

Tow Center for Digital Journalism
A Tow/Knight Report

MOVING THE NEWSROOM: POST- INDUSTRIAL NEWS SPACES AND PLACES

**NIKKI
USHER**

Columbia
Journalism
School 

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction: Moving the Newsroom:	1
Post-Industrial News Spaces and Places	
II. Why Move Now?	7
III. Moving Out: From Leaving the Heart of	9
Downtown to Resettling a Block Away	
IV. Symbolic Space: It Matters	15
V. Reconfiguring Physical Space to	25
Make Way for the Digital Future	
VI. The System Behind the Hubs—Change for the Better	34
VII. Mobile Journalism: Leaving behind Physical Space	45
VIII. What We Can Learn From All of This	55
IX. Physical Spaces, Newsroom Places: Considered	58
Appendix: Newsroom Photo Galleries	61

I.

Introduction: Moving the Newsroom: Post-Industrial News Spaces and Places

By the early 2000s, the majestic old building that had housed the *Philadelphia Inquirer* since 1925 was very roomy for its dwindling staff. By 2012, it was simply way too big. What was once considered the most modern newspaper plant in the world now may become part of a hotel, entertainment, and casino complex. The newsroom's operations relocated to a former department store a year-and-a-half ago after rounds and rounds of layoffs.

Ohio's largest newspaper, *The Plain Dealer*, moved from a newsroom in Cleveland built with grand ambitions—constructed in 1999 to hold 1,000 journalists—into a leased office space in a mall/office building/transit center above the Hard Rock Café. The *Columbia Journalism Review*, which reported on the story, received an email that epitomized the wounded morale of the paper's remaining staff. It stated, "This used to be newsroom."

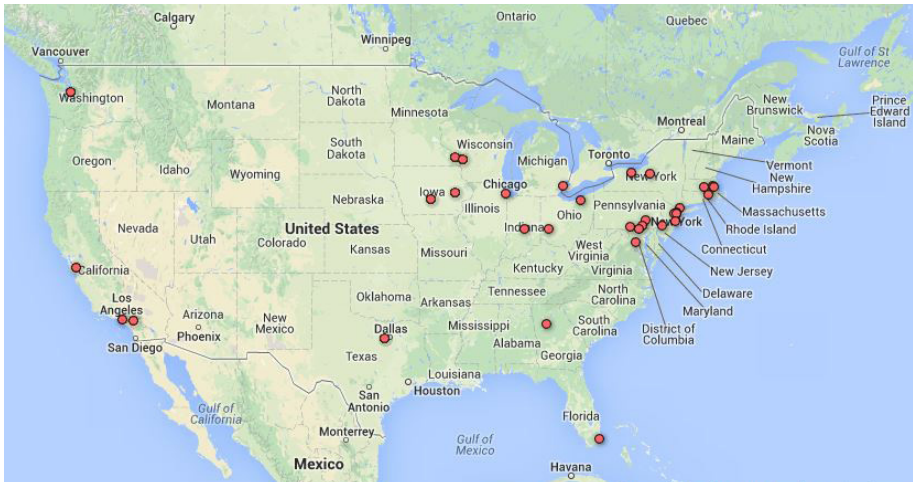
The original home of the Gannett chain, built by Frank Gannett in Rochester in 1928, is now for sale. Rochester's *Democrat & Chronicle* will move to new headquarters by mid-2014. For 3.5 million dollars, it will trade 135,000 square feet for a more modest 42,000, shrinking to just under a third of its former real estate size.

Both *The Des Moines Register* and *The Miami Herald* said goodbye to old buildings staffers loved and moved into open office spaces with great lighting, designed for continuous breaking-news operations. They're what news

Moving the Newsroom: Post-Industrial News Spaces and Places

executives promise offer a digital window into the future of journalism. These architectural innovations, and the move from old to new, they argue, provide a chance for reinvention.

Across the industry, we are seeing a wide-sweeping trend of newsrooms uprooting themselves: A.H. Belo, Gannett, MediaNews, Advance, GateHouse, Cox—small newspapers and large ones alike are listing their newsrooms for sale. Everyone from the private owners of the Syracuse Media Group, to the owners behind the *Boston Herald*, has moved buildings. This is a countrywide, size-wise trend¹ that begs the questions: Is this just one more slap in the face for newsrooms now at their lowest staffing levels since the 1970s? Is it one more sign in line with the circulation declines and revenue slides that signals the inability of newsrooms to get their financial models right? Or perhaps, instead, there is another story to tell here, one embedded with the opportunity to think about a physical move as a way to shed the past and look forward to the future of news through tactile readjustment.



See an interactive map of some newsroom moves [here](#).

¹ Joshua Benton at Nieman Lab helped compile this list, though I do not have a specific example for every newsroom from every chain on my list, simply because there is no central list other than my own.

The Tow Center suggests that journalism has become post-industrial. Institutions still matter, but their futures are more uncertain. The old methods for doing things and reliable ways of making money don't work anymore. Traditional newsrooms must do more with less, and the only way to maintain or grow relevance is to understand how to reshape work and processes through digital media.

As newsrooms shed their old, industrial pasts through optioning real estate, then perhaps the future for post-industrial journalism is quite bright. But if these moves are about nothing more than downsizing and loss, then we ought to be deeply concerned about the viability for quality news in the digital age, particularly from metropolitan newsrooms.

The task of this paper is to explore how physical change might make a difference to the future of journalism. The goal here is to help those inside and close to the industry understand the transition newspapers are making away from their manufacturing roots and into their post-industrial present. The relationship between physical and digital space, and what it means to journalists and their work, should help us learn more about what is happening inside journalism—and hopefully offer some insights into opportunities and blind spots.

What You'll Find in This Report:

Journalists care about where they work—and the symbols of change happening in their environments. I'll begin with both a meditation on and introduction to the seismic change occurring within the physical landscape of journalism. Following this, I'll discuss the changes that happen when newsrooms move, and then venture to look into the future of the possibilities and pitfalls as journalists say goodbye to physical space.

The research for this work was conducted at four key sites: *The Seattle Times*, *The Miami Herald*, the *Star-Telegram* (Fort-Worth), and *The Des Moines Register*. The sites were chosen because they represent geographic diversity and ownership variability (one majority privately-owned paper, two McClatchy papers, and one Gannett paper). More aptly, *The Miami Herald* and *The Des Moines Register* were actually making physical moves during the time of this research, and I was able to visit their newsrooms both before and after.

This body of data consists of six newsroom visits, 122 interviews, and more than 280 pages of single-spaced field/interview notes. Standard policy involved my using on-the-record, on-background, and off-the-record reporting. I have withheld some names if requested, or if usage raised concerns to me about any potential retribution.

The paper is sectioned as follows: a brief orientation into the reasons newsrooms are moving and the challenges presented by post-industrial journalism; how journalists deal with leaving memories behind when they relocate; what happens when these spaces are reconfigured; and whether physical space matters in a mobile age. At the end, you will find a brief conclusion with some possible suggestions for thinking about newsroom change.

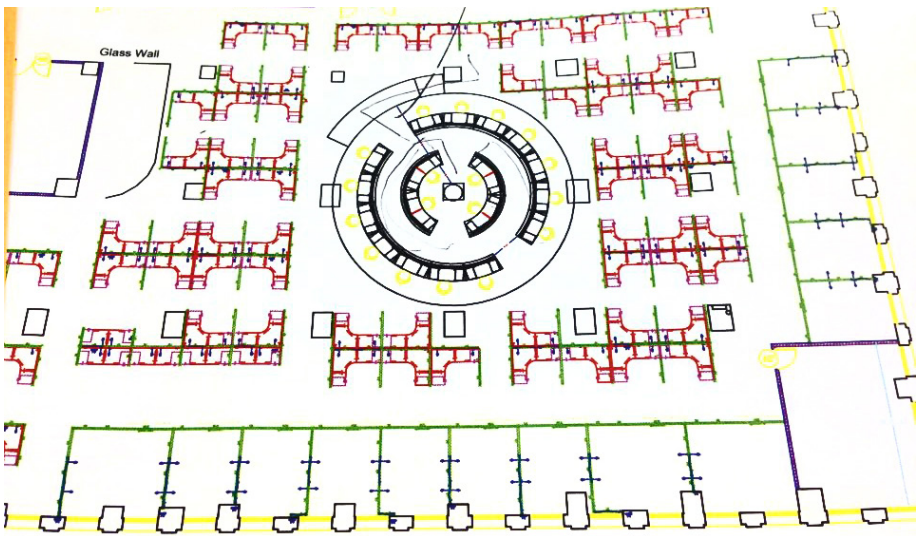
1. Why These Moves and the Connection to Post-Industrial Journalism

Newsrooms are mostly moving as a result of economic cutbacks. In some cases, news organizations stand to gain quite a bit of money—and have. Yet, ultimately the relocations make most sense because newsrooms don't need the space they historically did to create what was once an industrial product. The post-industrial journalism model, then, fits these moves in a literal sense, and the affordances of new space may be one way to address some of journalism's modern challenges. Newspapers are being charged with creating workflows that are more responsive to a digital environment, and reorienting physical space is one solution.

2. Physical Spaces and Symbolic Ties

On the surface, newsroom moves look like stories of decline rather than reinvention. To some journalists, leaving the mothership behind does indeed represent loss and a significant break with the past. On the other hand, these old newsrooms have been the empty, rundown sight of lay-offs for some time—perhaps more a sign of decline than anything else. Having the chance to start over has been welcome, with some caveats.

3. Newsroom Hubs and How They Work



A look at the Starship Enterprise of the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*

As part of these moves, managers across the industry are reimagining the physical space inside newsrooms. They have constructed elaborate news hubs to facilitate breaking news, and better collaboration and communication between digital teams and reporters. The results have been largely positive in the cases that I examined, though the results are still imperfect. If newsrooms are looking to change workflow, these hubs are at least enough of a symbolic change to create a cultural shift toward a digital-first mentality.

4. Mobile Journalism

As part of the physical transformation of space, I look to mobile journalism and address whether physical space even matters in an age where journalists can be mobile all the time. As newsrooms managers spend so much time on hubs, it's worth exploring the necessity of these efforts. With mobile journalism still evolving, it appears that journalists, for the most part, are still tied to the newsroom for practical and cultural reasons.

5. Reflections

Based on the research, I round up some key reflections about how we ought to think about the relationship between digital and space. First, physical spaces matter to journalists. Second, newsrooms should probably remain downtown or close to a central location and newsmakers. Third, newsroom hubs can work; and fourth, they work best with breaking-news reporters and those more generally in proximity. Finally, I suggest that journalists need to consider the evolving and complicated relationship between digital and physical space in a mobile environment.

II.

Why Move Now?

Though it's hard to say whether newspapers are finished with layoffs, they do seem to be stabilizing, at least according to reports from the Pew Research Center. But since digital advertising growth has been slow, real estate is another way to shave costs, with many chains choosing to rent rather than own, and to sell valuable spaces that are too big for their current size.

While Gannett hasn't put a figure on the real estate money it has earned, Bloomberg reporter Nadja Brandt found that the company has divested more than 2-million square feet of property since 2005. Her reporting also notes that A.H. Belo's non-core properties (before the Gannett purchase) account for "\$72 million—almost two-thirds of its stock-market value of \$113 million." In the case of *The Boston Globe*, its land may be worth more than the newspaper itself.

Post-industrial journalism offers an important jumping-off point for considering this real estate divestment trend. If journalism is no longer centered on the traditional proximity of the newsroom or journalism itself to the machinery of production, then it makes particular sense to sell large newsrooms. Newspapers no longer need the space, and less real estate saves money as they are increasingly removed from creating a physical print product. They don't need the headroom or the direct connection to the old machinery to create their daily, hourly, and minute-by-minute offerings.

Another important premise raised by the specter of post-industrial journalism is the idea that journalists might be able to adjust their work methods and practices to the need for speed and the imperative to distribute information faster. One aspiration of newsroom change comes from managers' avowed determination that the new space influence new ways of working. Their theory is that by reconfiguring the way people sit, they might also reconfigure the way people work. The stakes for these journalists are high, according to Anderson, Bell, and Shirky,² because if journalists in traditional newsrooms cannot adapt, they may see their relevance in the new ecosystem decline.

Post-industrial journalism also suggests that journalists in traditional newsrooms must come to terms with declining symbolic capital. Newspaper journalists must cope with the fact that they are no longer the titans of industry, and it's possible that newsroom relocations will be the final blow to their fragile psyches.

The final challenge relevant to this discussion is whether journalists can respond to reporting that is mobile and increasingly removed from traditional production models. What will become of the relationship between the physical space of the newsroom and the digital area, and will journalists adjust?

The stakes are high. If traditional journalists can't change the way they work and think, as the Tow Report³ argues, journalism will most likely get worse before it gets better, particularly in metropolitan newsrooms.

² C.W. Anderson, Emily Bell, and Clay Shirky. Post-Industrial Journalism—Adapting to the Present (Tow Center for Digital Journalism, Columbia University, 2012).

³ Ibid.

III.

Moving Out: From Leaving the Heart of Downtown to Resettling a Block Away

From the Bustle of the City Center to the Airport: *The Miami Herald*



Outside of *The Miami Herald* building



The view from the editor's office

The Miami Herald building, known industry-wide for its sweeping views along Biscayne Bay, was sold seemingly overnight in May 2011 to a Malaysian casino company, the Genting Gaming Corporation, in a \$236 million cash deal for the 14-acre area. Newsroom employees suggested this would help relieve McClatchy of some of the debt-load it had taken on after acquir-

Moving the Newsroom: Post-Industrial News Spaces and Places

ing the former Knight-Ridder properties. This rumor was wrong, though, as managing editor Rick Hirsch notes that most of the money earned actually went to paying off employee pension plans.

The former one-story newsroom had two years to move, and said goodbye to One Herald Plaza in downtown after 50 years. After a number of false starts in search of new buildings, in May of 2013 the newspaper moved 12 miles away to Doral, near the Miami International Airport. McClatchy built a new printing plant from the ground up, and fronted the cash to gut the former headquarters of the U.S. Southern Air Command. Though proponents argued that the Miami Herald building was a prime example of MiMo, or mid-century Miami architecture, the site failed to garner the votes to become a historical landmark, and will fall to the wrecking ball and be replaced by casinos. Editor Dave Wilson expressed great hope before the newspaper's relocation, saying, "This is our chance to build our home for decades to come."



The new press structure

The Miami Herald is now housed in a 160,000-square-foot, two-story building—still a formidable footprint. In its new building, executive editor Mindy Marques and key staff members created a new version of the existing Con-

tinuous News Desk, or CND. The large U-shaped design with a two-sided media wall, replete with 22 screens, is intended to help improve communication and speed in the newsroom.



The Miami Herald

Leaving Behind a Behemoth: Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*



Star-Telegram's old building

The Fort Worth Star-Telegram building, constructed in 1921, was the newspaper's home for 90 years. The block-long plant was expanded over and over again, but in 2009 part of the building once used for journalists' offices

was torn down (captured on [YouTube](#)). In 2011, journalists moved into five floors of a 19-story building newly rechristened the Fort Worth Star-Telegram building just a few blocks away; editorial is on one floor, while other floors house a lobby, the publisher's office, the video studio, and the advertising staff.



Star-Telegram's new building

Amon Carter Sr., the newspaper's modern-day founder, left a legacy in Fort Worth. Energy magnate Bob Simpson has bought the old building and will restore it to its old glory, including the wood-carved publisher's office. He will also install a museum dedicated to Carter on the bottom floor. In the new space, editor Jim Witt and top managers designed a "Starship Enterprise" intended to facilitate a breaking-news environment.

Witt couldn't speak to the specifics of the cost to set up the new building, but said, "We wound up spending a little bit more than we would have if we built [the inside] of a traditional newsroom, but the payoff has easily justified the extra 20 percent or so that the special equipment and construction cost us."

The Daily Planet to the Skyways: The Des Moines Register



Des Moines-Old building



Des Moines-New building

The Des Moines Register left its 1918 home in late June of 2013 for a modern office space just three blocks away. The old 13-floor newsroom, one that journalists liken to the *Daily Planet* building from *Superman*, had been built floor on top of floor, beginning with the pressroom, then composing and typography, the newsroom and ad sales, and at the top, the executive offices. Today, the *Register* occupies two floors of an office building inside the city's "skyway" system, which gives the sense that one is walking inside a giant mall. Its presence is denoted with modest signage. The centerpiece of this low-walled, bright office space is "mission control," or the central ring of editors, reporters, and homepage staff charged with breaking news. There are 46 meeting rooms and 16 TVs at mission control, along with an additional 24 television screens in the newsroom. The floor plate shrunk from 220,000 square feet to approximately 86,000.

Whereupon Grunge Filled Empty Space: *The Seattle Times*



The Seattle Times old building



The Seattle Times new building

The Seattle Times moved in January of 2012 from its 80-year-old building headquarters on Fairview Street to a building nearby once owned by the company (but where it now leases space). The newspaper currently shares quarters with a wine company and a communications firm in the same building that once just housed the newspaper’s advertising and business staff. As the South Lake Union area became a hub for Amazon’s new headquarters, the land *The Seattle Times* occupied became increasingly valuable. Due to financial concerns and what it stood to earn, The Seattle Times Company eventually sold its remaining buildings. The presses, abandoned since 1996 when operations moved out to the suburbs, have long been dormant—save for their use before the move as background for bands playing small shows (see a video [here](#)).

The Seattle Times’ new space includes a “hub” made of concentric semi circles (or spokes) to facilitate breaking news and print-online integration. Editors hope that the space gives the paper a chance to complete a culture change they felt was impossible in the old building—due to cost, scale, inertia, and other factors. In this case, the newspaper’s move was not purported as a symptom of decline, but rather as one of innovation.

IV.

Symbolic Space: It Matters

One of the biggest challenges facing traditional journalists in a post-industrial environment for news is not economic survival—it's ego survival. For decades and decades, newspapers have been the physical and symbolic center for information; now, others also lay claim to inhabiting this role. If journalists cannot change what they do to account for shifts in information production and consumption, they're at a loss. Nostalgia for times past is no aid, even if lip service is paid to the future. One indication of just how ready journalists are to move past their legacy roots is how much time they spend thinking about what they've left behind in their old newsrooms.

In Fort Worth and Seattle, new newsrooms down the block were opportunities to leave behind bad memories. In Des Moines, while the newsroom down the street was sunny and bright, it was nothing in comparison to the physical greatness of 13 stories of brick and mortar left behind. And in Miami, a move out to Doral by the airport, and the destruction of the plant by the bay, signaled a psychic blow that the newspaper had now become obsolete to the larger city of Miami.

In this age of the great newspaper crisis, or at least the dialogue around its possibility, journalists contend that newspaper buildings disappearing from plain sight symbolize yet another blow to institutional legacy. As Des Moines journalist Rox Laird, a 40-year veteran said after the move, "I miss most the image of the *Register* translated into a physical building," likening stone and granite to stability and permanence. Just how journalists can make peace with a move from old to new says a lot about their ability to

adapt and change. Still, old space can mean memories of decline, while new space can be a physical commitment to a new pathway forward. As is shown in each of these cases, the place journalists work is deeply connected to their journalistic identities.



In Des Moines: Piles of bound volumes

Saying goodbye was easy in Fort Worth, especially since the newsroom was moving down the street to a well-signed building a few blocks away. There were a few sentimental stories journalists referenced, including leaving the oldest elevator in Fort Worth, which many had gotten stuck in at one time or another. Journalist Anna Tinsley has kept a picture of the ornate carvings on the roof of the old building and recalled how she was a *Star-Telegram* baby, the daughter of two newspaper employees, who “grew up in the old building.” She said, “I took my first step in that building.” To many

journalists, the old building was a showing of the newspaper's historical ambitions: the two-city block space built in the heyday of the newspaper's grandest days.

At the same time, these memories are also tinged with the signs of decay. The newsroom was both empty and filthy. Editor Sarah Huffstetler said that while she was sad to leave the building, the romantic quality of being in a place that had at one time housed a morning and evening edition with presses now faded was gone once "we started laying people off...The main building was so empty. There was a lot more space than we needed." Executive editor Jim Witt noted the impact of all the empty space: "It was nice that we owned it, but there were empty desks. There were morale issues." Moving to a new office allowed these journalists to settle into a space that fit their current staff size, and shed the legacy of all the emptiness and literal decay.

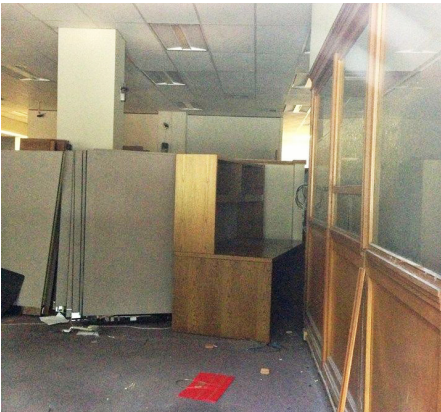


Inside the new Fort Worth newsroom

The journalists in Seattle echoed this sentiment, and were even quicker to dispense with their history. Though a movie or two had been filmed in the spot, the romance had long faded. The space had just gotten too big for the now slimmed-down size of the staff, and too expensive to maintain. There were cockroaches everywhere (or so a few employees exaggerated). Gray

carpet lined the floors and the walls, a homage to the 1970s. According to photo editor Angie Gottschalk, “The place was very, very dirty.” And it too was foreboding, especially after *The Seattle Times* began having trouble in 2000. Then-managing editor Suki Dardarian⁴ said, “It was depressing—we were too big for the space. There were only a few of us.” Referring to the disparate spread of the departments throughout the newsroom, Dardarian explained to me that it felt like parts of the newsroom were so detached from each other in the old place that it was like “living in another country.”

Seattle was more than happy to bid farewell to its old newsroom and move into a building just a block away where everyone was in one space, together. Everyone I spoke to about the move shared a sentiment similar to that of breaking-news reporter Jack Broom. “I just like this place a whole lot better.” When asked whether he missed anything, he shook his head violently.



Inside the *The Seattle Times*' old newsroom



The new *The Seattle Times*' newsroom

For the most part, these particular newsrooms are moving beyond dwelling on an image of their former selves. Often, this is because what they left behind was so dismal that it reminded them of just how far they had fallen—starting over was a means to rebuilding the ego, rather than another

⁴ Positions changed after executive editor David Boardman left for academia, just after my visit.

sign of decline. A move down the street for each newsroom to another, well-signed building didn't represent a major lifestyle adjustment or a connection between abandoning a large space with abandoning a physical presence in each newspaper's respective city. For these newsrooms, a change in physical space was a free do-over for staff and reason to create a culture change for managers.

In Des Moines, though, the story is a bit varied. Many of the journalists still feel a tie to the long legacy of Iowa reporters and the history of the building they left. Journalist after journalist pointed out the marble stairs on the first floor, so worn down that they are actually indented from many years of use. The old building's lobby featured a giant Cold-War-era globe that used to spin, which many journalists remember from youth. Some of the older journalists even recall a newsroom full of clattering typewriters, smoking, phone booths, and U-shaped copy desks.

Some spoke of being able to see the presses from the window. Many are Des Moines natives, children of people who worked in the building, and have childhood memories of coming to the newspaper with their parents in a pre-digital era when it was stuffed with giant mounds of paper. Younger journalists pointed out the legacy of presidential candidates who had come through the newsroom on their way to the primaries.

Senior news director Randy Brubaker put it this way:

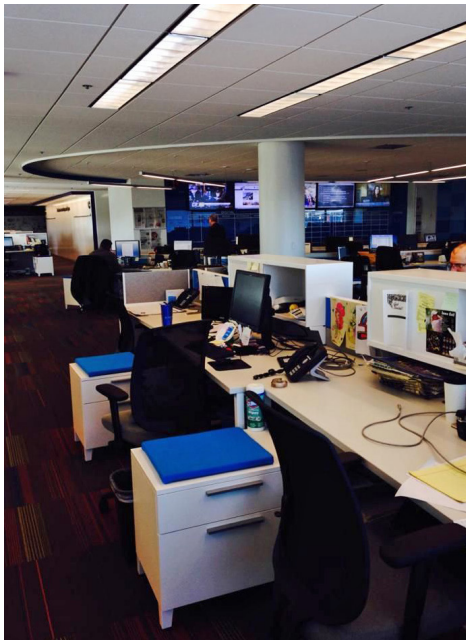
In some ways, the building still feels grand and nostalgic, but it is not like the building it was 50 years ago. It is old and ornate and much of the luster is gone, but you know you are working for a grand, old institution and it has a lot of history attached.

The newspaper occupied 13 floors, with some more empty than others, in a building that was designed top-down for industrial production. One journalist explained, "I miss the industrial feel of the old building, but there

Moving the Newsroom: Post-Industrial News Spaces and Places

aren't really industries in America anymore." The same journalist added that the newsroom didn't have the same kind of "psychic weight" from year after year of layoffs.

Still others in Des Moines welcomed the move to a new space. While some felt they were leaving a piece of history behind, from a practical standpoint they took pride in their new digs. Not only did the heating and plumbing work, but the office was more functional. Publisher Rick Green explained the newsroom now as a showpiece. "It shows how we are evolving after 95 years of being a legacy print organization to becoming a digital powerhouse." The newsroom had recently hosted an open house for advertisers and Gannett bigwigs, and Green commented that these visitors "could see that we were physically and mentally situated to do our job in a new way."



Showpiece

Senior news director Brubaker, who had recently invited a college class of public-relations journalists to visit, beamed when he described their response to the newsroom.

One of them said, “Wow, I never expected a newspaper to look like this.” If we are impressing college kids with the work space and the environment, with clean, open technology, then that is at least 50 percent of the battle to keep kids interested and show them that the newspaper is still vital.

The new space in Des Moines works to communicate a vision of the future to the community. At the same time, the building is still gone, and the *Register* is in an office building like so many other companies downtown. “I don’t think they anticipated there’d be this little signage,” Iowa columnist and move-chronicler Kyle Munson added.

While a number of newspaper offices are closing and reopening just blocks away, *The Miami Herald’s* move illustrates the practical and symbolic importance of a newsroom remaining close to the physical center of the community it covers. Its departure from downtown to the suburbs was not just inconvenient, but downright concerning to the branding and institutional heft of the *Herald*. In Miami, the bay-front One Herald Plaza was a landmark in the cityscape, and smack-dab in the middle of where news was likely to break.



The Miami Herald at night

Many surviving newspapers of a certain age in the United States are (or were) located in the center of a city adjacent to city hall, the courts, and the police station—even in some of the most spread-out urban locales, like Atlanta, Dallas, and Los Angeles. This central locus meant that the newspaper was literally staring down those in power, and was also physically situated close enough to get a jump on reporting.

One Herald Plaza was the site of the now infamous flesh-eating zombie attack, caught on the newspaper's own surveillance cams. In 2005, disgraced politician Arthur Teele walked through the building's front door one day and shot himself. A *New York Times* article described Miami journalists who might see "floaters" (dead bodies) outside in the bay. Cruise ship accidents and hurricanes were all plainly visible from the plaza, an advantage reporters worry about losing. One of them, Nadege Green, explained, "We are able to break big stuff when it hits the fan. I mean, we are right near the MacArthur Causeway. That's how we got the zombie story."

Obviously, the other half of this equation was the fear that being away from downtown meant being "out of sight, out of mind" for the newspaper. Journalists were concerned about the future of the brand. "It was in big, bold letters and that was us, and it was a reminder of who we are," journalist Chuck

Rabin said. Another journalist, Jacqueline Charles, echoed this, noting that the new building in downtown had nothing more than a banner at the street entrance. “I worry about our brand. I worry about our market visibility. Will people remember we are still here once the building goes down?” Editor Jane Wooldridge worried that *The Miami Herald* stood to lose “mindshare” being out of the city’s center.

Similar to in other cities, however, Hannah Sampson, Miami’s travel and tourism reporter, described One Herald Plaza before the move as “lonely,” noting that it was “sad to see the empty desks.” After the move, despite the new office’s location, I encountered no complaints about the new physical space. In fact, most journalists felt its energy was better and it was more conducive to working conditions. Wooldridge, who spoke about mindshare, said she didn’t miss the old building one bit. But exiting the city’s center mattered.

The other newsrooms I visited said they hadn’t considered leaving downtown, at least not for long. In Des Moines, the former publisher Laura Hollingsworth made a commitment to staying central, while senior news director of digital Kelli Brown explained, “It would have meant abandoning the city center. It is a commitment to the city to be here rather than leaving for the suburbs.” In Fort Worth, Jim Witt described how Fort Worth business leaders wanted the newspaper to remain in the city center; these leaders were working to revitalize the area and having the institution flee for the suburbs was unwelcome. In Seattle, leaving downtown simply didn’t seem practical; the physical location of the newspaper was central to the odd geography of a city cut off by waterways on three sides, where bridges from the city center were the best way to access far-flung parts of the city.

Symbols, and proximity, matter to journalists as they think about their place in the news ecosystem. As the metropolitan newsroom’s voice continues a visible erosion in print and profit, the physical newsroom holds special meaning to journalists. In an industry where many watchers offer commentary about the great newspaper crisis, it’s helpful to have some sort of way to forget about what came before—or just how far these metropolitan news-

rooms had fallen. Seattle product director Eric Ulken explained, “In the new building we could start over. [The old newsroom] was built in a manufacturing and distribution era. Here there are more information-age offices versus places stuff was made.” Editor Jim Witt in Fort Worth expressed the same idea: “When we came here, McClatchy said be creative, be inventive, they really gave us the chance to think about ways to do new things, to think about how we ought to go digital first.”

V.

Reconfiguring Physical Space to Make Way for the Digital Future

Journalists in charge of their newsrooms take great faith in the power of physical space to transform their newspapers into digitally oriented operations. In this way, the new environments have become stand-ins representing an aspirational look at how journalists ought to go about their work. Every newsroom I visited featured something like a “hub,” nicknamed any number of phrases like “Continuous News Desk,” “mission control center,” or, in Fort Worth, “the bridge” or “Starship Enterprise.”

This hub-like space is a physical manifestation of a new focus on breaking news—and while it looks different in every place I visited, each had the same aim: to centralize the placement of news on the homepage, the tempo of stories, the strategy behind social media, and the communication between editors about reporters’ whereabouts and the submission of new stories. By creating these hubs, editors hoped to recharge workflow with the demand for fresh news—even if not breaking—and a continuously updated and refreshed homepage and social presence.

Starship Enterprise: Fort Worth's Hub



The hub

Fort Worth's hub is a raised, circular platform that looks out over the newsroom from the left-hand side of a large, open floor plan. It's a large circle with an outer and inner ring. If an editor is talking to another staffer in the newsroom from the hub, he or she will be sitting while the other staff member is standing. It's almost a bird's eye view of the rest of the floor.

In the interior of the hub sits the head web producer, clustered next to the social media editor, and the engagement editor. Along the outer ring, two breaking-news reporters (focused on crime) join various assigning editors and photo editors. The hub has taken on many nicknames: "We call this the nipple of knowledge, the flight deck, the command center, any Star Trek kind of thing. Any of those really...the Starship Enterprise, the bridge," assistant photo editor Ross Hailey explained.

Managing editor Kathy Vetter planned the design with the intention of bringing together a newsroom that had been in too big of a space, where digital had been out of sight and mind. "We had to integrate tech symbolically," she said. "You can't help but pay attention to the fact that you are working in a digital space."

This newsroom prioritizes speed. Vetter's hope was to create a breaking-news zone where journalists could gather during high-profile events to plug-in, collaborate, and actually hear each other and exchange information. On a day-to-day basis, her intention was to bring together online staff to facilitate physical communication, and most importantly, enable a breaking-news operation. According to Vetter and Witt, they wanted to change the way news flowed throughout the day to create a more responsive environment. Vetter said, "When news [breaks] online we can move more quickly. You can hear the updates for an online story."

Semi-Circle Spokes: Seattle



View from the front of the newsroom

The hub in Seattle consists of cubes in concentric, semi-circle rows (or spokes). The cubicles run two across, with wide walkways between each one. There is almost no barrier between the different cubicles, so that if you sit in front of someone, you can easily turn around, see him or her, and have a conversation. Facing the front of the newsroom, one sees a modest media wall that features a few screens showing competing broadcasts. Toward the

back of the hub is a screen showing the up-and-down movements of Chartbeat, the metrics analytics software used for minute-to-minute monitoring of the homepage.

The key part of the hub consists of the editor charged with updating the breaking-news blog (The Today File) with feeds from reporters. Occasionally, extra source material will come from KING-5, the partner television station. Behind the first editor sits another editor who back-reads copy before it is posted to the Web. The assistant metro editor sits across from the editor responsible for breaking news, where he can dole out assignments to various reporters. Also in this area are the homepage producers, who monitor Chartbeat by the second on their screens, and the social media editor. Photo is also in this area, as is the Page One editor, who comes in later in the day. The criminal justice editor sits a few rows back.

Kathy Best, former metro editor (and now executive editor), explained how they came up with the idea for their hub.

We did a lot of reading. We based it on our own experience. We needed key digital people and key folks in proximity to breaking news. We wanted people to be yelling back and forth, efficiently and effectively. We were reading a lot of things in Europe about British papers and how they looked with hubs and spokes. There was a lot written about how that was the best idea.

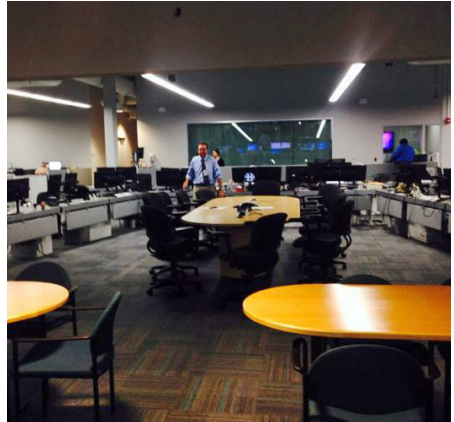
Seattle's hub was intended to bridge both digital and print, as well as to facilitate breaking news. *The Seattle Times* had a more difficult time integrating its two major outputs, so the hub was a chance for a reboot. As former managing editor Suki Dardarian explained, the goal since 2000 "was to create one newsroom, with a center...and to bring down the walls and really have print and digital together." Former executive editor David Boardman talked about raising a "digital consciousness" within the company.

Certainly, *The Seattle Times* was able to bring together breaking news in online and print (for a 2010 breaking-news Pulitzer covering the deaths of four policemen and a 40-hour manhunt for the suspect). New metro editor Mark Higgins wrote me, “The new space melded a number of essential players in a common work space in the middle of the room.” While the former building had an early version of this in place, the hope in moving was to make this hub even more present in a visible, permanent architectural way.

Continuous News Desk 2.0: Miami



Old CND



New CND

Two visits to Miami made it possible to see how its hub (called the Continuous News Desk or CND) evolved from old building to new. At One Herald Plaza, the CND was an odd, ad-hoc collection of tables pushed together to form a square. The production team was closer to the CND than the reporters, meaning that there was a sea of empty desks for most of the day.

When given the chance to start over again, executive editor Mindy Marques and other top editors working with her thought critically about how they would re-do the CND to accomplish the digital-first priorities of *The Miami*

Herald. When I visited Marques before the move, she showed me her physical file of research for the hub. I estimated it to be three inches worth of paper, full of highlights and underlines.

Marques began by thinking about what other newsrooms with hubs had already done. Though the CND was already in place in 2007, she wanted something that would transition the journalists from being “out of sight, out of mind” into a position where they could be physically present and visible, actively engaged and communicating with the people charged with the Web site. She explained, “You want to also be able to quickly communicate to readers, and within the newsroom you need to be talking and acting like this.” She added, “From the day slot, you want to be able to yell at reporters.”

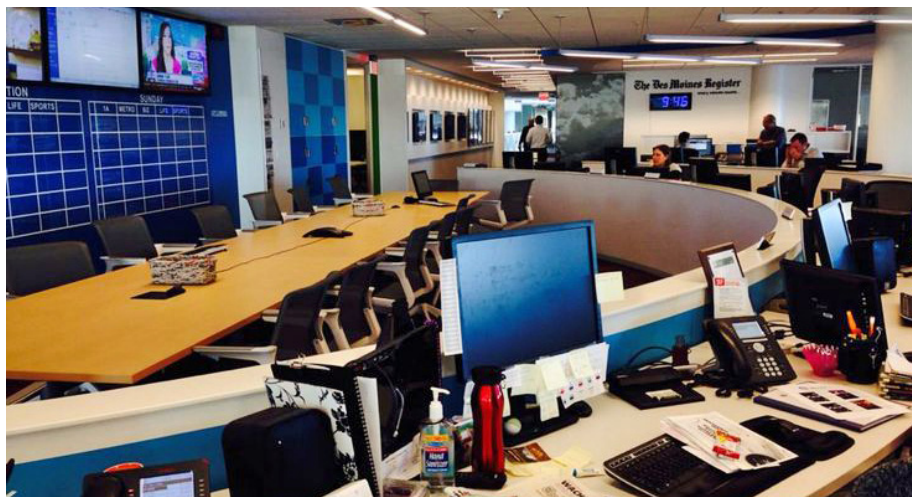
As the *Herald* began to look for relocation sites, military affairs reporter Carol Rosenberg suggested looking at the old U.S. Southern Command building, where the newspaper ultimately settled. When Marques and her team went to visit the relocated U.S. Southern Command just blocks away, the military officers explained to her how one central space served as a means for coordinated information exchange. The U.S. Southern Command also had many screens, inspiring Marques to think about how to create a central media wall.

Marques thought there was something to learn from the efficiency of military communication. “The military has to move quickly; they have to move resources efficiently and deal with urgent situations.” She also noted that their command center featured 22 key decision-makers, prompting her to think carefully about who should sit at the CND. Like the military, the point of the CND would be to centralize decision-making in one physical space.

After settling on the U-shape of the new CND, Marques mapped out the people who most needed to be in communication. She wanted some people fixed on the desk, along with other spots that would be open to rotating staff. In tandem with the team charged with the newsroom move, Marques decided that the day news editor, the social media editor, the social media reporter, the photography editor, a reporter, a copy editor, homepage pro-

ducers, and sports editors/producers would be on the desk—as well as partners from *El Nuevo Herald* (the *Miami Herald*'s Spanish counterpart), and WLRN, the partner public radio station. Marques focused on getting her vision for quick communication right: “I was obsessed with the shape,” she said. “We only had one chance to do this and we wanted to do it right.”

Mission Control: Des Moines



Des Moines'—Mission Control

Before its move, *The Des Moines Register* had nothing resembling a hub. Though digital journalists sat together they simply didn't have a setup that warranted fast response time. A single TV generally tuned to CNN played over their heads. The homepage editor streamed eight different police scanners off his computer, creating a constant chatter of voices. And the metro reporters were in clusters, but certainly not in clear proximity to this desk. Top editors expressed grand ambitions for the new hub, but most reporters didn't really have a sense of how it might affect them.

The vision for the hub—called “Mission Control”—was inspired by newsrooms that had already completed physical transformations. Within Gannett, Des Moines editor Rick Green (now president and publisher) looked at the *Westchester Journal News* and spoke with *USA Today* as it was trying to create its new desk. He also looked at the *Star-Telegram*.

Green explained his vision to me:

We will have Mission Control with a wall showing our Web site, TV stations like CNN, and a war table for the day’s meeting and the assignment team and digital editor.

Mission Control, I think, is really just a way, physically, for key assignment editors to come together and for the digital team to have even more communication. People will be closer to the action...to the news that is happening on Page One.

Green set up Mission Control in two concentric semi-circles in the center of the newsroom. Each newsroom desk—metro, business, sports, investigations, etc.—spins off the hub. An editor sits strategically positioned at the start of each spoke. The front row of the semi-circle includes the digital staff and the breaking-news reporter; the back row of the hub includes the digital breaking-news editor and the assignment editors. In keeping with Des Moines editors’ contention that their newsroom should be a training ground for young reporters, veterans are strategically stationed next to less experienced staff.

In the front of the room there are three large planning boards: one for the day’s online content, one for the day’s print content, and one for the upcoming Sunday’s content. In the past, these planning boards were in a conference room far away from all these key editors. Now, these slightly more sophisticated dry erase boards are displayed for all to view, all the time, in the center of the newsroom.

And, perhaps setting Des Moines apart, is the way it uses a new five-screen media wall. One screen cycles through the Web sites of competitors in Des Moines, and others across the region. Another screen shows real-time analytics via Chartbeat, with different views of the analytics software on rotation. The introduction of this media wall has had a significant effect upon its staff in a way that was not seen in other newsrooms.

VI.

The System Behind the Hubs— Change for the Better

To change the narrative of shrinking newsrooms from one of defeat into a positive message of change, newsroom managers placed great faith in the physical recalibration of workflow in a rapidly changing digital environment, imbedding within it new patterns of news creation.

But would this change in the physical structure actually work, or was this just another newsroom fad, as one skeptical Des Moines journalist suggested—another funny invention by newsroom managers to talk the talk of change without actually making any inroads?

More Responsive to Breaking News: Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*

In Fort Worth, despite a few grumbles and some suggestions for improvements, for the most part the desired effect of speeding up the news flow and increasing communication is being met. Journalists told me that this has been particularly helpful, because limited resources demands more efficiency from them.

Longtime police reporter Domingo Ramirez Jr. now sits in the hub to do his work. He explained to me how the proximity to the metro editors and online desk facilitates quick responses.

With all the TVs there, with numerous scanners, within seconds you will know what is breaking. Before it was phone calls and you didn't see the online editor. You would have to track one down. It's so much quicker to get something online. The command center makes a big difference. We are right on top of news breaking and we will know what happens immediately.

When I visited the hub, it seemed fairly sleepy; however, the month before in Texas had been a big one for breaking news. A fertilizer plant in West Texas had exploded, killing 15 and wounding almost 160. The *Star-Telegram* was the closest big newspaper to the scene, and was able to make inroads with sources the national media couldn't connect to, including an interview with the plant owner. That month, Greater Fort Worth was also hit with a series of tornados.

Danny Vandegriff, the AME for operations, said the way the news delivery came together during these incidents was just "physical and wonderful" (albeit the gravity of the news). More generally, though, he explained, "What the circle has done is remove what was previously a rumor about breaking news. There would be a night reporter on the phone but I wouldn't know there was a story. Now the night reporter is 10 feet away; photo is just five feet away."

One of the few young reporters in Fort Worth, Dustin Dangli, explained how sitting in proximity to the hub made a difference in his ability to help in the newsroom. "If there is something breaking, it radiates from the hub. Several weeks ago, a bus flipped over. I sit right outside and they were looking for someone [to cover the story], and I just said I would do it."

For most people with whom I spoke in Fort Worth the hub serves the central aim of making journalists more responsive to breaking news. The environment feels digitally conducive, and they believe that they are able to communicate more readily thanks to physical proximity. In this case, space seems to have reconfigured the digital workflow.

The *Star-Telegram* has the distinction of being in its new home (since 2011) the longest of all those I studied, so its newsroom may provide some sense of what life could be like in a newsroom that has fully adapted to a new physical configuration. Other places I visited were far more starkly divided in their feelings about their respective hubs. And ironically, despite having such strong feelings about physical communication, Fort Worth was also the newsroom most convinced it could become completely virtual.

A Case of Mixed Communication: *The Seattle Times*

In Seattle, those inside the hub find that their communication is better than it was before their move. But the layout of the newsroom doesn't accomplish what journalists had hoped might happen: reporters are still spread out throughout the newsroom and finding out about assignments is more difficult. More often than not, those on the desk are the ones finding the breaking news. They monitor the Twitter feeds of the Seattle Police Department (whose scanner is nearly impossible to listen in on) and pay attention to the television competition, deciding whether to pursue stories.

For Nick Provenza, the editor of the Today File (the breaking news blog), the arrangement of the hub makes back-reading the blog after he adds new information very easy. It also means that he can easily shout to the homepage producer if there is anything notable enough to earn prominence on the homepage.

Similarly, one of the homepage editors, Evan Bush, said he finds the shouting range between the digital team and the most immediate assigning editors useful because the staff can alert him to new stories and he can discuss suggestions for where to place them on the homepage. "You have access to people in the hub and that is currency."

Yet, other editors sitting in the hub point out that the idea of physical communication has not been completely realized because they are not able to shout over the current distance to their reporters. The earshot concept does not work for communication with all of those who were actually producing content.



Seattle's high walls

As then-assistant metro editor Richard Wagoner said, he still has to get up and walk across the room to talk to his reporters. And most reporters were fairly skeptical when I suggested that the hub might be better for communication with the breaking-news operation. Others noted that it simply felt like the “same old space” as in the old newsroom.

One reporter gave a direct example of the disconnect from the hub she had seen the same day I interviewed her. She had been working on a story that she thought needed a tweet about a new development. Her editor, who is stationed at the hub, came by to ask her about the development hours after she had made the discovery. She suggested that if the hub were really working, this sort of communication failure would never happen. Another journalist explained how she had been working on a blog series, but had trouble

getting people at the homepage to highlight it. In her view, if the hub were more integrated with the rest of the newsroom, it might be possible to make this communication easier on a regular basis. “I’m just back here,” she said. One reporter who spends more time on longer stories argued, “It doesn’t make any difference to what I do. Absolutely none.”

Current metro editor Mark Higgins, who helped design the hub, tried to give me some sense of what I might have missed in making these assessments. He says the hub has been indispensable in breaking-news situations, such as elections, and that its centralization is ideal for tracking reporters on breaking-news events. He also reminded me that ideal shouting distance is relative, and that he has a breaking-news reporter on duty in the morning and night at the desk with breaking news coming from throughout the newsroom, not just the hub.

Reporters who work on the hub had differing perspectives about it. One of the journalists who had been on hub duty the year prior had a very different experience than her counterparts in Fort Worth: “[During] most shifts I was with the editors it was horrible. It was not an ideal place to write. They were looking over my shoulders. I had Twitter; they would have Twitter, and they would distract me and make sure I was catching things.” Another reporter who comes in at 7 a.m., Jack Broome, described what sounded like an efficient machine. “I am the first reporter here. Nick [Provenza, the breaking-news blog editor] is an hour-and-a-half earlier. At that hour we are looking at what is going on the Web site, what’s breaking through the morning hours, whether there is something new we can put up.” For Broome, the hub is a seamless place for breaking news

In Seattle, the imagined role of the hub is mixed in practice. Those on the hub do have more proximity to each other for actual conversations, but some still feel farther apart than they had hoped. And significantly, unlike in Fort Worth, the reporters and editors still don’t feel that they are able to engage in real-time communication. Notably, though, those on the hub

are now expressing the digital consciousness that executive editor David Boardman had hoped, and are, at least, fulfilling the mission of turning Seattle into a more robust online newsroom.

Shifting Culture: *The Miami Herald*

The new version of the Miami hub—its CND—was not quite operational when I visited the newsroom for the second time in October of 2013. The giant, two-sided, 22-screen media wall was not working the way executive editor Mindy Marques had wanted—the feeds from the computers of *Herald* analytics, social media, and the Web site had not yet gone live. The CND was set up in principle, but pieces were missing, from buy-in to the presence of reporters on the desk.

When I visited, the CND was far from a hub of constant communication. The desk was empty for most of the day I was there. Perhaps it was because I came before WLRN, the partner radio station had filled in its newsroom spots, or because I left around 5 p.m. one day and 3 p.m. the next, but I didn't see the large space being used on a continuous basis. Also, the interns who normally fill some of the spots were not yet working at the paper. Still, my observations were substantiated by some of the staff. "The CND works well, though it's empty most of the time," commented editor Amy Lipman.

The large U-shape had 16 seats. The day homepage producer sat six seats away from the online editor, Jeff Kleinman. The sports producer also sat a number of seats away. There was a row behind the CND that contained the desks of the public insight network, social media editor and reporter, and the *El Nuevo Herald* producer, among others, but these folks came in after the morning rush of breaking news. During the afternoon, the GA reporter was camped out on the CND. In between interviews, I sat next to the online editor and head of the CND. I didn't see reporters come up to share breaking news and didn't hear much communication with others on or surrounding the desk.

But as Kleinman pointed out, he simply didn't have the bodies he needed.

We don't have a morning breaking news reporter. We don't have a dedicated night breaking news/cops reporter. We haven't been able to fill those spots but we're going to now. It's just me in the morning. I answer the phones now because there's no one to answer them anymore. This is something that really hurts us.

Still, in his estimation, "Communication has been working out mostly positive. Things are really good. I'm pretty happy with how everything turned out," Kleinman said.

Now, reporters are indeed within shouting range of the CND. Previously, a sea of print production desks had been lodged between them and the breaking-news operation. This was an important development, because there is a direct line of site between metro reporters and the CND.

Top editors were bullish on the hub. Managing editor Rick Hirsch commented, "The CND works better here. People see each other more...the departments are going through real change." Marques said that she wouldn't change anything about the hub, though she was frustrated that the TVs weren't offering the displays that she had hoped quite yet.

Reporters, though, were mixed in their reviews of whether the CND was actually achieving its goals. The reactions tended to vary based on the age of reporters in the newsroom, suggesting that culture change might be more difficult than some of the managers had estimated. Some of the younger reporters noted that they did feel like they were communicating better with the CND. Evan Benn, who had recently rejoined *The Miami Herald* after leaving for St. Louis, noted that he would run over to the CND and ask for a better position for his stories on the Web page, or a different kind of splash. He noted it was "now easier from our original setup to do that."

Jacqueline Charles, who is posted on the Caribbean beat, said that having the hub in the middle of the room was an advantage, though she had not yet worked on a big breaking news story. She liked the fact that “you can pack up and work there and that is great,” and like Benn, commented on the ease of finding people to talk to if she had a problem with a story.

Some older reporters were more frustrated with the changes. Chuck Rabin, who sits right in front of Kleinman, said that the CND does “not change my life as a reporter” and that he doesn’t think it affects him. Andres Viglucci, who actually covered some of the real estate of the *Herald* move, said, “I still don’t understand it.” He suggested that not much had changed even with the expanded CND. “Maybe it’s politically incorrect [to say], but it was the same setup in the old building. The media wall is for show,” he added. “I get nothing from that.” But after I left the newsroom, I was told that even these resisters were slowly moving along into the future.

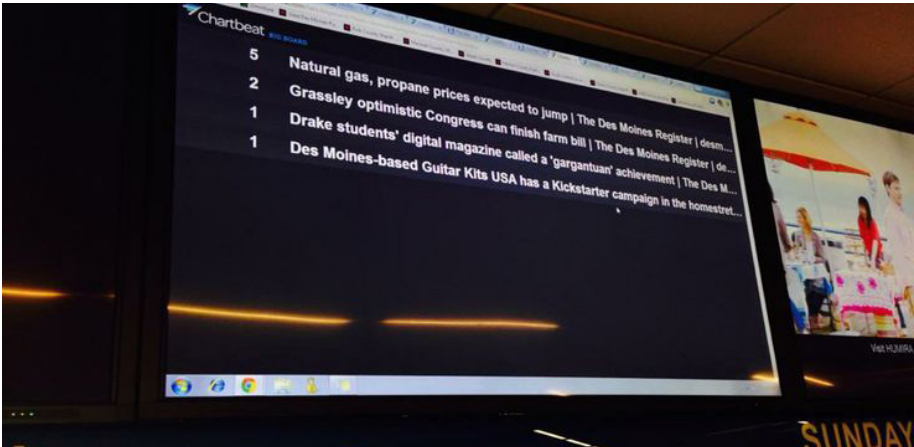
Kleinman suggested that one reason for skepticism about the CND could be that the staff hadn’t yet seen a huge breaking story. There was a yet unrealized potential of the CND. And while Kleinman certainly wasn’t wishing for a hurricane, he suggested that this was the kind of news that would really bring people together and spur the CND into action. This sentiment resonates with what I heard in Fort Worth, which was that the hub worked best for big breaking news.

On the whole, Miami managers had a vision, which some of the younger reporters understood. But with staff shortages, difficulty with the media wall, and cultural resistance, it was not yet fully operational, though my prediction at the time was that this would change. In fact, recently, the newsroom has added a morning general assignment reporter and a cops reporter, and just started a breaking-news blog called Deadline Miami. Rick Hirsch, the managing editor, told me:

At any given point, half of the CND seating is filled after about 10 a.m. We've put a new production system in place—a universal desk for editing Web copy during the day and into the evening, and eight features and sports designers and editors are now arranged in the desks surrounding the CND.

Now that this desk may be more ready than before, it will be fascinating to see it at work in big breaking news—which may one day mean a hurricane.

When Analytics Come to the Foreground: *The Des Moines Register*



Chartbeat on the screen—analytics in the front of the newsroom

Des Moines had gone from having virtually no operation for breaking news to a newsroom that brings all the key players together in a physical configuration. The themes seen in other newsrooms were also present here—communication had improved and the newsroom was able to respond more quickly to breaking news. But what I found most interesting was the response journalists had to the media wall and how real-time analytics had started to change workflow.

If the major challenges facing newspapers are relevancy and audience engagement, then understanding metrics is of utmost importance. While we can argue about the precision and efficacy of these metrics, the attention to audience engagement is incredibly important if traditional newsrooms want to remain pertinent players in the news ecosystem. I want to stress that this focus on analytics wasn't present in other newsrooms I visited.

Journalists in Des Moines now begin each news meeting reflecting on the analytics for stories from the previous day, a process which is changing the way they think about their work. Sports columnist Bryce Miller summarized what many reporters told me: "The way it was designed, you can't help but engage in online numbers. They are in your face all the time." Jason Clayworth, an investigative reporter who doesn't often publish daily stories, added, "I can't help but look up from my desk to see the screens. The metrics show what is going on." This suggests that Clayworth is thinking beyond his individual stories and is paying attention to what's performing on the Web site as a whole. Grant Rogers, the community and courts reporter, said he pays mind to what is popular on the blogs so he can figure out which one of his court stories to update. "It absolutely changes what I write," he said.

Those running the Web page said that the elevated consciousness of analytics through this constant, visible reminder helped spur-on additional thinking about their work. Both homepage editors with whom I spoke said they are constantly checking the analytics to monitor the site. While they had been using metrics before, Lucas Grundmeier explained to me, "Instead of having a million tabs, we can constantly look up and see how the site is performing." Another breaking-news editor, Adam Wilson, told me it helped inform what he might want to use for social media. In Des Moines, it appears that adding screens was not just a novelty. If traditional journalism requires a workflow reboot, then we can see clear evidence that at least some changes are in the works—though we don't know whether the results will ultimately make a difference.

In the case of these newsrooms, the installment of hubs suggests a bit of isomorphism throughout the newspaper industry. And yes, there is reason to be skeptical of any fad, especially when it involves an expensive physical investment in architecture. In the end, it may be that journalists would have changed the way they work anyway in order to respond to new imperatives in the more immediate, interactive, and participatory news environment. But as it stands, journalists are telling the story of their digital identities in part through their relationship to space. And the symbolic importance of this connection may indeed help in their further adaptation.

VII.

Mobile Journalism: Leaving behind Physical Space?

So far, I've talked primarily about physical space: both buildings themselves and what happens inside them. But there's another factor that has developed in response to the way journalists experience digital: mobile journalism. Reporters are now equipped with the tools to report from anywhere, in real time. With this in mind, the relationship between digital and physical space transcends the organization of the internal newsroom. It's not just about where reporters sit, but also about how they position themselves in a workspace where they never actually have to come to the newsroom.

Historically, journalists have always been able to work from anywhere, so long as they have had some sort of access to connect them back to their main newsroom: a telegraph, a phone, a wire. Journalists have been in the habit of filing rapid updates for decades. The difference now is that, at least in principle, journalists don't need to find that physically rooted landline or wire machine; instead, they can connect from anywhere, instantly through mobile or wireless. From a resource perspective, the re-write desk has essentially vanished, a casualty of diminished resources when one journalist can do the work of reporting, writing, and posting alone. As Fort Worth managing editor Kathy Vetter put it, "There is no one to dictate back to anymore. You can't afford not to report on the scene." This being said, in an age where journalists can be mobile all the time, it's worth questioning the value of dedicating resources to a central physical space, when maybe physical orientation doesn't matter.

Seattle: Where Mobile Isn't Mobile

Mobile journalism at *The Seattle Times* is defined largely as on-the-ground social media updates and iPhone photo updates, with a few exceptions. Even page designers have been inculcated into the culture of snapping iPhone shots during big breaking news. In this way, workflow has changed. But in other ways, Seattle remains tied to traditional routines with journalists wedded to the newsroom.

Reporters shared with me their perceptions of mobile journalism. Political reporter Emily Heffter told me she live-tweets entire meetings; the tweets are then aggregated by the social media editor. Reporter Brian Rosenthal, one of the youngest reporters in the newsroom, said he finds some of the practices useless, wondering what sense it makes to give up-to-the-minute school board meeting updates. In some cases, small efforts in mobile journalism have paid off, though. In 2013, the big breaking news was the collapse of the 1-5 bridge. A page designer took a photo and sent it to the newsroom. *The Seattle Times* was the first news outlet to have a shot of the bridge; no one else in the Seattle media market had been anywhere close to it or had such a compelling, firsthand image of the collapse.

But Seattle also has some practical concerns that make it difficult to be on the go. First and foremost, parking is terrible in the city. Journalists can't just stop anywhere and write in their cars—unless they want to pay a chunk for parking. And even in this city of wireless, getting a signal during breaking news can be difficult. (One of the photo editors has taken to the tactic of using a Sprint wireless transmitter on the working theory that no one uses the provider.)

In Seattle, there's a real culture of returning to the newsroom to write the big story. Part of that stems from the newspaper's historic pride in thoughtful enterprise and take-out pieces, perhaps marked by the quiet spaces and high walls that surround reporters as they collect their thoughts, retreat to write

and make phone calls, and have a place to ground themselves and call home. The paper does, of course, work to be flexible, encouraging reporters out in the field to work closely with those inside while putting together a story.

Miami: When Physical Space Can be a Barrier

Miami represents a different situation for mobile journalism. As noted earlier, *The Miami Herald* journalists are pretty unhappy with their new location out in Doral near the airport. Aside from the symbolic concerns, as with most newsrooms, many journalists like returning to the newsroom to chat with their colleagues and work through stories. Executive editor Mindy Marques wanted to avoid having too many people working remotely, believing there is something to be gained from coming together. But working out of the Doral area rather than downtown means that more reporters are working away from the office.

One frustration a number of journalists shared was that if they are reporting in Miami Beach, it might take more than an hour in rush hour to get back to home base in Doral. While they can file from anywhere, they don't want to. One reporter said before the move he met with the publisher to express his concern: "I said we need to be in Miami. We are going to have trouble making deadlines." Business editor Jane Wooldridge, a fan of working from home, noted that there was still a policy decision to be made about whether to allow more remote working environments. "At no point, though, does it make sense to spend half of the time driving."

Of course, some beats have become mobile over the past few dozen years or so as technology has improved. Sports reporters are rarely in the office. Photographers don't even have full-time desks (they have shared space), much less a set space in the new *Herald* newsroom. David Ovalle, a court reporter (whose Twitter bio says he covers courts, crime and zombies), almost never comes into the newsroom and writes out of a coffee shop when he's not tweeting. Some other reporters who follow the quick moving developments

of the city take a similar approach. Still, most argue there's reason to return to the mother ship. Hannah Sampson, the travel and tourism beat reporter who covers the cruise industry—with the headquarters for Carnival and Norwegian Caribbean just blocks from the new office location—explained, “There are days when I work remotely and will work remotely, but there is a lot to be gained from working together. I agree with Marissa Meyer (President and CEO of Yahoo!) about working from home.”

Another reporter shared her view that working together helps create a sense of camaraderie and an opportunity for swapping ideas. Jay Weaver, federal courts reporter, noted, “You don't need a building.” At the same time, he argued, “Coming to the newsroom you can exchange ideas more freely. There is value to that. If you just work from your house that's like being a foreign correspondent.” Miami reporter Chuck Rabin followed up, “There's nothing like being in a newsroom.”

Still, mobile reporting plays an important role in Miami's vision for its journalism, particularly in the case of two of its foreign beats. For a paper of its size, Miami is unique because it still has a reporter in South America (stationed in Venezuela), a reporter who covers Guantanamo and Cuba (though she cannot report from Cuban territory), and a reporter who covers the Caribbean. Jacqueline Charles, the Caribbean reporter, was on the ground for the 2010 Haiti earthquake. She fed text message updates to the CND from her BlackBerry (the only service that was working in Haiti). This way, the editors were able to continue collecting breaking news in real time. Military reporter Carol Rosenberg, who covers Guantanamo, works mobile most of the time. She said, “I tweet and live-stream court proceedings. I am working in a place people can't go and I offer the play-by-play [of court proceedings].” With what she called a “camera movie thing,” she was able to get the “only video example of the hunger strike” from Guantanamo. Her position abroad gives *The Miami Herald* an authoritative position on the beat.

But mobile journalism is not just limited to foreign beats. Walt Michot operates as a roving reporter. On the morning of April 24, online editor Jeff Kleinman heard about a boat fire in Fort Lauderdale over the scanners. Television was already on it, shooting live from the spectacular blaze. But Michot, without any direction from the desk, was also on his way. Kleinman posted a quick update from the scanner, and got a call from Michot. The mobile reporter, known for his 2 a.m. highway crash reporting jobs, gave Kleinman a quick update over the phone. He had also been able to find a woman who had taken shots of the blaze, and passed her directly on to the desk for comment, and then sent her photos for use on the Web. The story led the Web page for most of the morning.

Despite the remoteness of Doral and the bad traffic en route to the newsroom, there's something attractive to journalists about sharing the common experience of being together. That physical connectedness, at least for the majority of metro journalists, still seems to matter. On the other hand, *The Miami Herald* is able to get some unique coverage from reporters abroad, thanks almost entirely to technological advances that allow journalists to transmit information as they work from devices that aren't tied to any particular location.

Des Moines: Potential and Pitfall— Survival and Experimentation

To most journalists in Des Moines, mobile journalism simply meant working away from the office. It meant that someone working in the statehouse from the bureau was mobile; the same could be said for the police reporter working from the cop shop. There had been a major shooting in Des Moines about two weeks before I visited, and the staff had been dispatched en masse to the site. Executive news director Carol Hunter told me about a “backpack camera” that was giving live-stream updates from the scene, something that the newsroom had not yet used before. From the site of the shooting, jour-

nalists in real time were able to tweet, send stories, and shoot video without going through an intermediary, posting straight to the Web thanks to the iSuite of tools.

Most journalists, though, with rare exception, still feel tied to the physical space of the newsroom. They talked about the advantages of having a central place to bounce ideas off colleagues. But I heard another interesting take—that having everyone together actually made the newsroom more responsive. Carol Hunter, executive news director, said that it was simply easier and faster for her to assemble all of her reporters together when they were in one central place and dispatch them to wherever breaking news was happening.

And there was a darker side to feeling the need to be present in the newsroom: Some journalists working on long-term or more geographically dispersed projects assume they require the face-to-face interaction to make a case for their continued employment at the newspaper. Some of those engaged with investigative projects thought it was important to show they were working every day because they were not producing daily stories. Des Moines was the only newsroom I visited where sports reporters and columnists were in the office.

Fort Worth: You Wouldn't Need a Newsroom

“I want to know what happened to my babies,” screamed the January 12, 2013 headline. There had been a dramatic fire that killed a grieving mother’s two children, and her mourning was caught and captured by mobile journalism in action. As managing editor Kathy Vetter told the story, reporter Alex Branch had gone to the scene with “only his LTE-enabled iPad. He filed his story, shot photos and video, emailed with his editors and posted on social media using the iPad.” He managed to catch the grieving mother, who had shown up unexpectedly at the site of the fire, and shot a photo that became the print edition’s A1.

In Fort Worth, mobile journalism is in high action. McClatchy has provided 35 iPads, and about half of the paper's employees already have their own, for a total of 50–60 in the newsroom for a staff of about 130. The iPad is a feature of everyday reporting. In Texas, journalists imagine a world that could be completely mobile with no newsroom at all. Mobile journalism has become a survival mechanism baked into the workflow, an answer to diminished resources for a newsroom hit with layoffs, and a way for Fort Worth to try to be part of the breaking-news ecology in the city. In the city there simply isn't a big enough staff in the newsroom to have many specialists, and everyone must be ready to do everything from everywhere. The lean, mean-machine mentality has meant diminished expectations for journalists to be in the newsroom. Executive editor Jim Witt would rather his journalists have the equipment to work from anywhere. "There are fewer people and we need them to work with coherence wherever they are. They may have desks but they may never come to them."

As a result, journalists feel less tied to the physical space of the newsroom as a site of production. Journalist Mac Engel explained, "I could write from my toilet if I wanted to." His point was that it didn't matter where journalists worked as long as they are writing for the instant. As a sports columnist, he's basically live-reporting and the "good stuff is only a sentence or two."

Unlike other newsrooms I visited, many of the journalists I spoke with here could easily imagine a scenario that is entirely virtual. Editor Sarah Huffstetler, who oversees multimedia and design, asked, "What do you need to come here for? If you were logistically organized you could put it all together [virtually]." In her view, tech support would be the main challenge. Editor Kathy Vetter told me that if she could get rid of the newsroom, she would. She didn't feel that the sense of physical proximity was a defining characteristic to their newsgathering, or even organizing work. When asked, transportation reporter Gordon Dickson, who rarely comes in to the office, told me "We could be virtual, yes, I think we could."

As in Miami and Seattle, Fort Worth reporters and editors spoke about live updates via phone. I heard tales of iPad and iPhone heroics, stories of iMovie creations, and examples of digital success from the field. But what I took away from Fort Worth is that two ideas about physical space can exist simultaneously. On one hand, the newsroom has invested a tremendous amount of time and money thinking about how physical space may change the way they work via the creation of a news hub. At the same time, these journalists were also quick to say that the newsroom itself could exist virtually.

Video Tech Advances Versus Mobile Roaming



Des Moines Video Studio

Inside *The Des Moines Register*, now-president and publisher Rick Green boasted of the opportunity to use a high-def video studio to enliven not just news but also, potentially, create ad revenue. This video studio is home to a green screen, broadcasting capacities that can transmit to international-quality satellites, and cameras of the quality used by newsrooms like the BBC. Green argued that this video studio is a “flagship for our company” (referring to Gannett), and he expects it to stay that way even in the com-

ing years because it's just that sophisticated. "We need to experiment. The video studio is beyond a site for journalism, it's about engagement, quality, and revenue."

Near the video studio are video editing bays where photographers (who often double as videographers), Web producers, editors and reporters, or some combination thereof, come together to work on projects. In this way, the space has become more important as journalists have become more mobile. For journalist Kyle Munson, the Iowa columnist, one of the most useful parts of coming into the newsroom is simply to have this kind of ability to sit down and work together on software like Adobe Premiere Pro that works best on the big screens and on faster computers in the newsroom. At the same time, though, the newspaper has gotten rid of photographer's desks, illustrating the commitment to keeping the staff mobile on all fronts.

As *The Des Moines Register* amps up its video efforts, journalists are being asked to do one-offs and quick hits if they have a breaking story, or regular shows that readers can expect. For example, I watched two sports columnists prepare for their *HawkCentral* and *Cyclone Insider* weekly video shows on Tuesday at 11:00 a.m.

Similarly, in Miami, managing editor Rick Hirsch is also jazzed about the construction of the new video studio and radio studio. Both will give the newsroom tremendous capacity to offer multimedia to the newsroom. The collaboration with WLRN in Miami means that reporters can come on to the radio's shows and these can then be linked to the Web, or reporters can get help recording audio for their stories. The state-of-the art video room will also have a green screen, the capacity to film news meetings to share bits with the public, and fast cables with the ability to capture the content at speeds that will maximize the Web viewing experience. The studio wasn't yet operational when I visited, but Hirsch was already dreaming of the possibilities. Again, though, we see hopes of bringing people inside the newsroom to craft the kind of content demanded by the Web—the thirst for interactive, multimedia content that not only appeals to the Web

experience but can also be sold against valuable ad dollars. In this way, the newsroom continues to be a center of technology as the tools become more sophisticated.



Miami to-be video studio

In all, the extension of physical space into mobile space becomes an even more nuanced articulation of a vision for journalism. In most cases, journalists believe they still need a newsroom for practical purposes. Most notably, as tech gets more sophisticated, newsrooms are building advanced studios to make their newsrooms multi-purposed and multimedia-enabled, rendering the newsroom still important. Much of industry discourse has focused on the ability of journalists and non-journalists to work and report from anywhere. Yet the efforts to reimagine space within the newsroom seem warranted, given the attachment that journalists still have to the historic places they have worked—and the potential for new kinds of content to emerge from within.

VIII.

What We Can Learn From All of This

In this paper, I haven't questioned the idea of post-industrial journalism itself. I've operated under the premise that journalism has experienced a dramatic break from its past when it comes to production and distribution, as well as a different kind of audience, newsgathering experience, economic condition, and social and technological standpoints. I've assumed that the fundamental orientation around a predictable product has been disrupted. As a result, journalists have to figure out what's next.

The discussion of newsrooms' physical and digital space offers insight into a growing trend in the industry. First came shrinking staff. Then came shrinking newsrooms. This makes economic sense: old buildings are expensive to maintain. The spaces are too big for the size of the staff. There is no longer the need to have huge buildings because few newsrooms actually house any kind of space for material production. Gone are the days of hot type, composing rooms, and typographers. Given the trends, five key takeaways emerge.

1. Physical Space Matters to Journalists

As newsrooms move to new buildings, it's important to remember that journalists are leaving behind memories and legacies. In Miami, journalists each received a physical reminder of their old building: a small piece of marble from the lobby. To bring journalists into the new spaces in a positive way, news managers are crafting a story of digital transfor-

mation rather than one of decline. Likewise, it's crucial for journalists to create compelling narratives around their new physical locations that rival their old ones.

2. Downtown Life

Being downtown still matters to many newsrooms, both from symbolic and practical standpoints. Journalists feel strongly that being out of sight in smaller spaces could mean out of mind, and that a digital presence may not yet replace the physical reminder of a hulking newspaper building, or even a large sign visible from the sidewalk. Similarly, journalists believe it is still necessary to be near newsmakers—and be able to get to news quickly. Most newsrooms still need the physical space of a newsroom to enable the cohesion and communication to respond to a big breaking story. Being centrally located enables journalists to go back and forth between breaking news and the beats they cover, maximizing the benefits of collaboration with colleagues.

3. Hubs Can Work for Culture Change

Though the hubs I visited weren't all perfect, they did meet their stated goals. Journalists really do believe that the physical changes inside the newsroom impact their ability to communicate, to respond to breaking news, and more generally, to think digitally. Each newsroom I visited had slightly different results with their experiments, and it's hard to generalize from these examples, but the investments seem to be paying off. If one central challenge for newsrooms has been to create a digital workflow, then perhaps hubs are one way to affect this culture change.

4. Hub Architecture Does Matter to Workflow

The hubs that work best for breaking news have full-time breaking-news reporters stationed on the desk. These journalists are able to quickly talk back and forth with homepage editors and other digital staff working to create an up-to-date Web site.

Another key element involves having reporters nearby who can respond to the hub more generally. This was particularly effective in Fort Worth and Des Moines, and was a work in progress in Miami. The infrastructure in Seattle, however, makes this nearly impossible. For the hub to work as envisioned, this coordination between the digital staff and the actual news gatherers seemed to be an essential part of getting the process to flow smoothly. Some doubters might argue that these space configurations and the people within them mean nothing, but every indication suggests that the people, places, and spaces have cause and effect.

5. Messy Relationships Between Mobile and Physical Space

A dichotomy emerges as journalists focus extensively on reconfiguring physical space to create a digital workflow while also emphasizing the importance of being outside the newsroom. The research suggests that journalists understand the expected, quick pace demanded by a digital newsroom. What remains unclear is the relationship they are supposed to form between their newsrooms and their own work after they've completed their breaking-news duties.

Some newsrooms privilege the collaboration afforded by physical space. Others have a more mobile culture. As a result, journalists vary in their appreciation for and commitment to the new tools that enable them to transmit directly without an intermediary for instant, online distribution. Still, the actual newsroom may be growing in importance as sophisticated video and radio technical abilities are housed inside.

IX.

Physical Spaces, Newsroom Places: Considered

Newsroom moves matter. Journalists are storytellers and they have always crafted their own myths about the profession. If the message now for metropolitan newsrooms is digital innovation, then it may be necessary to create a very explicit break with the past. New stories need to be created to establish a new narrative about the purpose and mission of journalism. One facet of cultural change began when online journalists were integrated into the main newsroom as equal partners. This was a story of physical space just as it was one of cultural change.

While news managers seem to have a plan for the future, uncertainty continues. One objective is the transformation of physical space, built on the assumption that breaking news is of utmost importance. If breaking news is what will keep traditional newsrooms relevant, then physical hubs are helping and newspapers are on their way to being at least partially more mobile in order to facilitate this stream of breaking news.

The creation of news hubs offers some insight into the industry-wide approach to thinking about digital workflow. What we see is a physical effort to make it easier to cover breaking news. This idea of where to arrange desks might be quickly dismissed as another newsroom fad. But even if it is a fad, it signifies a very explicit attempt to reorient newsroom priorities.

The hub brings together the key players for online news distribution—some combination of homepage producers, metro editors, photo assignment editors, and social media specialists. It offers an opportunity to consolidate the breaking-news operation into a seamless organizational effort facilitated by quick communication. Journalists believe that face-to-face communication can make them faster and more responsive. Breaking news is a traffic-driver, and journalists believe it establishes their relevance when every competitor can compete for the same stories at the same time. The hub, then, offers one way for them to think about how they can emphasize the constant churn of news online in a predictable way.

Perhaps there's something deeply industrial about this consolidation, even if there is no physical product attached to the output. Workflow is hierarchical with one homepage producer or editor deciding where stories go and how long they stay up. While there's often some discussion, one or two people ultimately shape what the news looks like to the public. The hub emphasizes a singular efficiency to make news production as fast and seamless as possible.

On the other hand, a decided detachment from material production has encouraged journalists to work outside of the newsroom to facilitate the flow of breaking news. Journalists don't file from the office as much and offer their stories in increments from the field—either through Twitter or as blog posts. But with no rewrite desk to facilitate quick updates for a fixed deadline, these journalists are on their own to do it all. For many, this means gathering their own photos and videos, which they can now do thanks to better technology that makes it easier to get material that is passable for distribution to readers.

Journalists can work from anywhere at any time, and their incremental production is not visible in any kind of printed product but as ephemeral updates online. Their audience can be disaggregated from the main newspaper audience as junkies of the particular beat these journalists cover as consumers

may only watch for instant updates or posts and never visit the newspaper's main site. These beat journalists inhabit a de-hierarchal news ecology as they become their own brands apart from the papers they report to.

At the same time, journalists still imagine what they do to be part of a greater whole. They privilege face-to-face relationships as a way to work out stories, trade tidbits of information, and gossip. While they can and do work from home, most journalists still find value in coming to a set, physical place. This makes the physical location of the newsroom important as proximity to sources and home base facilitates their work. Physical roots remain important for human relations inside and outside the newsroom.

It's easy to get wistful about the decline of newspapers. And indeed, the loss of large newspaper buildings and their imprint on their respective cities is sad to those who have sentimental attachments to old journalism. The symbolism of these moves is incredibly meaningful to both reporters and the public. For this reason, newspapers need to tell their own stories of change. They must be able to create a tale that downsizing space is not downsizing the news.

Appendix: Newsroom Photo Galleries

These photo galleries were collected over the course of my field visits at each of the newspapers, and in the case of *The Miami Herald* and *The Des Moines Register*, during their newsroom moves. Collected on Pinterest, the social network allowed me to offer captions of what I saw while visiting, and I hoped to capture the scene. I am not by any means a professional photographer, but these photo galleries should give you a real sense of the newsroom spaces—inside and out.

The Des Moines Register – Before the Move

www.pinterest.com/nikkiusher/the-des-moines-register-first-shots-pre-move-june-

The Des Moines Register – After the Move

www.pinterest.com/nikkiusher/des-moines-register-new

The Miami Herald – Before the Move

www.pinterest.com/nikkiusher/miami-herald

The Miami Herald – After the Move

www.pinterest.com/nikkiusher/miami-herald-the-new-building-november-2013

The Seattle Times – In the New Building

www.pinterest.com/nikkiusher/the-seattle-times

The Star-Telegram (Fort Worth) – In the New Building

www.pinterest.com/nikkiusher/the-star-telegram-fort-worth



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