



HORIZON WATCHING INITIATIVE



Strategic Imperatives for Newspapers

Adopting A

Multimedia Mindset



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ADOPTING A MULTIMEDIA MINDSET

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Foreword

This is the third of three reports NAA has commissioned to expand upon and explicate three “Strategic Imperatives” issued last year by the Horizon Watching Initiative. They are:

- **Align the organization with the strategies, including roles, processes, structure and talent**
- **Adopt a multimedia mindset, viewing the business as a portfolio of products and services with different business models, pricing and distribution strategies**
- **Build world-class sales and marketing capabilities**

Three things are striking about these reports.

The first is the quality of strategic thinking and the degree of innovation that are being invested in our industry’s effort to redefine itself as a new kind of media business.

The second is seeing how interconnected these imperatives are, and how tackling each one can position a company to succeed in the others.

For example, you’ll find a case study about The Bakersfield Californian in the report on strategic alignment — but it serves just as easily as an excellent example of the multimedia mindset that is the subject of this report. Similarly, The Tampa Tribune’s work toward becoming a world-class sales organization across platforms also demonstrates the power of building the multimedia mindset into daily business operations.

And the third is how clearly these reports demonstrate the vitality and the viability of our transforming multimedia businesses. “I don’t spend a lot of time hand-wringing,” says Jennifer Carroll, Gannett’s vice president for new media content. “I spend time thinking about using the tools, harnessing all the resources. . . . I get frustrated with the gloom and doom. If we take some risks and think of ourselves as a knowledge industry, we don’t need to wave the white flag.”

For anyone who believes in newspapers’ First Amendment role, surrender is not an option. With some of the insights from these reports, it is our hope that NAA members will find new tactics for winning the battle to control the multimedia high ground.

The Horizon Watching Initiative welcomes your feedback and ideas. Please feel free to contact me with topics you’d like to see us pursue or strategic questions you would like to nominate for further analysis.

– **Randy Bennett**
VP, Audience and New Business Development



Strategic Imperative

Adopt a Multimedia Mindset, Viewing the Business as a Portfolio of Products and Services with Different Business Models, Pricing and Distribution Strategies

- **Become the dominant local “infomediary” by adopting a platform-agnostic approach to product, market and sales strategies and delivering what various market segments want, when they want it through a channel that best meets their needs.**
- **Recognize and define your role in consumers’ entire news, information, entertainment and communications portfolio.**
- **Develop multiple “core” products depending on what market segment you’re trying to reach.**
- **Reevaluate pricing structures relative to how various products provide value and your overall strategic goals.**
- **Transform the relationship between print and digital products so that each reinforces the other and each medium is used to its best advantage in a coordinated effort to fulfill the newspaper’s community and commercial missions.**



Multimedia Mindset

WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO GET IT

The jitters are understandable.

The newspaper has been the most successful mass medium in history, both in terms of audience reach and profitability. While the newspaper remains the dominant medium in virtually all U.S. markets, paid circulation and profit margins are slipping.

That's enough to make any owner, investor or employee nervous.

Yet the overwhelming consensus of observers inside and outside the industry, both in the U.S. and abroad, is that newspaper companies are well-positioned — perhaps better positioned than any competitor -- for success in the digital epoch.

"The industry is gloomy beyond necessity," says Michael Zimbalist, vice president for research and development for The New York Times Co. and former executive director of the Online Publishers Association. "There's plenty of exciting demand in the multiplatform world."

A Harris Interactive poll released June 6 at the annual congress of the World Association of Newspapers predicts that "online news and information will supplant television network news as the leading news source over the next five years, but newspapers will remain a vital source on their own, and can become dominant if they successfully integrate online delivery as a part of what they offer the public."

In another survey making its debut at the WAN forum, 85percent of 435 participating senior news executives around the world said that, overall, they were "somewhat" or "very" optimistic about their newspapers' future.

Which isn't to say that making the transition will be a breeze.

"I put myself in the camp of being confident it will work out," says Jim Brady, executive editor of washingtonpost.com, "but it may get worse for a few years before it gets better. There is still going to be some pain."

No rebirth comes without some pain. Unlike the mythological phoenix,

which burns itself to ashes in order to arise anew, the newspaper business can remake itself without immolation. But it probably can't avoid getting a few feathers singed.

The degree to which that pain is felt may come down ultimately to the attitudes and cultures within newspaper companies. Given newspapers' centuries of success, it's understandable that we've come to view the core business as being inextricably linked to the paper it's printed on.

But the core product from which that stream flows isn't the newspaper.

"The core product is journalism," Zimbalist says. "For 250 years, journalism has been tied to a printed distribution channel. But that does not inherently imply a printed channel" as the only or even the best means of delivery.

In a shift without precedent in the history of media, consumers are determining how news and information are delivered.

"We have an imperative more than ever before to be multiplatform, because the readers, the audience we're trying to reach, is multiplatform," observes Jennifer Carroll, Gannett's vice president for new media content. "It's not only imperative to think about the Internet but also mobile" — wireless phones, PDAs, mobile media players and products combining all those elements, and more. "Understanding the experience in whatever platform a 21-year-old wants to access whatever news and information we have is critical. If that 21-year-old is texting on a mobile phone, it's absolutely imperative we understand that."

Carroll has been one of the principal architects of Gannett's move to transform the newsrooms of its 90 U.S. newspapers into Information Centers, organized to deliver news and information in print, online, on mobile devices — and via any other medium that may come along. The core idea behind the change, Carroll says, is "getting print reporters to think more broadly about all kinds of media: print, online and electronic."

That broader thinking both derives from and continuously reshapes the multimedia mindset.



GAINING UNDERSTANDING

What defines a multimedia mindset? It's when a reporter asks, "Video, podcast, photos, print: What's the best way for me to tell this story?" Not, "What's my lede graf for tomorrow's paper?"

It's when editors ask, "What tools can we use to deliver this information to our different target audiences?" Not, "What have we got for A1?"

It's when advertising executives ask, "What would be the most effective product we could offer our customers to meet their changing needs?" Not, "How can we get them to buy more ROP?"

It's embodied succinctly in The Miami Herald's strategic statement: "Reach everybody, every day, their way."

The multimedia mindset must take hold in two consciousnesses: institutionally, across the entire organization, and personally, in those leading the transformation.

The institutional emphasis for many news companies has been to train reporters and editors on how to use digital media. Once they understand how to use the tools, most reporters are eager to employ them. And when they do, the experience can be transformative.

In March, for example, staffers at the Rapid City Journal participated in a training exercise offered by Lee Enterprises to its newspapers, mapping how they could use their digital resources to cover breaking news. On April 17, the day after Seung-Hui Cho shot and killed 32 people at Virginia Tech, Rapid City police received a report of a gunman at a local high school.

"School officials and law enforcement personnel responded immediately with a lockdown," recalls Rosanne Cheeseman, the Journal's publisher. "Within minutes, we had a reporter, a videographer and a photographer on the scene, and we had a report on our Web site within minutes. We updated that report regularly, every half hour throughout the day. And we had live video on the site before noon."

With teachers and students locked inside the school and angst-ridden parents outside, the newspaper's online reader forum became another vehicle for providing news and information. "There was a vigorous dialogue within the community, students and teachers commenting from the classroom, parents asking us about rumors of shots fired from a local grade

school," Cheeseman says. "Our editors were able to research that and get back to readers with answers to specific questions."

Multimedia mindset must take hold in two consciousnesses: institutionally, across the entire organization, and personally, in those leading the transformation.

"The newsroom was highly energized and really engaged. What normally would have been a day of preparation for the next day's newspaper became a day of reporting breaking news as it was happening. That enabled us to take the next day's newspaper to the next level — with more analysis, more reporting on what's next, not just what happened yesterday. That was a benefit for both our online and print products.

"Afterwards, we remarked to ourselves how similar the real-life event was to the training exercise we had just completed."

The gunman turned out to be a hoax, but the impact on her company was entirely genuine, Cheeseman says. "This particular incident really gave us a glimpse into the future of newspapers, and how exciting it will be."

Content creates audiences, which then become attractive to advertisers who want to reach those audiences. So a newsroom that embraces the full range of new storytelling and data delivery tools is essential to the development of revenue streams.

But the multimedia mindset must pervade the entire organization, so that organizational energy and resources are aligned to support the strategies that new media both offer and command. That means it has to be embraced by corporate officers, publishers and senior executives.

But how does someone who spent a career putting ink on paper make the transition?

Many news executives limit their online browsing to their own or to other newspaper industry Web sites. “That’s a shortsightedness I see a lot,” Carroll says.

The stories of some who have done so display common elements: customers, community and curiosity.

Jennifer Carroll’s journey began with a telephone. In the 1980s, many newspapers began offering audiotex services, which enabled users to get information by phone. Stock quotes, horoscopes and sports scores were popular features.

Carroll, who had spent her career as a newspaper reporter and editor, became fascinated with audiotex and “the idea that we could be available 24/7 – I’ve always found that a fascinating part of the business.”

Her curiosity led her to early dabblings in the Internet, which reinforced her belief that this real-time medium, unlimited by press deadlines or page counts, offered newspaper companies their first viable way to compete against broadcast media. Today she’s engaged in “constant R&D,” working with teams across all Gannett’s divisions. “We stay as close to the ground as

we possibly can on emerging technologies and use of media.”

But executives who lack deep technological savvy needn’t worry, Carroll says. It isn’t a requirement for understanding digital media. “You don’t need to be an auto mechanic to drive a car,” she points out. In the digital world, “you do need to know the applications and be conversant with them.”

Many news executives limit their online browsing to their own or to other newspaper industry Web sites. “That’s a shortsightedness I see a lot,” Carroll says. She thinks it’s vital that news executives become familiar with sites that specialize in community, such as Second Life, World of Warcraft, YouTube and MTV.

“It’s important to stay up on the different reports on usage, but equally important to stay as current as possible on all sorts of sites that reflect culture,” she says.

And then there’s her home laboratory.

Carroll has two daughters, 19 and 21, “and I’m always looking over their shoulders to see what they’re doing online. Whenever their friends are over, I’m like a sponge,” listening to what they say about sites they visit, how they get information, how they communicate with one another.

“My older daughter told me that I’m the only person who emails her – with everyone else, it’s texting or [Instant Messaging].” Even a casual remark like that may have strategic implications for news providers. “Email is not a preferred choice for that age group – so if our strategy for reaching them includes email newsletters, we need to revise our strategy.”

Michael Zimbalist’s approach to staying up-to-the-nanosecond on new media is “reading as much as I can, looking at as much as I can, trying as many of these new services as I can. It’s continual education and trial and sampling. I read a lot of market research – and watch kids.”



GETTING PAST THE FEAR

The newspaper industry has built phenomenal success. Newspapers pride themselves on offering the greatest breadth and depth of coverage in their markets and on commanding the greatest advertising market share. In most communities, the newspaper isn't just a company making a product. It's an essential community institution.

In many respects, says Michael Zimbalist, that success "is one of the largest barriers to overcome."

Sharon Prill agrees. "In terms of having the assets to be able to successfully transform, newspapers have them far above any media out there," she says. "What's going to be difficult is making those hard choices and reassessing how you need to organize when you've done things a certain way for over a hundred years. It's really hard in some cases for newspapers to change gears."

Whether the revenues of a portfolio of products across media will ever add up to the sums newspapers traditionally commanded is a big worry — and a valid question.

"People ask me, 'How do you make money online?' I can tell you 20 different ways we make money," Prill says. "As a stand-alone revenue stream, each of them may be nickels and dimes — but combined, they can be very viable."

Jim Brady observes that only about 9 percent of advertising dollars are spent online today, even though Americans are spending 34 percent of their time online.

It's a huge gap — "and that will change," Brady predicts. With other media, the correlation between consumers' use of a medium and the ad dollars it draws is much closer. "I don't have much fear about advertising money on the display side. Protecting the classified market that newspapers used to command, that's another story."

Still, even with the uncertainty, indications are that people throughout the industry have accepted that becoming a citizen of the multimedia world is not optional.

"There's general agreement now that we have to figure the web out, and that the future is about telling stories in a variety of different formats," Brady says. "Everybody's in agreement about that — the stress is about how to get there."

Where revenues will come from, what the new business models will be: "My point is always yes, those are real problems that have to get resolved — but we don't have a choice. We can figure out how to overcome these hurdles."

When he spoke at the Associated Press Managing Editors Conference in New Orleans in October, Brady found a consistent theme in all the questions afterward. "People were asking 'how' questions, not 'why' questions. 'How do you train people? How do you do this or do that?' A year ago the questions would have been 'why' — 'Why are you letting people comment on your Web site, why this, why that?'"

Moving from "why" to "how" is a big step.

One of the most important values in a multimedia organization is the willingness to experiment, to take risks — and to recognize that not every new product is going to be a winner.

"A large part of the future is putting your content every place you can and hope people find it," Brady says. "You've got to try things, and not be afraid to launch things that are a little riskier and edgier. The traffic numbers tell you right away if something isn't working, and you can stop doing it — that's much easier than with the newspaper."

Providing targeted content for specific audience segments is easier and less costly online than in print — and traffic-measurement and registration tools can help both gauge success and point to revenue opportunities. Gannett newspapers now have more than 30 "moms" sites with forums for exchanging parenting tips and information. "We've seen that they are using them at 10 o'clock on Sunday nights," Carroll says. "Also we see a spike around 2 or 3 in the afternoon. That really helps us.

"If you're an advertiser, and you specialize in catering birthday parties, and you know there is increased traffic at 10 or 11 at night, that's like a daypart on TV. It's an important time for you to be visible," she adds.

When the NAA Board Committee on Industry Development, which oversees the Horizon Watching Initiative, articulated adopting a multimedia mindset as one of its 10 strategic imperatives for newspapers, they included these elements as some of the action steps newspaper companies should take:

- **Become the dominant, local "infomediary" by adopting a platform-agnostic approach to**

product, marketing and sales strategies, and deliver what various market segments want, when they want it, through a channel that best meets their needs

- **Recognize and define your role in consumers' entire news, information, entertainment and communications portfolio**
- **Develop multiple "core" products depending on what market segment you're trying to reach**
- **Re-evaluate pricing structures relative to how various products provide value and to your overall strategic goals**
- **Transform the relationship between print and digital products so that each reinforces the other and so each medium is used—to its best advantage—in a coordinated effort to fulfill the newspaper's community and commercial missions**

The case studies that follow give some glimpses into the ways in which newspaper companies are changing their structure to cultivate a multimedia mindset, and how they are using that mindset to create not just new products, but a new future.



Restructuring News for the New Challenge

THE ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION

To Julia Wallace, the strategic imperative was clear: “We’ve got to grow digital and reinvent the print newspaper. Those are both huge. You can’t say to people, ‘Do both.’

“As I looked at where we had to go strategically, it became more and more clear to me that our structure made it harder to move in that direction, not easier,” says Wallace, editor of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

“We’ve been very aggressive online for years; doing breaking news for years and years,” Wallace says. Yet to her frustration, the conversations in the newsroom were still primarily about the print newspaper.

So earlier this year, Wallace led her newsroom through a major reorganization designed to position it for success on both print and digital platforms. In the new structure, two newsgathering departments – News & Information and Enterprise – will feed content to two production departments, Print and Digital. Here is how the four are defined in excerpts from their mission and goal statements:

The News & Information Department is home to beat reporters and photographers. This department “aims to reinvent for the digital era those days when the thrill of the hunt was everywhere, when shoe leather ruled, when the reporter with the scoop or the photographer with the key shot was king. We will aggressively pursue the local and localized news our readers want, publishing it quickly online and in print. On information, our goal is to deliver the ‘news you can use’ that helps people in Metro Atlanta connect with information and services that will help them live their lives. We will deliver on the promise ‘knowing Atlanta best is our business.’”

Wallace adds that the mantra for these staffers is to “ ‘Think online first, then think print.’ They’re serving both.”

The Enterprise Department “will conceive and execute unique and distinguished stories and story packages that readers can’t find anywhere else. Through a variety of approaches, the enterprise department will generate a steady stream of daily and larger-scope content rooted in watchdog reporting, storytelling, profiles and trend stories. The department will work to satisfy our loyal print readers, competing aggressively for

readers’ time by the selection of topics, the quality of our reporting and the accessibility of our writing.” This department also has a charge to work with the digital department “to explore the Web definition of ‘impact,’ and learn to conceptualize and execute public service/watchdog journalism within a digital framework.”

The Digital Department ... will work to expand an audience that turns to us again and again.

The Print Department “will tirelessly champion our readers and their interests and produce a newspaper that enlightens, engages and entertains them. Each day, the department will assemble and design a newspaper that satisfies readers while putting the AJC’s very best work on display in a clear, concise and distinctive manner. It will work with a passion for efficiency and a determination to see the paper delivered to readers when they demand it.” This department also is charged in working with a product development team to “reinvent the print newspaper in the next two years.”

The Digital Department “will grow online audience by creating and aggregating news and information that is primarily local, providing a platform for interactivity and social networking and extending our selection beyond news to attract new audiences. ‘Knowing Atlanta best’ will be the department’s mantra, as it innovates to maximize online’s unique strengths with a keen awareness of our readers’ needs and our journalistic and public service mission. This department will work to expand an audience that turns to us again and again.”

Traditional functions now reside in teams within the four new departments. For example, Digital houses a sports channel manager; Print is home to a sports section editor in charge of print sections. Neither manages any sports writers. Those reporters are distributed among four sports teams within News and Information and Enterprise. “So if I’m the section editor in sports, I’m coming over to talk with who has what” in the newsgathering teams, Wallace explains.

After participating in several executive-team sessions on strategic planning and growing the digital business, Wallace developed the broad outline for the new structure. She presented it to her news leadership team, where it was discussed and refined. Then it was communicated to the 430-member news department, and staffers were invited to participate in an electronic brainstorming session.

“The process is really hard on people,” Wallace says. “The biggest thing is loss about what has been. ... People need to be willing to do what needs to be done.”

“Half the staff signed up,” Wallace says. “Everybody is on a computer, and you ask questions and invite them to a live chat about them. Like, ‘Here are the four goals we’re trying to achieve; how do you rank them in importance?’ ‘What gets in the way most at work?’ ... You can get a huge amount of data in a relatively short time. It shows you where people are in their attitudes.”

Eight teams were formed to do further brainstorming, analysis and implementation work in a variety of fields, including “User Engagement,” “Work Smarter,” “Renewed Language and Goals” and “Content Workout.”

Overall, the response to the process was positive and demonstrated that staffers understood the need to change and wanted to participate in shaping it. Still, “the process is really hard on people,” Wallace says. “The biggest thing is loss about what has been. We’re reducing the number of beats. The enterprise team will be working in more generalized areas, and that means fewer beats. That has been hard.”

For example, the jobs of the transportation reporter and public transit reporter have been consolidated into a single position. Three people used to cover movies; now there’s one. The AJC used to have a TV writer who wrote national and local, and a radio writer who wrote local; now there’s one local TV and radio writer. The slot for covering financial markets has been eliminated: “We’ll now use wires for that,” Wallace says.

About half of the newsroom staff are experiencing changes in their jobs. Those whose jobs weren’t changing were given the option of applying for a new one,

and about 40 people did so.

Being in the middle of such a sweeping organizational transition is emotionally difficult for people, especially when the process extends over several months, she adds. “We could have done this much faster, but we wouldn’t have been able to do it with as much involvement.” Staffers participated in process mapping and organization chart revisions as well as the brainstorming.

The change has been hard on the management team, too, “because we’re learning things as we do it. It’s not like putting out a newspaper, which you’ve done five thousand times.”

This is the second major reorganization for the AJC’s newsroom in six years. “In 2001, we did it by department, so not all departments participated. ... The jobs didn’t really change that much,” Wallace says. “It was more about beat realignment.

“Now, because we’re dividing content from producers, people are doing different work. This is significantly larger, and we’ve spent a lot more time on it.”

Still, Wallace says, they learned several valuable things from the earlier initiative. “We didn’t have anyone minding the reorganization last time, keeping track of what’s working and not working. We now have a director of culture and change, plus a newsroom development and a training editor. ... You need someone focusing on the process and training related to it.”

The director of culture and change is responsible for moving our culture to the news department’s articulated goals for becoming more collaborative, reader-focused and innovative. “The senior editor for training and the senior editor for newsroom development report to her,” Wallace explains. “They are developing extensive training programs. They have mapped how work should get done in the new world and will work with the teams to make sure it is as effective and efficient as possible. They are responsible for recruiting and hiring people who are a good cultural fit for our new organization. And they will work with the staff on career mapping, so people can be as successful as possible.”

Wallace’s advice to other executives seeking to restructure for multimedia production is simple: “People need to be willing to do what needs to be done. This is clearly really hard. There is nothing easy about it. ... But the other way of approaching it is death by a thousand cuts.”

(For information on Gannett’s newsroom transformation, see Innovation in Action: Part 2 on the Growing Audience Web site.)



Transforming the Relationship Between Print and Digital

MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

Because the Internet is a global medium, it's tempting to think of it primarily as a means for newspaper companies to expand their footprint, to command a larger market, to reach a universal audience by telescoping their offerings deep into cyberspace.

With its hyperlocal Community Now project, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel is peering down the other end of the telescope.

"It really started out as my digital team wanting to experiment with creating some hyperlocal sites that would be partly user-generated sites, partly aggregated content from the Journal Sentinel newspaper, and from the weeklies designated for certain footprints in the suburbs," explains Sharon Prill, vice president for interactive media and marketing.

Over the past year, the Journal Sentinel has launched 26 community sites from Bayside to Wauwatosa and beyond (<http://www.mycommunitynow.com/>). As part of the plan, the Journal Sentinel reconfigured its 16 weekly community tabs, cutting the number in half.

The new Web sites "have a strong relationship with the eight weeklies that we have now renamed the 'Now' papers — like Northshore Now," Prill says. "What we do is cross-promote the two products, then reverse-publish the best of the blogs into the new community newspapers, and vice versa."

The last of the Web sites went online in January, 2007, and the community newspaper conversion was finished in the first quarter of 2007. Revenues are growing on both the online and print side, Prill says, noting that some of the former community tabs weren't profitable. She believes the new combined products offer advertisers a stronger value proposition, but it's too soon to predict how profitable the Now concept will be.

"Online sales continues to be a challenge for print sales reps," Prill says. "We have a sales team dedicated to online-only sales, and they seem to have the greatest success selling the community sites" as well as other online products. "We are also looking at changing our compensation structure . . . to direct more sales focus on combined online-print sales."

The products are beginning to resonate with the Journal Sentinel's deeply rooted communities.

"In most cases, we are hitting an audience that moves back and forth between the two platforms," Prill says. "But there is also a growing audience of those discovering the online component. Some of those features are becoming popular."

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The sites include a series of discussion threads among people in the community, which are being moderated by staffers at jsonline.com. Built on the same format, each site includes local news and features, a video interview with the community's mayor or other official, photos submitted by residents, a calendar of events, school news and honor rolls — all the elements of in-depth community journalism.

And, of course, blogs. Some 90 bloggers have signed up to publish on the 26 sites. In Cudahy, for example, resident Greg Janisch, an avid runner and biker, writes about community parks and outdoor events; Casey Mysliwy, a 2005 graduate of Cudahy High, publishes dispatches on college life from the

University of Wisconsin at Madison. State Senator Mary Lazich writes a blog called “Conservatively Speaking” that appears in the Now sites for her five constituent communities. The blogs are managed by a communities editor and a coordinator, which are new positions.

“We are utilizing the staff at the community newspaper groups as a part of the content,” Prill says. “On the online side we have definitely invested new resources into this – the editor and coordinator did not exist before we did this.” The creation of the 26 sites also required an increase on the support side, with some new complement in engineering and design.

“We also are launching a wiki-type product for those community sites to see how much traction we can get in creating social knowledge online about this area,” Prill says, explaining that the Milwaukee regional market isn’t as transient as many parts of the United States. “People from up here tend to spend their entire lives here, or move away for a while and come back here; it’s a very generational place,” she says. “There’s a lot of institutional knowledge here that you don’t find in places such as the West Coast, where you have a lot of people moving in and out of communities.”

The sites also have tabs taking users to a shopping section with classifieds and pdfs of display ads appearing in the print products. As with most newspaper sites, the shopping content is much thinner than the editorial content.

In her role as a marketer, Prill thinks about issues of branding and how the concept of “core” products plays out online.

“The way I look at it, ‘core’ refers to the [jsonline.com](#) product and has more to do with branding than anything else,” she says. “Because of the way we went about developing our news site here, there’s a certain expectation that readers and viewers who come to our Web site have.”

That expectation is built largely on the Journal Sentinel’s journalistic tradition. “To try to take [jsonline](#) and make it a Bakotopia” – the groundbreaking social networking site founded by the Bakersfield Californian – “and make it so far from the expectation can create some confusion in the marketplace as to what you’re all about.”

So to find new audiences, “you almost have to create a new experience, a new brand that doesn’t have those preconceived expectations yet.” While those expectations are “valid and good and speak to the quality of what our

journalism is,” they don’t offer the latitude for the significantly different feel of the content of the Now sites, for example.

Prill is quick to point out that the Now sites aren’t edgier or more daring than the main newspaper site. “It’s a more familiar, more intimate experience. You took photos at the 4th of July picnic, and you’re sharing them with your neighbors. The bloggers are going to be people you know, talking about your community. It’s a way for you to find a fellowship with others in your community.”

At the Journal Sentinel, the strategic focus is on creating a stronger portfolio of products, Prill says. “Folks who have been in the online area know, probably better than anyone else, that you really have to focus on the vertical categories of business, and let that drive synergies” across products and platforms.

“We have a magazine called Metro Parent that’s been pretty successful for some time. Recently we acquired [milwaukeeemoms.com](#). . . . We married up those products, in that we’re driving traffic to both and looking at how we can really go after that segment, whether it’s online or print or possibly broadcast. That’s a much more holistic view than just creating another section in the paper for parenting.”

Even for online, the traditional classified verticals – cars, homes, jobs – “are where the bulk of the money is,” Prill notes. “There’s a lot of movement in each of those verticals, so it’s really important to have a defined strategy around cars, recruitment, real estate, because that’s where the money is right now. It shouldn’t stop you from looking at other verticals or at features like local search. But there is definitely a lot of wisdom in focusing on these core verticals.”

(For information on how other newspapers are developing online communities go to the [Growing Audience Web site](#).)



Building Multimedia Skills

THE ROANOKE TIMES

Editor's note: Though the co-author of this case study was president and publisher of The Roanoke Times from December 2000 to February 2007, we felt that the newspaper's story should be included. Roanoke Times senior editor of new channels Dwayne Yancey provided additional analysis and background for this case study.

* * *

Walk into the lobby of The Roanoke Times and one of the first things a visitor sees is a large flat-screen monitor that continuously plays the newspaper's daily news-and-entertainment webcast, The TimesCast. It's a display more akin to a television station lobby than a newspaper.

Walk a little further and the visitor is greeted by a 8-foot-tall banner that announces the newspaper's growing list of prizes in contests for multimedia.

It's clear before the visitor even reaches the elevator to the third-floor newsroom that this is a newspaper that values multimedia.

It wasn't always like this, of course. When Mike Riley arrived as editor in 1998, the newsroom didn't even have an online operation -- that was constituted not only as a separate division, it was located two blocks away in a separate building.

The story of how The Roanoke Times built a multimedia skillset — and mindset — offers some lessons to other newspapers who want to do the same. It's a story that underscores the importance of a newsroom leadership that is visibly committed to online. It also shows the importance of building grass-roots support across the newsroom for such innovations — and how to do so without creating (too much) resistance.

* * *

Riley was the first editor in the newspaper's modern history who came from outside the paper — and he came with a background in online. Previously, he had worked for TIME magazine and helped start the Time-CNN AllPolitics

Web site. From the beginning, he made it clear that part of his mandate was to position the newspaper to compete online. But for his first three years, he had few tools to work with. Then in 2001, a new publisher, Wendy Zomparelli, decided to re-integrate the money-losing online division back into the core newspaper. The online portfolio was added to Riley's duties as editor, and the stage was set.

In hindsight, Riley — who left in early 2007 to become editor of Congressional Quarterly — said he wrestled with how much to reveal about his long-term goals for the paper's online presence. "If I had said at the outset, we're going to build a video studio, the resistance would have been much harsher than it was." Instead, he adopted an approach of gradually, and quietly, building allies in the newsroom. "The goal I had was almost like terrorist sleeper cells — find small groups of people who were interested and got them involved."

The first place he looked was in the photo department. Photographers, by nature, were more accustomed to dealing with technology than were pad-and-pen reporters. One of those most adventuresome photographers was Seth Gitner, who would come to figure prominently in the newspaper's push into multimedia. Soon, photographers began experimenting with audio soundslides. And in time, a few reporters took notice of what was happening in the photo room down the hall — and expressed an interest in getting involved, as well.

By 2003, though, Riley was looking even further over the horizon. "I became convinced we need to figure out how to do video," he said. The percentage of households with access to broadband was climbing rapidly, even in a small city such as Roanoke (metro population 225,000.)

Riley persuaded the publisher to create a position dedicated to multimedia — it was filled by the photographer Gitner. To further emphasize the importance of new media, the editor in charge of the online operation was repositioned. No longer did he sit in a separate room down the hall with the computer programmers, but square at the metro desk. The idea was to make sure print editors thought about online — and that online was aware of what the print side was up to.

* * *

In 2004, the newspaper's longtime managing editor retired. Once again, the newspaper uncharacteristically looked outside -- and hired Carole Tarrant, then managing editor of The Fargo (N.D.) Forum. "One of the reasons I wanted to hire Carole," Riley said, "was that she understood online. I told her we wanted to make online front and center in all our decisions. I didn't care how it happened; I just wanted it to happen."

She arrived in Roanoke in early 2005 and found that some news staffers remained dubious about the value and quality of online journalism. "They

Reporters who take on a multimedia project experience an individual epiphany. Each becomes an evangelist in a different way," says Carole Tarrant

were so skeptical," Tarrant recalls. "My attitude was, 'We're going to devote the resources and do it well -- not at the expense of journalism.' For me as a manager trying to pace the newsroom, there was this whole line-up of things we could do. I wanted to concentrate on one thing. I wanted the newsroom to feel successful and to be recognized for it."

Tarrant focused on the newspaper's project reporting, making sure that each big project considered online from the beginning and added "everything you could add to it online. Reporters who take on a multimedia project experience an individual epiphany," she says. "Each becomes an evangelist in a different way."

That focus quickly resulted in two high-profile (and eventually award-winning) projects. The first, by reporter Beth Macy and photographer Josh Meltzer, was "An Unlikely Refuge," on the influx of Third World refugees to Roanoke. The online component featured an audio, video and an interactive timeline. Next came "Going Down the Crooked Road," which took both print and online audiences on a musical journey along Virginia's Heritage Music Trail. In addition to the video, audio, interactive graphics and articles, the

Web feature even offered a mixer, enabling the user to change the dynamics among the instruments playing bluegrass and old-time music.

The online content, which was heavily promoted in the print packages, drove significant additional traffic to the Web site, generating as many as 10,000 additional page views, says Dan Wheeler, director of digital media. The most recent major multimedia reporting effort, "Off the Scale," a look at childhood obesity, also drew a modest sponsorship from an advertiser.

The quality of the reports, the positive audience response and the enthusiasm of those who got to work on the projects began to pique interest among other staffers. "People started asking for that individual experience -- they wanted online training," says Tarrant, who became the Times' editor in May. "They said, 'We all know we need to be there.'"

But they didn't know that some of them also needed to be in front of a camera.

* * *

For the first time, the newspaper had both an editor and a managing editor committed to online. While Tarrant focused on making sure that traditional reporting projects now included multimedia, Riley focused on a more radical endeavor -- creating a video studio.

Riley freely admits his intention was to get the news department's attention. At a time when budgets were relatively flush, he wrangled \$45,000 -- \$25,000 to build the studio and \$20,000 to equip it. "We could have done it cheaper," he said, "but one of the things I did was spend money. People take notice when you spend money."

And they did. When the back wall of the studio-under-construction was turned into a made-for-TV green screen, "people were outraged," Riley recalls. One reporter accosted him in the hallway to ask "what the hell are you doing?"

Riley would patiently explain that newspapers need to master video if they were to compete online in the future. But he also had goals beyond simply using video for news reports; he saw the video studio being used to turn the newspaper's Web site into an entertainment site. "He wanted the dresser from Beauty and the Beast walking through the newsroom," Wheeler says, referencing one memorable day when two costumed actors from the local theatre strode through the newsroom -- and into the studio to be videotaped.

In late 2005, The Roanoke Times embarked on its most controversial multimedia move — launching a daily webcast, The TimesCast. The newspaper, in effect, created its own television show on the web. The TimesCast officially launched in December 2005, and remains a staple of the paper’s multimedia report, drawing approximately 250–300 page views per weekday. The webcast’s demographics are skewed toward a younger audience very different from the print product; an informal survey found the typical viewer was a single woman in her late 20s.

With multimedia now considered an essential part of major reporting efforts, and a daily video show underway, the next big effort was to get more staffers involved in the business of collecting video. The Times brought in Chet Rhodes, deputy multimedia editor for breaking news at washingtonpost.com, to conduct a one-day workshop for reporters. His presentation included how to shoot a “video mugshot,” how to put scenery and atmosphere behind it, how to add narrative. The Times also bought four \$400 video cameras for reporters to use — “and the next day, we had [reporters’] live on the Web site,” Tarrant says. “Then they started asking for editing software so they could tell the story themselves.”

From his vantage point outside the newsroom, Wheeler agrees “there has been a significant change.” Not every reporter is clamoring to pick up a video camera, but enough are that the paper’s Web site now routinely features reporter-generated video.

That broadening base of multimedia experience was a major asset when, on April 16, a gunman opened fire on the Virginia Tech campus, and The Roanoke Times faced the biggest breaking news story in its history. As reporters and photographers fanned out to report the story, they went in search of not only the traditional stories and still photos, they also looked for video. In addition, the newspaper posted video sent in by a Tech student who was near the scene. Plus, the paper produced three special webcasts to update the growing death toll. On that day, roanoke.com’s page views, which usually run about 2,500 for its most-read story, numbered 261,000.

Several lessons can be drawn from the evolution of The Roanoke Times from a print-only operation to one that routinely thinks of multimedia on even its busiest day:

- **Leadership matters.**

“If you don’t have the managing editor talking about [online], it’s not going to happen,” Riley says. And, by extension, that emphasis on multimedia has to

extend down to assigning editors, as well.

- **Don’t force everyone to get on board at the same time.**

Enlist a few willing supporters, Riley says, and let their enthusiasm spread to others. “I wanted the newsroom to come to believe in it, rather than resist completely.”

- **Focus on what you want to do.**

The web offers innumerable ways to reach audiences: podcasts, videocasts, reader forums, social networking, blogs. Pick one or two areas in which to concentrate, Tarrant says, and build expertise and confidence; don’t try to do everything at once.

- **Take advantage of the traffic data – and share it.**

“Show a reporter that that one paragraph breaking news update online was the best-read story for 48 hours,” Tarrant says. Nothing engages reporters more than knowing people are reading and talking about their work.

- **Structure matters, but don’t let lack of the right structure stand in your way.**

Much of the Times’ early work online was accomplished through organizational improvisation. Editors, reporters and photographers who were interested in online squeezed in the work on the side; the production of podcasts and webcasts didn’t fit neatly on the newsroom’s org chart, but the tasks gravitated to those with the most interest, no matter where they were in the department.

Ultimately, though, newsrooms will need to be restructured to support multimedia. In the Times’ integrated structure, Tarrant sits as a member of the Online Leadership Team, which deals with everything from software purchasing decisions to setting priorities for content and advertising product development. “Learning the business end, the business model behind online — that’s been really valuable for me,” she says. And when Tarrant was named editor after Riley’s departure, one of her first acts was to reorganize the newsroom — and create a senior editor with specific responsibility for multimedia and other new ventures.



Thinking Differently

- **Approaching the evolving media market from the perspective of your business and its needs is natural – but successful adaptation requires a different frame.**

"I always like to begin by taking a look at the customer, and how their days are spent, and how news and information fits into their days," says Michael Zimbalist, vice president for research and development for The New York Times Co. "If you do that, you get a view of a person who is multiplatform. They're getting content online at home, in the office, on their iPod and cellphone. The multimedia mindset begins with that realization."

- **Recognize that part of the excitement of online is in the discovery process, advises Sharon Prill, and capitalize on that excitement to reinforce the multimedia mindset in your company.**

"Not every new product, not every new widget is going to be a winner," says the VP for Interactive Media and Marketing at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. "You have to build into your process or culture the knowledge that that's OK, because trying a million things is the only way we're going to come up with the one great new idea that will be a winner."

- **Make sure the opinion-leaders in the organization are champions of new media.**

If they aren't, give them the tools, training and experience to convert them. For news staffers, demonstrate how the digital tools can contribute to higher-quality journalism – or bring in a speaker who can. "Our First Amendment reporting is stronger than ever today," notes Jennifer Carroll, Gannett's vice president for new media content. As journalists experience the depth and versatility these tools afford, "it's bringing them back to the passion for journalism that got them into the business in the first place."

- **Take time to change the vocabulary and stop talking about "readers."**

Instead call them "consumers," "users," "viewers" or "an audience." That will force a change in the way content producers view their work.

- **You can learn a lot from your photo staff, which is full of creative people who use the Web, think visually and probably don't think in terms of "readers."**

Talk to them about how they see media evolving and what changes they would make in your products, if they had the opportunity.

- **Audiences are using a portfolio of news products – but that doesn't mean they want to see the same content in two formats.**

If you post a news story online at 11:05 a.m. Wednesday, you can't expect people to want to read the same story in print Thursday morning. And a light turn of the lede doesn't cut it anymore. The second day you need analysis, deeper reaction, a look at what will happen next.

- **Your newspaper is everywhere. It shows up every day in driveways and on front porches.**

It's in the lobby at the bank. You see it at Starbucks. But the Web doesn't work that way. You have to convince users to go looking for it. That means they have to know it's there, find it to be consistently timely and sufficiently rewarding to seek out.

- **Online audiences are impatient and have quick clicker fingers.**

Update online content much more often than you think you need to. Think about why and when users come to your site. Are they bored at work at 3:30 p.m.? Make sure there's something to entertain them, a feature they can look forward to day after day.

- **Don't limit your Web browsing to news sites**

Visiting sites that specialize in creating communities — sites such as Bakotopia (<http://www.bakotopia.com/>), MySpace (<http://www.myspace.com/>), World of Warcraft (<http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/index.xml>) and PegasusNews (<http://www.pegasusnews.com/>) — offers valuable insights into the relationship between content and how people want to use it.

- **Organizational change causes stress.**

Be sure to monitor employee morale during times of major change, and offer opportunities and venues for them to vent their concerns. Remember that the most effective person to reassure and support an employee is the direct supervisor; make sure he or she has the information and understanding to do it.

- **Are there Web sites in your market that amassed an attractive audience?**

Do any of them fall into the categories served by your print products? If so, acquiring a Web site and marrying it to your print product may be a more effective means to owning a content area than developing your own new Web site.

- **Experiment. Experiment. Experiment.**



Next Steps for Executive Teams

- **Take an inventory of the new products you've launched in the past two years.**

What percentage have failed? If the answer is zero, you're probably not trying enough new things or things that are significantly different from the core newspaper.

- **Organizational structures that evolved to produce a daily newspaper once every 24 hours do not lend themselves to delivering digital content around the clock.**

If you were designing your company from scratch to meet today's competitive challenges, what would it look like? What steps could you take to begin moving in that direction now?

- **Make a grid with the audiences you want to reach down the left column, and the products you offer across the top.**

For each product, place a check mark in the boxes of the audiences it serves. Are you aiming most of your products at the same audience? Are you trying to reach multiple audiences with a single product? Talk about opportunities for developing new products for audiences you aren't reaching, and for more effectively targeting products that are trying to reach everyone.

- **Go on a field trip to a college campus.**

Observe how students are using cell phones, iPods/iPhones, Blackberries, computers, the campus newspaper and other print products. Ask them how they define news and how they like to get it. Pool your findings and discuss the implications for the news and information products you are offering.

- **Some editors and publishers say their news departments are ahead of the business side in developing a multimedia mindset.**

With a brief email survey, gauge your non-news employees' understanding of multimedia strategy and ask what they feel they need to learn about the digital future. To close the gap, consider in-house training sessions or an online department "open house" with demonstrations, tutorials and activities.

- **Take a look at how much time your executive team members spend working on newspaper operational issues, and how much on new products or digital ventures.**

What do the proportions suggest? What would it take to invest more senior executive time in multimedia strategy development?



Resources

- For more case studies of newspapers developing multi-media mindsets, visit **The Digital Edge** and **GrowingAudience.com**.
- For a copy of “Trends in Newsrooms 2007,” published by the World Editors Forum and the World Association of Newspapers, go to <http://www.trends-in-newsrooms.org/articles.php?id=20>.
- For a look at prominent gaming and social networking sites, go to <http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/>, <http://www.secondlife.com/>, <http://www.bakotopia.com> or <http://www.biglicku.com/>.
- To visit the Journal Sentinel’s hyperlocal “Now” sites, go to <http://www.mycommunitynow.com/>.
- roanoke.com’s multimedia reports are found at <http://www.roanoke.com/multimedia/wb/xp-index/>.



About the Author

Kannon Consulting is a Chicago-based strategy and marketing firm focused on building “Outside-In” business and marketing strategies to help clients grow revenues in the changing environments they face. New competition, emerging technologies and the need to revitalize growth all create an increasing need for market-driven strategies built on rigorous, structured thinking. Kannon’s analytical, collaborative and iterative approach helps address complex, multiple strategic options while offering actionable insights and solutions.

Wendy Zomparelli served as president and publisher of The Roanoke Times before joining Kannon as a senior consultant in 2007. With more than 25 years of experience as a journalist and newspaper executive, Zomparelli has been recognized for her insightful leadership and her ability to create high-performance organizations. She has been named the Reynolds Distinguished Visiting Professor of journalism for fall 2007 at Washington and Lee University. Wendy works as a member of Kannon’s marketing and strategy consulting team. She also heads a new division, Kannon Performance, designed to help clients reinvent organizational structures, processes and practices to stimulate innovation and drive results.

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