentator believes that in the age of convergence and sharing, the print scoop or exclusive is a thing of the past – even though this may be hard especially for print journalists to accept. (Botero, 1999). A warning comes from another observer, that to sit on news waiting for old media cycles to turn is to risk being seen as a purveyor of old news on Web. (Skene, 2000). Nora Paul (1998b) elaborates that to hold a story for a newspaper publication or a broadcast bulletin is to risk having a competing company scooping you. Her advice is: rather release it under your brand, in the quickest possible way – which may well be online. The mantra should be "someone is going to scoop us; it might as well be us."

In practice, many converged operations have developed procedures and policies to cover the complexities of this issue. It all depends on an assessment of how unique the story is, and how likely it will be for a competing medium to get it. Lengthy investigations are unlikely to be scooped; lesser scale enterprise reporting could be. The bulk of news of course is common currency to all media, with the only difference being timing of release and angle taken. Experience at Tampa's converged newsroom suggests that the best results of cross-platform publishing come with spot news and when there is no exclusive news, meaning that the biggest challenge then is the speed of

getting this out. Next, come those enterprise stories which external competitors can catch up on quickly, so the emphasis then is on making a big, combined splash. But the Tampa converged operation found it hard to get its platform-specific people to share the big-investment enterprise story that would be difficult for anyone to duplicate. (*newspaper techniques* p18. January 2001).

Going further, a number of print institutions with sister web platforms have set in place measures to prevent "cannibalisation" of one platform by another. For instance, the print product as a matter of course releases only part of its product on the website, and/or delays in making it available online until after the hard copy hits the streets. This is a common phenomenon, exhibited in southern Africa by media as diverse as Mopheme newspaper (Lesotho) and Financial Mail (South Africa). In some cases, the fear behind such arrangements is exaggerated. The Internet, it turns out, often tends to attract people who were not buyers of the print publication in the first instance. For the *New York Times*, nearly half of its 11.4 million registered online readers reported that they had never purchased a print copy of the paper, which meant that the online version was spreading the brand to an entirely new group. The Web presence also helps the *Times'* print circulation: the paper gained some 12 000 new subscribers via the site in the first half of 1999. (Boynton, 2000). Certainly in Africa at this point, too few people have access to the Web to make them even a potential threat to denting sales, so the "cannibalisation" concern is not really substantive.

To make the judgement calls about scoops, and about shifting priorities between platforms, different kinds of co-ordination can be

found within different convergent contexts. Tampa works by TV, newspaper and online editors collaborating in the interests of each of their particular platforms. The situation here is that each platform tends, understandably, to think of its own interests first.

A similar situation is often found at the level of reporters. At Dallasnews.com, "If you are hired as a reporter for the paper, your primary job is to make sure to get the paper out in that job," says an editorial manager there. He continues: "As these budgets get tight, and they want you to do more, and say 'take this camera' or write an early version of this for the Web...it becomes a problem because we still have an obligation to do (the primary) job." (Stone, 2001).

In some converged media operations in the USA, there is also a *multiple*-media editor (as in Tampa and Orlando, incorrectly styled as a *multi*-media editor) specialising in developing cross-media content gathering and sharing. There is a case to be made for an editor-in-chief or similar overarching executive to play this role. By contrast, in other instances, with far lesser convergence, there are simply informal champions who ensure maximum content exchange and rationalisation between mainly separated platform "empires".

A more integrated version of a news-hub, such as at the *Financial Times*, UK, sees instead of a committee compromising for each platform's interests, a single co-ordinating editor who knows each medium's needs, strengths, deadlines and audiences, and who can oversee a dynamic and shifting prioritisation in servicing them all. This situation clearly requires an overview of what plays best where and when.

### Fusion at the Financial Times

According to the former editor of FT.com: "People in the central news desk will tell the reporting team working on a particular story that they need to file a particular angle at a certain time for the Web site. Certain hours later, they will have to file another angle for a particular edition of the newspaper. After receiving the instruction, individual reporting teams will decide their own ways of meeting the deadline. When, all of a sudden, a reporter phones in and tells the central news desk that he or she has a particular story, then it is the decision of the News Editor of the central news desk if he wants to put it up on the website straight away or not. Under the News Editor, there is an editor responsible for the Asian print edition, one looking after the US print edition, and one for the UK edition and one for the website." (Paul Maidment, cited by Fung, 2001:171).

With the *Financial Times*, the decision was made in 1999 to produce a single integrated newsroom with one authority in charge. Thus, reporters for paper and website there work side by side, often working for both. They report to a central news desk, that works in London for some part of the day, and New York for other parts. It decides what assignments to cover, what stories to chase and what angles to take.



FT.com Everything you n  
FT.Com - Click Here!

Make FT.com your [homepage](#)

**FT.com**  
FINANCIAL TIMES

SITE EDITION **Global** | [UK](#) | [US](#)

FT.com > Home > **Global**

**World Indices** 23:00 BST\*

Index	Value	Change
<a href="#">S&amp;P</a>	1133.58	0.40%
<a href="#">DJIA</a>	9949.75	0.30%
<a href="#">NASDAQ</a>	1805.43	0.77%
<a href="#">FTSE</a>	5345	0.23%

**Banks**

### Full circle:

Stone (2001) describes the FT.com arrangement as poised for "full circle" multi-media news integration, as distinct from many other efforts which are still at the 90 or 180 degree level.

The volume of collaboration in convergence determines if you need an executive editor, a lower level co-ordinator or perhaps just a liaison person. Whatever the permutation, it is clear that everyone needs to be on board. Every frontline journalist needs to understand that the name of the game is how stories play across the totality of outlets, and not blind defence of turf.

It is important that this kind of holistic approach to getting the best out of convergence does not prevent different platforms from trying to further service their own needs through a range of external partnerships. This is also part of convergence. What is non-negotiable, however, is a commitment by all editors and journalists to working as effectively as possible with internal partners and colleagues, and to overcoming issues of culture clash, snobbery or stubborn platform loyalty and prejudice.

Journalistic convergence in these variegated forms are one part of converged media. The other part occurs on the business side of the companies concerned. Keith Hartenberger, Tribune Co Intergroup Development, notes: "Co-ordination becomes more important as a partnership develops. When a partnership is really running on all cylinders, the leaders of the partnership are not only coordinating the convergence of content, but also efforts in the areas of sales, marketing, promotion and business development." (Gentry, 2000: 32).

The two dimensions — editorial and business — do not need to run in exact tandem (usually, developments are ahead in the business realm), but there needs broadly to be some pace keeping. And while there can be fairly fixed systems for cross-

promotion, centralised advert sales, common technology and databases, etc., a more nuanced approach is needed for journalism.

### ***Webwork***

Convergence at this point in history implies the likelihood that websites increasingly will be part of an integrated whole, and also that they will take second or third place either regularly or occasionally to other media platforms in the group. However, this is not a reason for the sites to be reduced to feeding off leftovers. Strategic convergence deals in how stories synergise with specific platforms and their audience qualities, and when, and so the specificity of the web platform needs to be kept in sight.

In this context, can you succeed with shovelling second-hand content online, do you need to add some value to it, or is wholly original content called for? What makes for an effective website? The question needs elaborating: effective for what purpose, and effective for whom? The answer has to be effective in relation to its purpose, and whether the medium is being used to the full in that regard, and in a sustainable way.

Too many news sites try to be too many things to too many people. But what do people want? It depends to some extent on where they are. If they are out of range of access to other sources of content concerning your news niche (eg. beyond the circulation or footprint of your parent old medium), then shovelware may be enough to satisfy them. It also depends on where people are when they go online (at home or at work). Visitors from offices that go to news sites tend to be searchers, rather than random surfers or meandering browsers. How you think about them is important for

what kind of features characterise your site and how these distinguish it from other media, old and new. If they're workplace-based searchers, chances are that they want the latest news — and if your convergent partners can only supply this once every 24 hours, you need to make a different plan.

What this means is that shovelware, preferably fast-paced, can be adequate on its own. But that also misses an opportunity to use the medium to full capacity. This is like TV news in its early days when an announcer simply read the radio bulletin to camera. Online publishing can be a lot more than electronic archiving and distribution. Few news operations have really recognised the different character and potential of the Web. What does it take to really exploit the potential of the medium? A good place to begin is to try and emulate the philosophy of the *Rocky Mountain News* website InsideDenver.com, which is reported to operate from an emphasis on content, not on re-purposing. Thus, it attempts to do things that print cannot, like frequent news updates and user interactivity, so as to give readers unique reasons to come to the Web site. The rationale is to build market share, not to transfer the share from print to online. (Outing, 1998). What this requires, however, is people. Manoim (2000) points out that "the combined demands of speed and depth and hyperlinking are – if done well – hugely labour-intensive." South Africa for one, he argues, cannot afford the salary bill.

In this light, the Rocky Mountain model may seem difficult if not impossible to follow – and not only in Africa. According to one study, 85 percent of North American newspaper sites have five staff or fewer. Only 27 percent do journalism (at least

occasionally), while 73 percent can only offer content that derives mostly or entirely from the parent medium. (*newspaper techniques*, p.158. Sept 2000). Already overworked, websites nowadays are under even greater staffing pressures.

Here's the view of Madeline Baro, retrenched from *Miami Herald's* online edition: "Now the site is updated less often, it's less visually appealing because they're using few photos, and the commitment they made to make the news site competitive and fresh-looking isn't there anymore." And Jordan Legun, managing editor of KnightRidder.com in Miami says: "It's a challenge to figure out how we're going to update the site seven days a week and give people the quality they've come to expect ... We're having to do more with less. But through technology and innovative thinking we can produce a very high-quality product." (Lasica, 2001a).

Legun refers to exploiting the online archive which was very valuable in producing special packages. This is one option to go beyond pure shovelware, but still a labour-intensive one. The trick is to find what can be done by technology to automate some tasks, in order to free up time to do other things. At MSNBC.com, they have developed a Photoshop macro-script sequence that performs scores of operations on pictures at the press of a button – meaning that the site's photo-editor can concentrate on the communications aspect, and on a fast turn-around time for photos going up on the website.

However, the solution goes deeper than technology. It is the case that cost-cutting has led to a lot of sites dropping special features that take advantage of the Internet's uniqueness, and the result has been reverting to solely shovelware operations. But this



outcome is also because these sites failed to re-strategise a different kind of Web product more appropriate to their diminished resources. What's lacking is a sense of levels of use of the medium's potential, eg. first level being a photo-gallery, top-end being fully-fledged interactive, graphic- and database-driven features, and a whole lot of options (templated) in between. Few websites have taken to heart the advice by Mindy McAdams: "When editors start thinking about going online, they're like children at the dessert table: Their eyes are bigger than their stomachs. It's very exciting to talk about creating giant local business directories and events calendars, but then it's time to come back to earth. Count your staff. Count the hours you can put into this."

The task therefore is – even for Africa's superstretched web producers – to develop scalable systems for covering the range of possibilities of the Internet qua medium. It is, for example, hard to do a decent multi-media story treatment even once a month. But even if you do it only during major stories like a national election, your Web platform can keep its head aloft with offering less rich, but still useful, shovelware re-purposing of other platforms' stories for the rest of the time.

### ***Tools***

Part of developing a scalable system for exploiting the potential of the Web platform is to develop a set of tools that can be drawn upon to do so. CNN has exactly such a facility on its intranet. It's a kind of a stylebook-cum-ideas-manual, in that it gives staffers examples of time lines, maps, quizzes and image displays along with the requisite code for each of them.

"EXAMPLE  
This is a good example of new navigation with timelines that have many dates grouped into individual spans of time"

"PURPOSE  
Combines the essence of a photogallery and a timeline to display images spread across a time period"

The screenshot shows the CNN.com Timelines section. On the left is a navigation menu with links like 'Timelines', 'Maps', 'Quizzes', 'Images', 'Who's Who', 'Galleries', 'Story Elements', 'Games', 'Using Forms', 'Specials Includes', and 'Community'. Below the menu are 'JavaScript tools' and 'JavaScript Cookbook'. The main content area is titled 'Timelines' and contains three examples:

- Timeline/Photo Gallery:** Includes an 'EXAMPLE' section with a photo gallery, a 'PURPOSE' section explaining it combines a photo gallery and a timeline, and a 'RECIPE' section for HTML using frames. A 'Where's the html for this?' link points to <http://linux/interactive/specials/9904/auto.timeline/>.
- Calendar:** Includes an 'EXAMPLE' section showing an interactive calendar, a 'PURPOSE' section for an 'Interactive Calendar', and a 'RECIPE' section for HTML using frames. A 'Where's the html for this?' link points to <http://linux/interactive/specials/9903/kosovo.strike/>.
- Key Dates:** Includes an 'EXAMPLE' section with a rollover effect, a 'PURPOSE' section for increasing interactivity, and a 'RECIPE' section for JavaScript rollover HTML using frames. A 'Where's the html for this?' link points to <http://linux/interactive/specials/9904/escaln.timeline/>.

Annotations on the right side of the image include:

- "RECIPE HTML using frames" pointing to the recipe section of the first example.
- "Where's the html for this? Look on .." pointing to the link for the second example.
- "Frames for an interactive calendar" pointing to the recipe section of the second example.
- "Roll-over effect to highlight key dates on timeline" pointing to the recipe section of the third example.

There's no reason why other players can't also set up a series of their own templates that can be recycled and rolled out for special projects at varying levels of effort. Examples might be:

- Basic information: auto-scrolling photo gallery.
- Richer information: add audio clip and button or video clip window.
- Basic interactivity: post a poll with a question.
- Richer interactivity: add a game or quizz.
- Application: add a service.

Adding different content to such templates makes them look new to people in the same way that a limited number of front page

designs of newspapers still come across as fresh because they are alternated and because each new edition has different pictures and headlines.

Of course, to have time even to use these tools on an occasional basis raises the question of how time is being used otherwise. This in turn is a function of the strategic positioning and niche of your site.

### ***Strategic focus***

One area where a re-think is in order is the strategy of news websites attempting to do something different from the parent product by continuously updating news round the clock. This newsagency function is tempting: it can give a weekly publication a daily product; it can turn a TV station with a three-x-day bulletin into a must-come place for the hottest news. Recommendations for successful TV sites are indeed that they should promote themselves as the place for breaking news. (Bergman, 2001). It is also observed that the online public does not mind a newspaper chewing over old news, especially if it is exclusive news or a sense-making take on the news; but that they do want the Web to be up-to-date. In September 2000, it was reported that 36 percent of North American newspaper Web sites were updated more than once daily. (*newspaper techniques*, p.158. Sept 2000). But many more also want to go that route because real time continuous news delivery in the style of a deadline-a -minute, every hour and every day ("24/7" in the jargon), was still seen as the key to success.

Fresh news is indeed the heart of the business, but does it have to be around the clock? In fact, most news sites, it appears, have highest traffic during the day, showing that the service is being

used as an office tool (or office diversion). In the USA, on the average a professional worker spends 23 percent of her or her workday online. ([http://www.cisco.com/warp/public/779/govtaff/facts/Nstats/Internet\\_Economy.html](http://www.cisco.com/warp/public/779/govtaff/facts/Nstats/Internet_Economy.html)). Similarly in South Africa, most news sites confirm that major traffic is indeed during working hours.

The implication is that there is not much point in offering newsagency-style updates outside of the working day unless you're playing to a global audience in different time zones and to one for whom this really matters. But even here, most news originates mainly during daytime hours, so it is still debatable as to whether night-time updating is worth it, except on special occasions. Also of interest is the finding of a study that online news consumers in the USA tolerate slightly stale content in local news although they expect national news to be up-to-date. (Ifra trend report 82. 2001).

Another limitation with the newsagency model, is evident in South Africa websites like iafrica.com and IOL.co.za, which both rely extensively on wirecopy to keep up to date – and in this case, they both draw on the sole national newsagency, Sapa. There is nothing per se wrong with this, and indeed, IOL has carved itself the niche as the country's top news website in part because of this service. But it also means the same story on two rival sites. It further means that for IOL much of the mass of unique content coming from parent papers – and drowning the newsdesk in the process – is actually redundant, because the basic news has already been broken. Opportunities for synergistic use of partner content are diminished.

The point is that resources used round the clock for the newsagency role could be channelled into adding different value to the site to attract more visitors during "visiting hours". And even during this time, a decision could be made to prioritise for frequent updates only for sports, politics or whatever is top driver of your site, and less frequently for the remaining areas of news content. Mindy McAdams argues against putting most of the newspaper online. "Your readers will say they want it, but it won't get them coming back day after day." Instead, she advises, do only one popular section.

A starting point to using freed-up time could be improving the usability of the site. Too many news sites are actually news sties — the clutter and mess cries out for a clean-up. According to one American study, half the people using TV news websites in the USA get frustrated and leave because of poor layout and navigation (Bergman, 2001). There is a need on many sites to take something out so that you can put something else in — like some white space as part of the design.

Another use of freed-up time might be offering a purely text-based e-mail news service such as that by Mercury Center which sends out daily packages to 50 000 subscribers. The *Namibian* online has more than 1000 subscribers to an e-mail newsletter that it sends out (Staby, 2000). More sophisticated upgrading is possible, such as customised services along the lines not of an undifferentiated B2C ethos, but B2T(ourists) or B2S(occer fans), etc.. These kind of services could likely provide better returns than a 24-hour newswire service.

Freed-up time is essential if news sites are to consider special

projects with at least some completely unique own-generated content. In the USA, Gilbert's study shows that while some sites offered no own content, others had 85 percent, so clearly some entities can do it (Gilbert, 2001). In South Africa, IOL.co.za conducted a very successful special project around the country's bid to host the World Cup. Collaborating with the 14 titles and 13 community papers in its parent company, the IOL site offered an online petition, plus a chat forum and even a poetry contest with prizes. The project attracted a lot of traffic from elsewhere in Africa. Websites need to get a strategic mission that includes mounting these kind of special initiatives as an integral part of the overall project.

### ***Sound and moving image***

What is also potentially up for development in news sites is the audio-video capability of the Internet. Text, sound and moving image are to be found co-existing or fused on the bigger news sites, and with the spread of broadband connections, this will escalate. Notwithstanding the many challenges, in the same way that readers come to expect photographs and colour in newspapers, so Web audiences will also come to expect both multiple-media and multi-media offerings as part of online news. That doesn't mean the eclipse of divergence even online – there remains a strong place for stand-alone audio delivered via the web; likewise text-centred content will retain a niche. In this regard, a study (though with a small sample) by Stanford University and the Poynter Institute found that at least during 2000, text was the attention grabber on websites, not graphics or photos. (*newspaper techniques*, p. 66 July/August 2000.) That will likely change. The

enduring advice for all content forms online is: break it up, have a short version and a longer one, and have complementary formats in audio, graphics, text, multi-media, etc.. This is not just because the tech makes it possible: it is in the interests of telling a story in the richest possible ways.

To grow the markets beyond text-content on the Web, some old media are doing some interesting things. For example, in Israel, the *Jerusalem Post* has set up an online radio station ([www.jpostradio.com](http://www.jpostradio.com)) with three 15 minute news programmes daily. Studies show that "streamies" – people fond of audio or video on the Web, are a definite audience (*newspaper techniques*, p. 18. December 2000). One recent report concluded that half of American web users were streamies, and that the monthly audiences of Internet-only audio sources, such as streaming Net radio, were nearly equal to the audiences of terrestrial radio stations. (see [www.edisonresearch.com](http://www.edisonresearch.com) and [www.arbitron.com](http://www.arbitron.com)).

According to Steve Outing, "newspapers in the 2000s can no longer afford to let their Web sites be mostly text- and static image-driven. They must learn to produce their own video content, or find other media partners who can." (Outing, 1999). An example here is *USA Today* which has a TV and Internet venture that swaps audio and video content with Gannet's 21 broadcast affiliates. Although at present, consumer use of video on websites is approximately only 10 percent of visitors in the USA, the figures there are expected to grow as more users get the necessary download speed of connections thanks to broadband connectivity via their cable TV systems. In time, satellite feeds may offer the same functionality in Africa.



Video filming and editing equipment continues to fall in price, and digital versions of this equipment are not out of the range of many southern African media operations. The beauty of digital video is demonstrated by world-leading news website MSNBC which uses the technology to massively expand its choice of still pictures (and its speed of access to fast-breaking pictures) beyond what the wire picture agencies can supply. It does this by grabbing frames off live digitised video feeds from its sister MSNBC TV and its co-parent company NBC. From an ongoing video sequence, the site's photo-editor can locate the perfectly expressive image for the page. (MSNBC also selects photographs with a composition that allows for superimposing a headline on them – a design trademark of the site. It also makes a practice of cropping pictures very close. This not only makes for strong images despite their having to be sized for computer screen size. It also gets rid of background detail that would otherwise add to the compression size and slow download time for the visitor).

MSNBC uses expensive software to get the stills, but there are cheaper options. And, remembering convergence, there is software for re-purposing digital video for newspapers that enhances quality from 72 dpi video (which is fine for websites) up to the 200-300 dpi required for high quality printing. (see [www.salientstills.com](http://www.salientstills.com)).





## ***Multi-media***

The point needs to be made that it is one thing to have TV on your website; it is another to have video content within a multi-media production. But many news websites, including Tampa's TPO.com, misleadingly refer to TV clips on their site as multi-media. The distinction is really between having multiple parallel media (even on the same theme), and integrated multi-media productions that blend the elements into a fused single whole. Putting his finger on the difference, Neil Chase of CBS Marketwatch.com recommends not to think audio or video or text, but rather about story-telling that combines all these in an integrated message (*newspaper techniques* Jan 2001. p. 36). Graphics and animated Flash movies are also elements that go into true multi-media.

Lanson (2000) argues forcefully that it is not enough to belatedly integrate multi-media elements into something that is started fundamentally as a print enterprise story like the *New York Times'* famous series on how race is lived in America. He stresses that a Web team ought not to be brought into a convergable project only once the reporting is already done. That approach leads to uneven multi-media and interactivity, as well as to limited graphics and data-sets and an inflexible design. For him, the websites should be involved in the initial brainstorming. Karl Idsvoog of the now defunct APBNews.com goes even further: "The Web demands multi-media conception on any major project. Once the online investigation and production is done, it's easy to create versions for other relevant print media, such as print or television news." (Gahrn, 2000). This is one instance where material produced primarily for the website can be re-purposed for other platforms.

The statement by Lanson concerning data-sets points to other added-value possibilities unique to websites as a medium. In particular, it highlights interactivity.

### ***Interactivity***

What passes for interactivity on the Web is often just no more than navigation functionality. This is no different to an "inside" contents list or set of sky-box teaser panels on the front page of a paper. But there is much more to interactivity online than this.

Interactivity takes a visitor into the realm of doing, not just seeing and/or hearing. It involves them – often in a fun way. From spectator, they become actor. This is sometimes hard for journalists to think about. Without wanting to sound pretentious, I would suggest that this changes the epistemology – the theory of knowledge – upon which journalism is historically based. Classically, journalists have collected and analysed data and consulted experts to find out what "the story is", and then proceeded to "tell it like it is". Once the implications of interactivity are grasped, the mindset shifts from story-teller to story-facilitator. Your task now becomes one of letting the user tell the story – to make connections and sense of it in his or her way. You provide the elements with which people can interact. What this calls for is a quality of humility and respect for audiences, and a degree of openness to what are "facts" that may be new to the profession.

Interactivity as a whole can be differentiated as follows:

#### *Interacting with content:*

- Database where users can find info specific to them.
- Online polls.
- Electronic postcards.

- Ipix 360-degree images where the surfer can scroll around. Such images are well used on *Orange County Register*, and *Albany Times*.
- Interactive graphics, such as on sports.bayarea.com. Three dimensional graphics are very powerful at explaining.
- Navigable satellite imagery. (see www.earthetc.com).
- Non-linear video that can be driven by the user, and which has embedded "hot-spots" in it that can be clicked to provide annotational data or a range of links.

Interactivity in relation to data-sets entails turning data over to the public – letting them manipulate it to find their patterns and answer the queries that they really have, whether about voting statistics or city budgetary information. A good example of this was the *Raleigh News and Observer* two years back, which put data about school performances online with a user-friendly interface that enabled users to interrogate the subject according to their own interests.

#### *Interacting with people:*

- Users-to-users, users to journalists, users to experts
- Discussion forums, live chat, scheduled events. (iafrica.com in South Africa has pioneered what it calls the cyber-equivalent of TalkRadio – TalkInternet).
- Reporter email addresses.
- Article feedback mechanisms like ratings.
- Facility to create personal webpages
- Hobby and tribute pages (Outing, 1998).

Lanson (2000) draws attention to the pro-active aspect of facilitating interactivity among users such as by posing irresistible questions to draw them into forums and polls. These community building capabilities should not just be to "lock" people longer into

your site, nor just to garner community-created content. Interactivity ought to also be based on recognising that people have their own legitimate point of view, that the meaning they make of the news could well be different to yours, and that this is worth talking about in a public sphere.

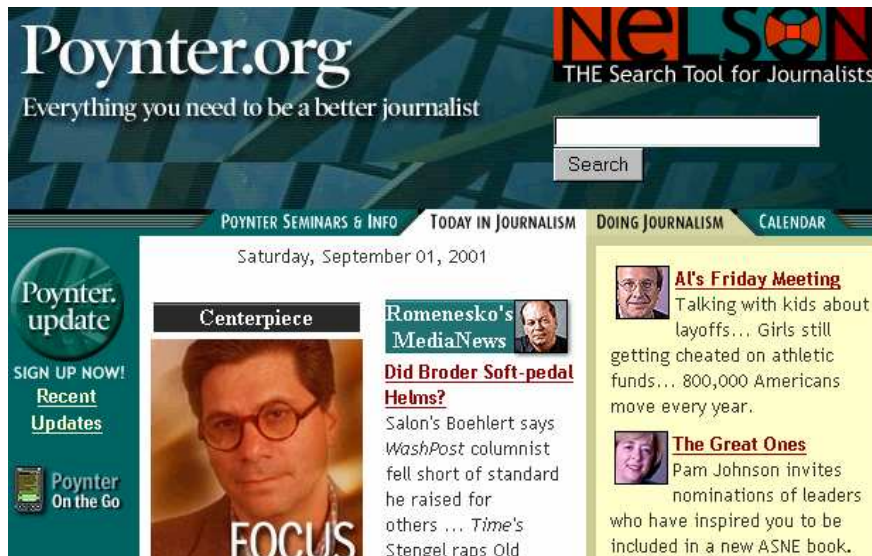
If interactivity is a way to build real participatory cyber-communities, it is likewise a companion to e-commerce capabilities and attractions on a site. Web journalists have to balance the commercial and ethical issues in developing this area of interactivity.

Conceptualising both interactivity and multi-media for a story is a complex challenge. The Poynter Institute offers these guidelines:

- Clarify the audience for the package, and their interests.
- Create a story board (and tree chart).
- Find examples of good packages on same or similar topic.
- List audio, video, graphic, text, interactive features, databases you might incorporate into site.
- Find 5 – 10 links you would include, plus a newsgroup or listserv that visitors could join.
- Find someone who could be a suitable guest for a live chat on the site.
- Plan how you will update the story and keep it fresh ... and when you'll move on.

[Http://www.poynter.org/dj/Projects/onlineseminar/multi.htm](http://www.poynter.org/dj/Projects/onlineseminar/multi.htm)

Poynter also suggests a way to ensure that news website editors keep coming up with fresh ideas for interactivity. This is to take turns with colleagues in exploring a couple of sites a week, and then circulating the interesting features amongst your team or online community.



A provocative challenge comes Mindy McAdams who encourages "outside the box" thinking about doing something different on websites: "Don't be fooled by what your readers say they want. People will answer yes to all kinds of things in a poll, and after you produce what they said they wanted, they'll stay away in droves. The only way to find out whether online users will come is to build it."

Indeed, the exciting thing about the Internet is that it is still new and evolving. The medium therefore lends itself to experimentation and invention. Journalists can lead the market to news experiences that are new, and not just always tag behind long-established habits and formats, as time-tested as these may be.

But McAdam cautions Web editors that before embarking on a big project, to break out a part of it that you expect to be popular and build only that part. "Roll it out with a lot of fanfare and then ask for feedback from the users." If it wins acclaim, do it.

### **Summing up**

News websites have to think big. Online journalists have to lift

their noses from the proverbial grindstone, and look at what convergence means for strategic story-telling across several platforms. With extremely limited resources, they have to concentrate on doing some things well on their sites, rather than many in a mediocre way — and on choosing these things for well thought out reasons. They need to develop tool-kits to dip into, and they need to confront the coming multiple media, multi-media and interactivity as standard features of news websites. The Web not only enables innovation, it demands it. But don't blow the budget in one go.

## 8. Conclusion

### *Where we are*

Convergence is a mega-trend with mega-implications. Steve Outing warns that "a news company in the early 2000s cannot sit back and focus just on its legacy platform, whether print or broadcast or online. It must begin to train its editors and reporters to produce content for other media formats. Editors must learn how to craft content packages appropriate to a print edition or as a PDA edition. (Shovelware isn't enough). Reporters must learn how to write a succinct article summary for mobile phone news subscribers; and how to write a story for a print edition, and a companion version for the Web that includes complementary resource material." (Outing, 2000).

Accurate as that may be, as Hickey (2000) observes, convergence is "expensive and complex; the electronic components must be firmly in place; the multi-media command post needs a trained team of specialists; and the several staffs must cooperate seamlessly, non-competitively, and enthusiastically." The reality is that it is hard to convince business managers to spend more on ventures that still have uncertain financial results. It is also not easy to convince journalists to stretch beyond their traditional ways of telling stories.

Finally, it may well be hard to prove to the public that the whole thing is more than co-ordination, centralisation, cost-cutting, cross-promotions and a way to corner more advertising. Elaborating on this theme, Al Tompkins (2001) says we should not be surprised if

the public is suspicious of media partnerships. "The tradition of journalism is based on competitors trying to beat each other," he points out, adding that in the USA there has long been concern about media monopolies. He calls for converged newsrooms to be aggressive and to include many community voices in their coverage, as well as to be public spirited and accountable to the public. In his view, if convergence is not about producing better journalism, it has no legs and the public will reject it – which, he says, is how it should be.

Tompkins' colleague, the Poynter Institute's Bob Haiman warns that "convergence may end up being good, maybe even very good, for media companies. I fear, however, that it is going to be bad, maybe even very bad, for journalism." (Haiman, 2001). It is indeed the fact that the driving force is commercial. Convergence is about responding to competition and economic pressures by getting people to connect to a media brand, whether it is on print, Web, radio, cellphone or TV. However, the counter-argument is that for the viewers, readers, and 'Net surfers, it all translates to "news, when and where and how you want it," in the words of Reid Ashe, publisher of the *Tampa Tribune*. Of the Tampa experiment, it is claimed: "We believe this has really improved the journalism of all the properties." (Wendland, 2001).

Certainly if convergence means the survival of the threatened species of new media, in the long run it will be a contribution to media plurality. Whether this will amount to media depth and diversity in content is a different matter, but arguably it is at least a valuable underpinning for this potential. In southern Africa, with our low media density, that is very important.



However, the move through convergence is not guaranteed. "The battle over the newsroom's mindset, its attitude, will be the toughest and most important battle to win in transitioning to a new newsroom." (*newspaper techniques*, p 12. Feb 2000). In this regard, Al Tompkins spotlights how successful convergence efforts need to include training. "Newspaper journalists do not want to look foolish on television and television journalists often fear they are not good enough writers to write for newspapers. Print photojournalists must learn more than the mechanics of TV and they must learn about shooting motion. TV photojournalists need to understand what makes a great still image for the newspaper and all sides have to learn how to produce for the Web. Successfully converged news operations make it easy for journalists to spend time in one another's newsrooms." The point is that convergence does not just happen, it takes skills — and these do not magically appear.

### ***Looking ahead***

If convergence of Web, print and broadcast is testing ingrained habits and narrow platform-based thinking, this is only a sign of what's to come.

Already earlier this year, the *Wall Street Journal* said it had more people downloading its channel to read on their PDAs via the AvantGo service, than there were logging onto their website. (They have 150 000 dual print and Web subscribers). (Budde, 2000).



Seattle journalist Pete Rinearson told a group at the Poynter Institute in January 2001 that people classically overestimate what changes will happen in two years, but underestimate the difference in ten. By way of illustration, one can take the simple question of "What is a computer?" Thirty years ago, people would have answered by referring to a large mainframe cupboard-sized machine. Ten years later, the image was of a television-shaped monitor balanced on a rectangular box positioned on a desk. In the 1990s, the image of a portable laptop would have been conjured up, followed more recently by PDA's like the Palm Pilot. My guess is that in Africa, smart cellphones will be seen as the computers of the first decade of the century. What we certainly do know is that a lot more devices will be connected to Internet – TV sets and motor vehicles for a start, and their implications for journalism are hard to predict.

One possibility, however, being investigated by Columbia University's John Pavlik and the University of Southern California's Larry Pryor, is "immersion journalism". This looks towards a time when a reporter in the field (eg. at a demonstration) will act as an avatar for audiences sitting at home with surround sound, and kits that conjure up live 3d images of the story right there, as well as transmitting haptic data (giving them the sense of touch). That's of course way ahead, but it is not off the radar.

Looking specifically at the changing newsroom, it is probable that the newsroom of the future will be a "smart" one, tapping the collective information, memory and wisdom of all the people working there. A media house will be acknowledged as a "knowledge refinery" with journalists taking raw information and refining it into a knowledge product. (George Landou, Newsengin. *newspaper techniques*, p 23. Feb 2000).

The focus will be on making the process more efficient, on making money off by-products that are currently discarded, and on distributing the core product to as many outlets as possible. The market will be global, and media production and distribution will cater to international time zone differences.

In turn, these developments will mean new ways of acquiring, storing, communicating and sharing information. Coming soon to a newsroom near you is "knowledge management". This is "a computer-enabled, database-centred process of getting people to share what they know so that everyone in the newsroom is smarter." The system enables the news operation to know what it is that its members collectively know. It captures, preserves and monetises all the expertise. (Kerry Northrup. *newspaper techniques*, pp 38/9. March 2000; *newspaper techniques*, p 12. Feb 2000).

Seattle's Pete Rinearson poses the question, are we are the last of the old, or the first of the new? We are both, but we have to look ahead to where the next generations will be when they take the stage.

### ***The African agenda***

"E-commerce may be the rage among an affluent minority, but E-coli bacteria is the street reality," has been the down-to-earth comment of Mammen Mathew, editor of the Indian daily paper, *Malayala Manorama*. The same sentiment could be applied to new media talk in much of Africa. But awareness of this grim reality ought only to drive us to greater efforts in using new media technologies to realise the continent's information riches. This is critical to benefit our people, and the rest of the planet.

The challenge is for journalists to bridge the gap between the techno-arrogant and the techno-ignorant as part of spanning the bigger domestic and global digital divides. Part of doing so is for us to find out, and tell, the tech story – perhaps the biggest, and most exciting trend, in the world today. And it is not just the big stuff like genetics, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, super-computing, 3G tech for cell phones, e-commerce, etc.. Yet few such stories get onto the top of the news agenda in southern Africa. We need to take technology more seriously both as a means to our work and as a subject of our work.

As Francois Boissaire of the French national journalists union points out, flexibility tends to be evident more at small organisations than large, precisely because it stems more from obligation than choice. (*newspaper techniques*, p20. Feb 2000). Certainly, many African media institutions are small and adept at surviving against the odds. With this advantage, we're in a position to configure media convergence for the needs of the African public.

That means cranking up our content, community, commerce, channel and everything else, across all our media. Convergence is

what will enable us not just to save our websites, but to see them succeed. Convergence, in short, is the key to using new media technologies to optimum effect. Convergence is a mission critical factor for Africa.

We have no choice but to make it happen.

---

### **Highway Africa 2000 Conference: Statement (excerpts)**

- The Conference recognises that Africa is increasingly becoming part of the global information society and that its entry and participation poses a wide range of challenges and opportunities.
- In order to maximise the impact of New Media on African societies, efforts should be made to marry the new media with existing media and other forms of communication.
- The Conference noted that there is a steady increase in African content being produced by African communities and institutions, and stressed the need for diverse strategies for developing and publishing African content.
- Further, the conference stressed the need for a greater diversity of African content on the Internet. In particular, there were calls for the preservation and assertion of indigenous knowledge and cultural values, as well as the need to develop content in African languages.
- New Media present unparalleled opportunities for the gathering, processing, publishing and dissemination of journalistic content. They open up channels to reach new audiences.

– Grahamstown, September 2000

# Bibliography

- Accone, T. 2000. Digital dividends for journalism in Africa. *Nieman Reports*, Winter, 54 (4) pp 67-70.
- Bastian, ML. 1999. Nationalism in a virtual space: immigrant Nigerians on the Internet. *West Africa Review* 1 (1) <http://www.icaap.org/iuicode> (accessed July 2000).
- Bergman, C. 2001. Eager crowd packs first broadcast Web summit. 03.19.01. <Http://www.lostremote.com/story/summit.html>.
- Bogart, L. 2001. Classifieds. In, *Innovations in Newspapers*. The 2001 World Report. Giner JA and Sussman, B. (eds). Pamplona: International Media Consulting Group.
- Botaro, M. 1999. Multimedia. In, *Innovations in Newspapers*. The 1999 World Report. Giner JA and Sussman, B. (eds). Pamplona: International Media Consulting Group.
- Bowles, S. 2000. Media Partnership Produced. *The Tampa Tribune*. <http://www.media-general.com/newscenter/trib.htm>
- Boyd, B and Skene, N. 1999. Analysts: Reorganization for Web Doesn't Guarantee Online Success [http://www.digitaledge.org/monthly/1999\\_07/Manage.html](http://www.digitaledge.org/monthly/1999_07/Manage.html) (accessed 28 August 2001).
- Boynton, R. New media may be old media's saviour. *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August 2000.
- Budde, N. 2000. Wireless Internet News: another challenge for newspaper publishers. Speech given at the Online Information 2000 conference in London, 7/12/2000. At: <http://www.futureprint.kent.edu/articles/budde02.htm>.
- Clare, Karen P. 2001. Online editors still fighting for total newsroom cooperation. *The digital edge*. [www.digitaledge.org/monthly/2001\\_06/printbuyin.html](http://www.digitaledge.org/monthly/2001_06/printbuyin.html)
- Cole, D. 2001. Mission: multimedia. [www.naa.org/presstime/0005/multi.html](http://www.naa.org/presstime/0005/multi.html). Accessed 12 June 2001.
- Decotis, M. 2000. Online Editors: Many Hats <http://www.poynter.org/centerpiece/112700.htm>
- Decotis, M. 2001. Managing Online Staff <http://www.poynter.org/centerpiece/041601.htm>
- Deve, T. 2000. Speech at Highway Africa 2000 Conference, September 2000, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.
- Eason, J. Memo from CNN's Eason Joran. *The Wall Street Journal*, 17.1.2001.
- Fernandez, T. 1999. Internet. Where journalists find new and fascinating information resources. In *Innovations in Newspapers: the 1999 World Report*. Pamplona: International Media Consulting Group.
- Fung, S. 2001. Dotcoms in crisis – way forward for online journalism. Reuters Foundation paper (unpublished), Green College, Oxford University, UK.
- Gentry, J K. 2000. Tampa: another stop on the road to convergence. In *Extending the Brand: a newspaper editor's guide to partnerships and diversification in a converging media world*. ASNE.
- Gerstner, L. 2000. "Letter to shareholders". IBM Annual Report, 2000. at [http://www.ibm.com/annualreport/2000/falt/chr\\_ltr/1\\_1\\_chr\\_ltr.html](http://www.ibm.com/annualreport/2000/falt/chr_ltr/1_1_chr_ltr.html)

- Gilbert, C. 2001. The internet and newspapers – a dilemma in response. Accessed 2/6/2001.  
[http://www.digitaledge.org/monthly/2001\\_02/HBSmain.html](http://www.digitaledge.org/monthly/2001_02/HBSmain.html)
- Giner, J.A. 2001. Integration. From media companies to 'information engines'. In, *Innovations in Newspapers*. The 2001 World Report. Giner JA and Sussman, B. (eds). Pamplona: International Media Consulting Group.
- Haiman, R. 2001. Can Convergence Float? 28.2.2001.  
<http://www.poynter.org/centrepiece>
- Hickey, N. Converge me up, Scottie. Tribune beams toward a multimedia future. *Columbia Journalism Review*. May/June.  
<http://www.cjr.org/year/00/2/2hickey.asp>. Accessed 27 August 2001.
- Kees, B. 2000. 'This minute's news': how CBS MarketWatch works. Report on 2000 Freedom Forum Technology Conference for Journalism Educators.  
<http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=12070>
- Lasica, JD. 2001a. Soul-searching time at online news units. *Online Journalism Review*. [Http://ojr.use.edu/content/story.cfm?request=-530](http://ojr.use.edu/content/story.cfm?request=-530). Accessed 02/05/2001.
- Lanson, J. 2000. Multiple ways to interact. *Online Journalism Review*.  
<http://ojr.usc.edu/content/story.cfm?request=432> accessed 13 June 2001.
- Lasica, JD. 2001b. Dot-com Content sites get creative. *Online Journalism Review*. [Http://ojr.use.edu/content/story.cfm?request=-529](http://ojr.use.edu/content/story.cfm?request=-529). Accessed 02/05/2001.
- Lawrence, K. 2000. Baseline report on Mopheme Online, presented at Highway Africa 2000 Conference, September 2000, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.
- Manoim, I. 2000. Putting the journalism back into online. Paper presented at Highway Africa 2000 Conference, September 2000, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa
- McAdams, M. Lesson 2: Why News Is Old News  
<http://ajr.newslink.org/mocol2.html>
- Musoke, F. 2000. Newspapers in Uganda and the Internet – the case of The Monitor. Paper presented at Highway Africa 2000 Conference, September 2000, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa
- Natale, C. 1998. Survival tips for small online staffs in small newspapers.  
[Http://www.poynter.org/dj/Projects/onlineseminar/integration.htm](http://www.poynter.org/dj/Projects/onlineseminar/integration.htm)
- Nichols, J. 1999. Extending the reach of print.  
[Http://www.poynter.org/dj/Projects/onlineseminar/Nichols.html](http://www.poynter.org/dj/Projects/onlineseminar/Nichols.html). Accessed 27/08/2001.
- Oldham, A. 2000. Analyst, Digital Technology International. Cited in *newspaper techniques*, July/August 2000/ p. 12,
- Olorunnisola, AA. 2000. African Media, Information Providers and Emigrants as Collaborative Nodes in Virtual Social Networks. Paper presented at Highway Africa 2000 Conference, September 2000, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.
- Outing, S. 1999. News publisher strategies for the 2000s. *Editor and Publisher*, 29/12/2000.
- Outing, S. 2000. Online news advice for 2001. *Editor and Publisher*, 27/12/2000.  
<http://www.editorandpublisher.com.ephome/news/newshtm/stop/st122700.htm>.



- Outing, S. 2001a. Audiences aren't deserting the Web. 27 June.  
[http://209.11.43.220/editorandpublisher/features\\_columns/article\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1005955](http://209.11.43.220/editorandpublisher/features_columns/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1005955). Accessed 24/08/2001.
- Outing, S. 2001b. Mining Your Site For Multiple Revenue Streams  
[http://209.11.43.220/editorandpublisher/features\\_columns/article\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1005955](http://209.11.43.220/editorandpublisher/features_columns/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1005955). Accessed 24/08/2001.
- Outing, S. 2001c Lessons From the Online Sex Sites.  
[http://209.11.43.220/editorandpublisher/features\\_columns/article\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1005161](http://209.11.43.220/editorandpublisher/features_columns/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1005161)
- Outing, S. 2001d. A Modest Proposal For News Web Sites. 23 May.  
[http://209.11.43.220/editorandpublisher/features\\_columns/article\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1005956](http://209.11.43.220/editorandpublisher/features_columns/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1005956)
- Outing 2001e Two Money-making Techniques You Haven't Tried Yet.  
[http://209.11.43.220/editorandpublisher/features\\_columns/article\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1005159](http://209.11.43.220/editorandpublisher/features_columns/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1005159) (accessed 3 Sept 2001)
- Outing 2001f. A Whack On the Head For Online Media. 11 July.  
[http://209.11.43.220/editorandpublisher/features\\_columns/article\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1004988](http://209.11.43.220/editorandpublisher/features_columns/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1004988)
- Paul, N. 1998a. Integrating old and new media newsrooms.  
[http://www.poynter.org/research/nm/nm\\_integrate.htm](http://www.poynter.org/research/nm/nm_integrate.htm)
- Paul, N. 1998b. Integration hurdles.  
[Http://www.poynter.org/dj/Projects/onlineseminar/integration.htm](http://www.poynter.org/dj/Projects/onlineseminar/integration.htm)
- Paul, N. 2000a. Putting technology tools to work.
- Paul, N. 2000b. Bridge over converged waters.
- Pew. 2000. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, at  
<http://www.people-press.org/media00rpt.htm>
- Porter, M. Strategy and the Internet. *Harvard Business Review*, March 2001.  
 Page 78
- Price, L. 2001. The online juggling act. *The digital edge*.  
[Digitaledge.org/monthly/2001\\_06/smallshops.html](http://Digitaledge.org/monthly/2001_06/smallshops.html) (accessed 13 June 01).
- Quinn, K. 2000. News Alert!. Interactive Week, of Zdnet.com. 19/11/2000
- Rabasca, L. 2001. Benefits, costs and convergence.  
[http://.www.naa.org/artpay.cfm?AID=15398SID=104. .](http://.www.naa.org/artpay.cfm?AID=15398SID=104.)
- Runett, R. 2001. Changing role for news sites. Accessed 14/08/2001.  
[Http://www.digitaledge.org/monthly/2001\\_07/localonline.html](http://www.digitaledge.org/monthly/2001_07/localonline.html)
- Shaw, D. 1991. The rise and fall of American mass media: roles of technology and leadership. Bloomington, Indiana: Roy W Howard Project, School of Journalism, Indiana University.
- Skene, N. 2000. The changing culture of the newsroom.  
<http://www.asne.org/works/interactive/asne4.htm>
- Stone, M L. 2001. Multimedia. Stepping stones to multimedia journalism. In, *Innovations in Newspapers*. The 2001 World Report. Giner JA and Sussman, B. (eds). Pamplona: International Media Consulting Group.
- Shapiro, C and Varian, HR. 1999. *Information rules. A strategic guide to the network economy*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Staby, J. The Namibian Online. Presentation at Highway Africa 2000 Conference, September 2000, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.



- Taylor, S. 1999. The Boston Globe and Boston.com. Building a franchise in the new millenium. Presentation to the 52nd World Newspaper Congress. Zurich, 13-16 June 1999.
- Taylor, A. 2000. Independent Online. Who, what, where, when and how. Presentation at Highway Africa 2000 Conference, September 2000, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.
- Tompkins, A. 2001. Convergence Needs a Leg to Stand On  
<http://www.poynter.org/centerpiece/022801tompkins.htm>
- Wendland, M. 2001. Convergence: Repurposing Journalism  
<http://www.poynter.org/centerpiece/022601.htm>, accessed 25/08/01.
- Zollman. P. 2001. Free Publicity Is Available If You Know Where to Look.  
[http://www.digitaledge.org/monthly/2001\\_07/searchoptions.html](http://www.digitaledge.org/monthly/2001_07/searchoptions.html)

