Bring in the changes – here's the theory

Some changes are gradual, like the slow migration of certain advertising to online. They need proactive and pre-emptive editorship styles. Some changes are sharp and crisis-shaped, like major budget cuts, calling for reactive flexibility. Other changes need vision, as when there are new ventures, re-positioning, special projects or different ways of working.

In the turbulent sea of competitive journalism, editors need to understand the deeper complexities of changes and how to bob above the turmoil, even sail somewhere on it. And sometimes be the change agent who stirs up the waves.

Times of change force editors to improve their competency to prioritise what should get attention.

When that change is open-ended, such as convergence scenarios, you have to be guided not so much by a vision of where things are going as by the foundational values from whence you came. That lodestone is something to hold aloft to help guide your decision-making about uncertainties.

Change entails:
● New things: learning, creating and/or adapting to them.
● Letting go of some existing practices, sometimes even people.
● Knowing what old things to keep.

Part of managing change is dealing with anxieties over balancing these three unavoidables.

According to Gill Geisler of the Poynter Institute, like it or not there are **five principles** you need to recognise:
a. Change happens; it will happen to you.
b. Change is not necessarily fair.
c. Change creates more work.
d. Change requires communication.
e. Change can be a time of renewal.

Plan for change

If you and your team are facing major change, set aside some dedicated time to think about the deeper dynamics involved. If you want an advanced grip, consider using the following planner:

1 **Context: what is the top change most relevant to your current situation?**
● Technology and convergence
● New reporting systems and accountability
● Change of faces (above or below)
● Cash squeeze or new budget targets
● Heightened competition
● A new editorial project
● Dumbing down or tabloidisation
● Racial and gender transformation
● New owners or political realignments that impact on you
Other........................ ....

2 **Position yourself to understand what's up**
● Is the change permanent/temporary?
● Is it planned, or unforeseen?
● Symbolic or seriously substantive?
● What will stay constant?

3 **Threats, opportunities or hybrid of both?**
● Threat: "a bad thing":
● Change is pain, change hurts
● The impacts on your operation's knowledge base – eg causing uncertainty
● The impacts on your staff's emotions – eg creating fear
● Promise: "a good thing":
● Inertia is stifling – the "ain't broke, don't fix" ethos is an enemy of innovation and renewal
● Change can help avoid becoming the victim of other changes
● Keep both dimensions in mind and develop actions in regard to each.

4 **How do you and others react to the major change at hand?**

Positively, with enthusiasm, opportunity, challenge, excitement, new skills and knowledge, reward, fulfilment, survival, new start, new options, learning experience, motivating.

Negatively, with fear, anxiety, shock, distrust, anger, stress, unrealistic resentment, loss of self-esteem or identity, confusion, uncertainty, demotivation, loss of peer group network, letting go, saying goodbye, insomnia, conflict, politics, criticism, mutiny, high risk, resistance, misunderstanding.

Expect elements of both – even within yourself! Acknowledging them explicitly is key to addressing them.

(Adapted from: Liz Clarke, The Essence of Change, London: Prentice-Hall, 1994)

Quotes on change

Changing culture is a tall order in any organisation; experts say expect to give it three to five years of hard work.

✦

It was the business literacy training session that many editors point to as an early turning point for increasing the level of conversation in the newsrooms around change.

✦

... a new idea or change in routine might first be met by **opposition** from journalists. ("It would be stupid to do that.")

If that doesn't work, **perfectionism** – particularly as evidenced in an unrealistic commitment to flawless results – might kick it. ("We don't have time to do that.") In some environments, this perfectionism might even be the first response.

If there is still a beating pulse to the idea, it might encounter **passive resistance**. (" I will go through the motions, but my heart's not in it. This too will pass.").

Any of the three styles is equally effective at stopping a change initiative in its tracks.

✦

When an entire workforce begins to take greater responsibility, day in and day out, for its own happiness, change is apparent.

– From Williams, V. 2007. All eyes forward. How to help your newsroom get to where it wants to go faster. The learning newsroom at the American Press Institute.

5 **Understand resistance to change**

Many people, even editors, resist change. Sometimes rightly so, even successfully so.

But when a change needs to be pushed ahead, it helps to think about why some people dig their heels in:

● Fear of the unknown
● Loss of control
● Not understanding reasons – lack of information
● Reluctance to let go
● Unexpected surprise
● Loss of face – indictment of existing and past efforts
● Fear of looking stupid
● Feeling vulnerable and exposed
● Threat to status and power base
● More and/or different work
● Lack of perceived benefits
● Threat to status.

The **four classic phases of reaction** to unwanted change – and suggested positive **responses** to them – are:

● **Disbelief, shock, denial:** ("it will soon be over") – Find and circulate facts; give people time.
● **Anger, depression, resistance** ("anger, blame, anxiety") – Listen and empathise.
● **Acceptance** (internalising), acknowledgement, letting go. – Help define, consolidate, support.
● **Adaptation and exploration** – Ideally embracing the change with commitment, developing ownership ("getting on board") Develop long-term goals, teams, rewards.

On-the-ball editors will promote a permanent culture of the last phase, there-

Add it up

Dis-satisfaction with status quo **+** Desirability of change **+** Practicality of change **=** Successful change

fore leapfrogging the earlier stages.

Putting it mathematically: successful change = the sum of dissatisfaction with status quo + desirability of change + practicality of change. Editors need to work at this till the bottom line of the equation is a value greater than the cost of changing.

(Adapted from Clarke)

How to deal with **resistance to change**:
- Talk and teach.
- Get people involved.
- Help others adjust.
- Negotiate to avoid major resistance.

But watch out:
- Manipulation and co-optation can lead to ill-feeling.
- Explicit and implicit coercion can arouse anger.

(From John P Kottler and Leonard A Schlesinger: Choosing strategies for change. Harvard Business Review, March-April, 1979)

6 How to cause change

Whether you start a change strategy with fireworks, or by stealth, the following fundamental steps have been identified by John P Kotter as important to take:
- Create a sense of urgency (realities, crisis)
- Form a powerful guiding coalition (team to lead)
- (Co-)Create the vision
- Communicate the vision
- Empower others to act on the vision
- Ensure short-term wins (visible improvements, rewards)
- Consolidate improvements (build on credibility)
- Institutionalise the new (compare it to the old, prepare for the next)

7 How to lead change
- Recognise the culture of the organisation
- Diagnose the situation – jointly
- Scenario plan: identify the optimum outcome, and list ways to get there
- Don't work uphill.
- Focus on the easiest areas
- Choreograph and celebrate success
- Be optimistic
- Compromise
- Manage myths and rumours
- Work on your integrity and trustability.

Along the way, it's clearly critical to have intelligence about progress or setback and initiate remedial action where necessary.

8 Putting principles into practice
- Define the human objects – and subjects – of the targeted change (can they be one and the same?)
- Assess the problem AND opportunity dimensions.
- Describe your best outcome scenario.
- Describe your worst outcome.
- What can you compromise on in the best outcome?
- Who is an obstacle to best outcome?
- How will the resisters react (cf four phases)? What can you do to get them through the early phases?
- Who is an ally for the best outcome? How can you synergise with them?
- Describe your first 3 communication steps in moving ahead.
- List 2 quick gains you can deliver.
- How will you consolidate and reinforce what you achieve?
- Specify a reward to give yourself for success in being Change Champion.

– Guy Berger

Cultivating newsroom culture

Workplace culture is made up of how employees relate to each other and the enterprise as whole.

It is fundamental to performance, impacting on staff satisfaction, motivation, teamwork and output quality. The culture of any given team is greater than the individual editor, but leadership style and power can help reinforce or change it. Leadership can make the difference between two models of culture.

TRADITIONAL NEWSROOM	→	LEARNING NEWSROOM
Information held by a few	→	Information shared
Strategy is a secret	→	Goals are well-known
Training is static	→	Training is done to goals
Command/control styles	→	Ideas flow bottom-up
Waits for a rescue	→	Takes smart risks
Clings to old ways	→	Anticipates change

(from Williams, V. 2007. All eyes forward. How to help your newsroom get to where it wants to go faster. The Learning Newsroom at the American Press Institute. p.14)

Do it yourself

To take stock of your workplace culture, locate it on this binary grid below (adapted from newsimproved.org). It is artificial in its extremes, and you may often have sub-cultures, differences between departments, or hybrid areas of the two poles. But *overall* does your shop lean one way or the other?

Ask them

You can easily research your newsroom's culture.

Draw some questions from what follows, or create your own, but make up a questionnaire to send out to staff, asking them to fill it in. You can make it anonymous, or you can ask for names – either way, give feedback to them when you've composited the results:

- List three things you feel are right about the newsroom.
- List three things you think are wrong and need to be fixed in the newsroom.
- If there was one thing you could change about the news department, what would it be?
- Do you have a clear idea of what is expected of you at work?
- Do you have an opportunity to grow in this news department?
- List the five most important things you think the editor needs to do over the next six months.
- What do we do better than our competitors?
- What do our competitors do better than we do?
- What is the biggest impediment to you personally doing your best work here?
- What would you like to know about the editor that you don't already know?
- What is your media house's news strategy?
- What are the roadblocks standing in the way of the media house being successful?

	Constructive culture	Defensive culture
Communication	Open and honest	Some voices dominate, others don't contribute
New ideas	Lots bubbling up	Conformity rules. Initiative is shot down, and/or people abdicate interest in making suggestions
Collaboration	Working in teams	Working in silos and defending turf; seeking to avoid blame.
Goals	Balance between detail and big picture priorities	Detail without big picture

- What is preventing you from being successful in your job?
- What phrase best describes our work environment:
  - Respectful and professional
  - Friendly and warm
  - Harsh and cold
  - Strained and frustrating
  - Challenging and stimulating
  - Demanding and overwhelming

(adapted from: Radio and Television News Directors Foundation)

Don't reject any staff responses, even if they implicate you in saying that the newsroom is far from having a constructive culture. Don't blame the questionnaire. Don't become passive or start rationalising the situation on the basis of limited resources and scope for change.

In the end, you'll only avoid thinking about the necessary changes.

Cultural nuance

Management experts typically identify three types of organisational cultures:
- Constructive (good)
- Passive-defensive (bad)
- Aggressive-defensive (worst).

These different options may suit diverse kinds of organisations, but in an era of massive communications change, media should lean towards the first.

This is because in a constructive newsroom culture, people are more likely to:
- Take initiative and responsibility at all levels.
- Enjoy brainstorming and trying new things.
- Learn even from failed experiments.
- Be open to change.
- Feel their potential is being realised.
- Grow, learn and stay with the company.

A constructive culture depends on three things: participation by employees in decision-making, open communication, and transparency.

(adapted from: News, Improved: Learning to Change. From a New Book by Michele McLellan and Tim Porter, 2008)

Understanding negative cultures

In 2000, the Readership Institute at Northwestern University found that that all but a handful of 90 American papers had defensive cultures.

The research noted striking similarities between many newspapers and military units in this regard.

In both:
- People worked in a top-down environment, competed with peers, were risk averse and focused one-sidedly on personal performance rather than overall goals.
- Managers rarely caught employees doing things right, but never missed when they did things wrong.
- Unresolved conflict and turnover were common.

Defensive journalistic culture emerged in an industrial age of mass media production.

Experts say it takes an aggressive-defensive form, and that the dominant style is perfectionism. People are expected to avoid all mistakes, keep track of everything and work long hours to meet narrow objectives.

Another aspect is that this culture is oppositional – which entails much mistake-finding and confrontation, such as between old-style kick-butt news editors and reporters.

The model has some benefits, not least because it has worked for more than a century. Some oppositional behaviour can be useful in a newsroom. There is a reason for perfectionism.

But many feel the model as a whole inhibits people from taking chances, leads to issues avoidance, and that it is stuck with a focus on flaws rather than solutions.

The research by the Readership Institute in the US found a huge gap between the prevalent culture and the ideal (constructive) one.

The key shortfalls were in giving positive feedback and encouragement, and assisting colleagues to think uniquely, develop and enjoy their work.

– Guy Berger

Focus on the field officers!

If you want results from the foot-soldiers of journalism – your reporters – put resources into those who directly manage this rank.

That's the strategic focus – loud and clear – emerging from research commissioned by the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef).

The forum began with a study in 2002 to investigate problems at the junior reporter level about skills and attitudes. (www.sanef.org.za/skills_audit/phase_1/) That research emphatically confirmed that most reporters had:

● Paltry general knowledge, inferior interviewing skills and low ability to use language.
● Weaknesses in media law, and were uninformed in terms of media ethics, poor at newsgathering and writing skills, and unconcerned about accuracy.
● Inadequacies in their coverage of HIV/Aids and race, and low commitment to the profession.

If these were the "*what*" about the challenges in generating quality journalism, the bigger issue was "*why*" this troubling picture existed.

Among the several causes, one important factor was pinpointed: the quality of the direct line management of the junior journalists.

Following this up, Sanef in 2005 surveyed news editors around the country, and found that:

● Two in every five of the frontline news managers had less than three years' journalistic experience. This inexperience affected their confidence in managing reporters – who in turn had a very low opinion of their bosses' skills to do so.
● Reporters complained that new managers failed to brief and debrief them, and to give career advice. The managers in turn said they were too busy due to pressures of deadlines and that they had to tread carefully because of reporters' over-sensitivity.
● Internal communications in newsrooms were poor, and exacerbated by the fact that 70% of the news managers surveyed had either English or Afrikaans as a home language. The reporters studied (half of whom spoke an indigenous African language) saw their bosses as unwilling to deal with diversity.
● While the news managers put "team work" at the bottom of a list of areas where they needed development, reporters cited this as the biggest need for their supervisors.

The picture was one of news editors under pressure from the bottom, but also lacking support from the top. Many senior editors seemed to lack awareness of the problems experienced by middle editorial managers.

The solution, proposes the Sanef study, is for the top echelon to get more involved in coaching and mentoring their news managers.

Editors themselves are under huge pressures, but they need to do this – or continue to suffer the cascading consequences.

– Guy Berger

WORK ON IT

Give them skills

A survey by the Readership Institute of US newspapers found that top editors get the **lowest effectiveness ranking** for ensuring that subordinate editors are skilled at managing.

Middle managers were seen as least effective when it came to regularly discussing career goals and providing constructive criticism to employees.

Another key finding was the need for more recognition of reporters. The study said this mattered a great deal to most journalists, but was too often ignored by their leaders.

(from: Leadership: It may never matter more. ASNE Leadership Committee, available at: www.asne.org/kiosk/editor/01.jan-feb/buckner1.htm)

Innovating new products

Peter Bruce

Editor of *Business Day*

At my first BDFM board meeting as editor of *Business Day* in early 2001 I asked for two things.

One was to hire 14 new staff for key jobs I'd identified in the run-up to my editorship. The other was to turn *Business Day* into a sort of shopping basket, full of value-adding supplements we could then use as an excuse to begin charging more for the paper, while also getting more revenue.

Not all went as planned. By the end of 2001 we were deep in the red. Not only had I not hired any of my 14, but we had made a further 35 or so redundant. A scary time.

But the supplements have worked. Last year they raised R30-million and we have more than doubled the cover price in the intervening years.

Almost the entire editorial cost is now, theoretically at least, covered by the cover price. That's been vital to us as the rule obliging listed companies to advertise results is always under threat and, anyway, more than 400 companies (400 advertisers!) have delisted and no longer advertise.

For newspapers, new products are a lifeline, provided the risk is shared.

My idea was to bring revenue in through the new products and to help boost the price of the papers. But how? We had three possibilities:

● We would find sponsors for some supplements (we tried not to call them sponsors, but they were).
● Or we would find partners to co-publish with.
● Or find publishers who wanted to use us as a distribution channel.

The idea with the sponsors was that they would help launch the product by sharing commercial risk: *Business Day PM* (SAA), *Business Day Africa* (Transnet), *Law* (Edward Nathan), *Health* (Discovery). The sales department would use the time created by stable revenue to bring in other advertisers. This didn't always work well in practice and supplements folded after sponsors became fatigued or their managements or priorities changed.

Co-publishing worked better. We produce *Motor News* and *Home Front* with a partner who provides content and advertising. Perhaps because they are weekly, or about cars and homes, they have done incredibly well. I think frequency is vital to a new product.

The only products we innovated ourselves, an eight-page *Appointments* and our monthly luxury magazine *Wanted*, are also profitable.

Now we're preparing to carry our first branded supplement produced entirely outside of the company: a monthly glossy sports magazine. It represents the pinnacle of risk-free publishing: they take the risk and we get 30% of the revenue for free.

It has been critical to us to retain editorial control (or the ability to control). They all carry our brand.

My management colleagues have taught me that you can publish sponsored or co-published products with integrity.

Business Day is a better (and certainly richer) newspaper for them.

Changing strategy and internalising it

A couple of years ago, *The Star* implemented a new strategy for its editorial content and direction.

In brief, *The Star*'s strategy is:

- Visual paper
- WEDs (writing, editing and design – working in a collaborative process)
- Joburg
- Women
- Trinity (refers to the projection in layout of stories with headline, pictures and stories working together)
- Narrative

The return to local Joburg news was a significant break from past strategy where emphasis was on *The Star* as a national, morning newspaper with a mix of quality and popular stories.

How it was developed

The key thing is to understand the reader: to go beyond simple demographics (age, race, income). We developed a portrait of a Star reader to guide us. Here is a summary.

PORTRAIT OF THE STAR READER

- Greater Jo'burg
- Well-heeled, well-educated – or on their way to getting there

- Aspirant, ambitious, achievers
- Want advice on how to improve their lives
- Robust, love change, risk, controversy, provocation, strong opinion
- Highly visual animals. Pictures/graphics must have an impact
- Self-centred but also touched by …
- Like pleasant surprises

OUR CHECKLIST

Stuck on each *Star* staffer's computer

- Is your intro in *Star* style: short, uncluttered, captures essence of story or most interesting aspect?
- Have you personalised the story?
- Does your photo fit in with the story?
- Have you projected women as citizens and leaders; as survivors rather than victims?
- Have you quoted at least one woman?
- Does this story need a graphic?
- If your story is complex, have you done a WED before writing it?
- Have you included a text pullout?
- Have you given our readers hope?

- Have you told readers where to get help or information?
- Have you answered all the questions readers will ask?
- Does your story have at least two sources?
- Have you checked all names, facts and phone numbers are accurate?
- Have you checked that all the numbers add up?
- Have you made complex things simple?
- Does your layout have a visual focus?
- Have you linked the photo, headline and intro (trinity)?

- Want hard news, but not rehashed
- Want to understand their world
- International news and trends
- Different portrayal of women
- Quality paper they are proud to read
- Optimistic, patriotic, not parochial
- TIME-PRESSED

Implementing the strategy

1 An executive editor was given the responsibility of being change agent. It was her role to ensure elements of the strategy were incorporated into every edition of the newspaper.
2 Extensive training by the editor and senior executive editors for all staffers on elements of the strategy.
3 Inclusion of the strategy into the daily diary.
4 The change agent made a bookmark-sized list which included elements of the strategy. This was placed on computers for easy reference.
5 Posters with the elements of the strategy were put up around the newsroom.

Keeping it alive

We do this by:

1 Training by editors once a year during which the strategy is explained and all staff (editors, reporters, photographers, design subeditors and copy subeditors, and graphic designers) put the strategy into practice with various exercises.
2 Daily post mortems of the paper – to monitor alignment with the strategy.
3 Writing, Editing, Design (WED) meetings; weekly planning meetings.

How our strategy helped

The pages displayed above show how sticking to the strategy has turned out in practice.

– *Moegsien Williams, editor of The Star, and colleagues*

Repositioning, relaunch and redesign

Thabo Leshilo

Editor-in-chief of *Sowetan* and *Sunday World*

Sowetan has a proud history as a "struggle newspaper".

Like its immediate predecessors, *World* and *Post*, *Sowetan* played a significant role in the fight against apartheid by exposing its evil machinations and devastating human rights violations.

It was one with the reader, hence its circulation success. Just before the advent of democracy in 1994, the paper sold upwards of 250 000 copies. It was also a champion newspaper brand, being voted the top newspaper brand in South Africa for more than a decade.

Ironically, like peace is bad for the arms trade, liberation was bad news for the politically significant *Sowetan*.

The newspaper, like others, failed to read the changing mood. It remained stuck in its old ways, failing to recognise that its readers had grown tired of the apartheid story and wanted to be given hope and inspiration in the new South Africa.

The result was that the paper was selling a mere 118 561 in 2004.

New owners

South African press journalism has undergone a revolution since democracy; most significant is the explosion in popularity of the tabloid genre.

Johncom Media, now Avusa, bought New Africa Publications in August 2004. It was back to the drawing board with the new owners.

They subsequently re-launched *Sowetan* as a popular, racy tabloid on November 12 2004.

Reader research had indicated the newspaper's tired diet of politics and big business stories was not working. Readers said *Sowetan* needed revamping to make it relevant to their lives. It was time to adapt or die.

Community involvement became crucial. We are a developing nation: people look up to newspapers to fight their causes and for guidance. We do this both editorially and through the *Sowetan* Nation Building project.

The re-launched *Sowetan* now focuses on the mainly black African market in the LSM 4-7 category. The strategy is working: circulation has risen to 135 514 (December 2007 ABCs) and readership has shot up from 1,5 million to just over two million (November 2007 AMPs).

Qualipop

The new *Sowetan* likes to be thought of as quality popular (qualipop) or "the thinking man's tabloid". It is important that we continue to enjoy the trust of the reader, hence our slogan "The soul truth".

We see it as a hybrid newspaper, fusing the tried and tested attributes of a traditional quality paper with the best tactics of the tabloids: screaming headlines, colourful design, cheeky in-your-face journalism and witty writing.

It is "sexy but not sleazy" and we steer clear of the gutter – guarding ourselves from this by a public commitment to uphold the SA Press Code and be scrutinised by the Press Ombudsman.

Changing *Sowetan* was easier said than done. It is work in process. We are still institutionalising our mandate. The dearth of journalism skills in general, and in tabloid journalism in particular, makes the ride rough.

This is compounded by resistance to change. Old habits die hard. Expecting seasoned journalists who honed their skills on the field of battle – either covering the June 16 1976 uprisings and aftermath or capturing the turbulent 1980s – to suddenly feel at home producing "light stuff" about celebrities they even resent, proved a tall order. It was also a painful

exercise. Inevitably, there was blood-letting: jobs were shed and people who did not like working on the new product left.

Sadly, although there was an element of good riddance, we also lost people with valuable skills. The brain drain has been debilitating.

Advice

My advice to anybody contemplating taking on such a mammoth task as relaunching a newspaper and leading it in a different direction is:

- Don't do it unless you have lots of energy and are willing to sacrifice your personal life even more than is expected of any journalist.
- Do not be a bull in a china shop. Recognise your own limitations and appreciate that you do not know it all. Defer to your colleagues.
- Credible research is vital. It will help you produce a saleable newspaper. However, research is not a substitute for an editor's wisdom – combined with readers telling you whether you are on the right track or not.
- You should articulate your vision clearly and pursue it clinically and ruthlessly.
- Buy-in from your lieutenants is crucial. They need to internalise your

mandate: they too must live and breath it, otherwise you end up with a different newspaper whenever you are not on duty.

The task of repositioning an iconic brand such as *Sowetan* becomes even more daunting if you did not come from within the ranks. To survive and thrive, you must have a thick skin and be prepared do deal with rejection.

You will be the object of people's contempt for a company that is seen as fiddling with a sacred institution. To say this does not mean legacy issues are irrelevant. It would be foolhardy to mistake readers' desire for change and new things to mean you can totally disregard what came before you.

The *Sowetan* reader might yearn for change, but there is a limit to the amount of deviation he or she is willing to take from the path charted by the great Percy Qoboza, Joe Latakgomo, Aggrey Klaaste and Joe Thloloe, with whom our readers still associate the newspaper.

It would be wonderful to have your own core team, unencumbered by fond memories of a glorious past under previous regimes. Then you could ensure you achieve the twin objectives of eliminating resistance to change and infusing the newspaper with the necessary skills and enthusiasm to carry out your mandate.

It is vital to bear in mind that organisations do not fail because everybody working in them is bad. Institutional memory is important … but only insofar as it can be harnessed to inform the future.

Involving their readers in the new-look *Sowetan*.

Communicating through change

Paddi Clay

Head of the Avusa Pearson journalism training programme

For reporters and their editorial managers, "interpersonal contact and face-to-face communication still seems to be the preferred way of communicating with staff, especially when it comes to difficult issues", the Sanef skills audit phase 2 noted.

But is this communication happening in your newsroom? There's a good chance the smoking space – an entirely informal channel which you might never enter – is the major source of information for your staff.

You have two priority target markets you need to communicate with professionally and regularly: your readers or audience and your producers or journalists.

If you're taking your newsroom through a change process, which is almost a given today, additional communication opportunities and channels may be required.

As Conrad and Poole point out: "The greater the uncertainty the greater the need for direct, intensive communication and many adjustments."

Communication should not be confined to diary conference, e-mail, chance encounters in the lift or those formal meetings everyone hates. Interpersonal and informal communcation can be also be promoted through spatial design – which is why newsroom planning is a big

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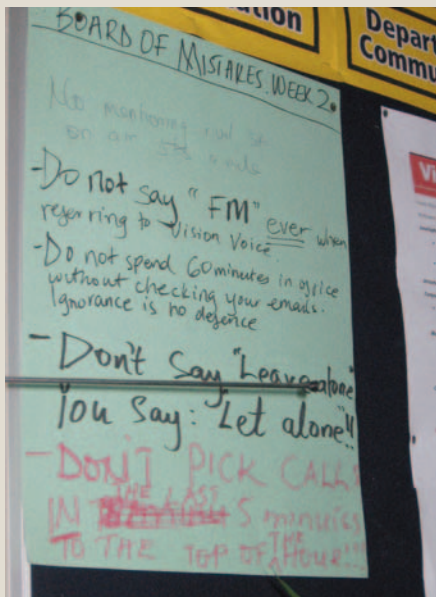
Low-tech communication in a changing environment: the suggestion box and a whiteboard for reminders.

issue when it comes to integrated newsrooms.

This link with proximity is borne out by research done by Jane Singer, who quotes a news manager saying: "When journalists sit 'elbow to elbow' proximity breeds collegiality not contempt."

Digital tools such as Live Messenger, wikis, blogs or bulletin boards can all be used in addition to or as an alternative to face-to-face communication.

In integrated newsrooms, LCD screens should not be for the sports fanatics, but a means of keeping everyone in touch with what is happening on the website or the latest ratings or readership information.

It's also important that you prepare and plan for any formal meeting. How you communicate, particularly in formal meetings, can impact on how you are perceived as a leader.

You need to know who your stakeholders are and who the difficult people are that you need to win over. Think about the outcome you want from the meeting and strategise how you are going to achieve it. Anticipate some of the questions and get your facts to hand.

Continually having to defer to management above you for details does your image no good.

When there's a crisis, or gossip is doing the rounds, communicate even more frequently.

There's nothing more embarrassing than your staff reading about coming changes in someone's column or an industry magazine before you've even talked to them.

Communication in this Web 2.0 era cannot simply be one way. Create your own opportunities for staff to feed back to you and don't leave it up to the maligned HR climate survey. An old-fashioned suggestion box, or occasional lunchtime chats with your senior people, not to talk about stories or operational issues but to find out what they're thinking and what the journalists they manage are thinking and are concerned about, will keep you in touch.

Creative people, and that is hopefully what you have around you, need to feel empowered and must be made to feel part of any change you are going to lead them through.

Diverging into convergence

You have a favourite platform – print perhaps, maybe television.

Yet you've now had to belatedly embrace a newcomer. Possibly you've even fallen in love with this wonderful web, and forgone your previous attraction.

But now what's going to happen when mobile really makes an appearance? How do you stay faithful to journalism in the midst of all this movement?

What confounds your thinking is the thick fog around the word "convergence".

For a start, although the term simply means the "coming together of things formerly apart", it also encompasses a multitude of highly different degrees of integration.

Unless you stay fixated on the journalism, an editor can easily get lost in a forest of fuzzy language and too many forks in the road.

In addition, confusion occurs because convergence can also apply at many levels – macro to micro:

- You can get corporate convergence (as in joint ventures) between telcom and media companies, for instance. Or between, say, TV and newspaper companies. (Watch this space in SA).
- The branching out of a traditional print operation into internet publishing or audio/video or mobile, is another realm of convergence.
- Reverse publishing from the web into print is another instance.
- Production processes, where content is co-ordinated or shared.
- The skill-sets of previously segregated specialist media practitioners – whether reporter, news editor, or production personnel – can also be part of convergence.
- Convergence can also refer media consumer devices: the camera-cell-phone for instance, or computers being used to watch video broadcasts.
- There's a coming together of producer and consumer functions: what Dan Gilmor calls "the people formerly known as the audience" are increasingly generating media.

Like most things, these convergences are largely driven by economics – although often they are still some way off demonstrating either significant profit or even serious savings. It's that tenuous status that heightens pressure on editors to make convergent activity economically viable.

Focus wider

Editors have to start stretching their focus to track this gamut of issues, while at the same time figuring out the specifics of your operation in regard to any single one of them.

Few editorial leaders nowadays can think only one platform (for example the newspaper), even if they do (for now) give it priority attention. At the very least, there's a need to acknowledge an interconnection (and sometimes tension) between outlets, and then work with a holistic view.

The good news is that there's no holy grail or ultimate destination of achieving 100% convergence. Instead, there's good reason for a lot of heterogeneity to persist within the broader merging.

And yet an editor also has to transcend any "us" and "them" mentality between employees working in diverse areas and coming from different media models.

Take note

In managing all the complexities of convergence, the areas below need attention.

- Technology: editors have to have a strong interest in the workings of whatever Content Management System is used to underpin the convergence; you can't delegate this concern to techies.
- Critical in a convergent context is the need to manage resistant cultures and narrow skill-sets bequeathed from one medium, and to re-engineer the routines that underpin these.
- Most vital is the journalism: sophisticated story-telling that runs across several platforms, and which may include not just *multiple media* on

the web (video, audio, photos around a given story), but also fully fledged *multi-media* (a mix of text, audio, visuals in an interactive graphic package where the sum is greater than the parts).

It's fatal to try and force the pace of convergence without continuing communication among the players, re-designing job descriptions, amending work flow processes, sorting out new deadline systems and creating guidelines for which platform comes first.

In all this, gradual or rapid multi-skilling of staff seems inevitable, even if core areas of focus and competence will continue. Journalists doing blogging is just one indication of this.

Strategic issues

How much you automate the re-publishing and re-purposing of content for a different platform is a management challenge, not least because of the copyright issues implicated.

A distinct challenge is pre-purposing, which entails advance organising to cover a big story in terms of how the full bouquet of platforms can be best exploited. It's a matter of planning which aspects are best told in print, broadcast, web or other formats ... and when. Cross-promotion protocols need devising.

One global trend in recent years has been towards reintegrating formerly divergent web-operations into the purview of an overall newsdesk, and operating within the same newsroom space. Technical, environmental, ergonomic, special and cultural issues are thrown up by this.

"Social media" and user-generated content in the whole package is a major extra component needing to be taken on board.

New policies are needed for all this – for example, on the degree of moderation, the type and amount of hyperlinks in your content, staff blogging guidelines and audience interaction.

Editors have to lead the process, no matter how technophobic or traditionalist, or risk the future of your medium and even your own job.

Embrace it by working closely with innovators and early adopters in the newsroom. These are the personnel who will help you to evolve workable models and diffuse convergence at the coalface.

– Guy Berger

HINTS

What makes it easier or harder

Enablers for 'easy' convergence	Complicators making for 'difficult' convergence
It's made central to organisation's strategy	Not central: secondary or an afterthought
There is committed and focused leadership	Other leadership priorities
A culture of innovation and risk-taking	"Always done it this way"
Co-ordinating structure	No co-ordinating structure
Same ownership	Different ownership
Same values	Different values
Aligned systems and processes	Systems not aligned
Past successes together	Previous problems or no relationship
Cultures flexible or similar	Cultures not flexible or similar
Co-located	Located some distance apart

(adapted from Gentry, 2004, cited in Quinn, S. & Filak, V.F. 2005. Convergent journalism: an introduction: writing and producing across media. Amsterdam: Elsevier)

Challenges of New Media

Judy Sandison

Editor: new media, SABC News

The changing media landscape in terms of new technologies and new consumer habits is impacting on the way newsrooms are run.

Factors driving growth in new media include:
- The growing use, by 18- to 35-year-olds, of the internet for news.
- Rapid growth in general internet usage.
- The cellphone "revolution" in Africa.
- The growing need for 24-hour "news on demand".

With these market forces at play for new forms of "news on the run", the pressure is on for news producers to provide users with news on a variety of platforms and in various formats, to keep the appetites for news feed via both "push" and "pull" technologies.

News consumers have also become more savvy ... with ever-widening choices of where to source the news they want first.

The challenge is to provide fresh, relevant, accurate news in an almost continuous news stream in single or multi-media formats, while still catering for the more traditional user in the form of fixed-time news bulletins or products.

Don't wait

Newsroom leaders cannot afford to wait or they'll be left behind – they need to explore potential niched new media opportunities while still running their traditional news operations. Who could have predicted that a broadcaster's arena would now encompass cellphone technologies such as the SABC's 082 152 audio news-on-phones service or that cellphone networks would themselves look at producing their own content, such as Safaritel in Kenya?

The edges are getting blurred. But one key challenge in every newsroom remains providing a relevant and credible product that the end-user perceives to have value.

Leadership anew

These trends have thrown up new leadership challenges:
- To keep pace with the rapid growth in new technology
- To adapt content to the medium
- To be responsive to the changing needs of users
- To remain competitive and cost effective, and generate new revenue streams.

Pioneering new media editors must now:
- Be entrepreneurs, facilitators and leaders
- Still meet the more traditional managerial requirements of their organisations
- Retain consumer trust in the credibility of the product
- Be open to different and unusual partnerships.

Journalists themselves have to become more multi-skilled and accountable. Team leaders need to be facilitators, not autocrats; teams have to be results-oriented and add to their skills base daily in order to provide customised, personalised, 24-hour news and information.

Markets are widening as low-technology tools such as wind-up battery chargers for cell phones and WAP-enabled phones make the internet accessible to many more across Africa.

Managers need to shape and grow new products with their teams, be directly accountable, provide strong training and support, and share regu-

Cellphone billboards in Uganda are symptomatic of the spread of the medium.

lar communication and feedback.

The manager or editor needs to be a strong driver who makes things happen: be results-oriented and decisive in selecting suitable team members and putting things in place.

Bigger picture

Issues such as the pros and cons of total or partial integration into the newsroom need to be addressed while keeping momentum going related to the bigger picture. While being responsive to special new media needs, team members must be encouraged to be self-starters. Synergies with other newsroom teams within your media house are vital.

New team dynamics must be managed as part of the broader newsroom. Each leader must play both a strategic and operational role.

Maintaining a decentralised and flexible operation, responsive to new oppor-

tunities, is vital, as are regular "tweaking" of the products/services and radical changes when required Use audience research, monitor output; get feedback from the marketplace.

Do not forget to manage upwards: promote awareness in top management of the needs of news as a "business".

Ensure fast decision-making on new policy/strategy matters. Keep them informed on progress and new developments. Be open to new leads and ideas.

And while managing all these developments, always remember:
- To balance the commercial and public interest
- Promote synergies between old and new media
- Communicate and give feedback
- Identify and harness any "spare" capacity.

The integrated newsroom

Ray Hartley

Editor of *The Times*

The Times newsroom was designed from scratch by the editorial team after much discussion about the ideal workflow for an integrated newspaper and online operation.

The first big decision we took was to totally integrate photographic, multimedia and print journalists by creating what we called "pods".

The idea was to have a writer, video producer and photographer working on a beat sitting together at a workstation. This is quite a radical departure from the traditional newsroom.

It also made a statement about the equal status of these three distinct roles. Crucially, it acknowledged that writing, video production and photography were specialisations with their own disciplines and special skills.

The second major decision was to have a totally open plan workspace with NO offices – not even for the editor – showing our intention to be a workplace that prized constant communication higher than the status attached to having an office.

Content managers sit together in a hub and are able to communicate with each other easily at any time.

These moves were crucial in sending a signal that we were creating a new newsroom culture.

However, for the new generation of journalists, born in the digital age, there are few challenges. They live convergent lifestyles and are promiscuous when it comes to their personal use of content channels. We actively sought out and hired young staff for this reason.

With the more senior staff coming out of print backgrounds, the largest chal-

The *Dispatch* newsroom and its new design, inspired by the UK *Telegraph*. A central hub situates online and print editors together, with 'spokes' running off into the rest of the floor grouping the various departments together. This is a slightly different approach to that of *The Times*.

lenge was to reset their "publication default position", if you can call it that, to the 24-7 operation online.

Their gut instinct, learned through the intense competition between print titles, is to hold back everything for print and to keep it as secret as possible until then.

So the most obvious sign of success in achieving change is being first with the news online – and doing it with your own news staff. This immediately places you ahead of the competition who rely heavily on news agency copy.

For us a key indicator is whether or not we have multimedia to punt in our daily paper alongside our print stories. This indicates clearly whether or not the teams are working together.

On multi-skilling, we chose not to go this route because we want to develop quality: in writing, multimedia and pictures. We would like everyone to attain a foundation level of knowledge about how other streams work, but we want them to focus on their own skills.

Having said that, the ability to record digital sound for use online in podcasts or to take pictures in a crisis situation is encouraged.

In priorising stories for specific platforms, and managing staff deployment, we took a strong position.

Web must come first because it's the 24-7 medium. Once this is the default position for filing breaking news, it becomes easy to select the exceptions to be held back for print. All employees are expected to work for all platforms. It's in all our performance documents.

When it comes to training, we take the view that multimedia journalism is an entirely new discipline. Here the fastest learning has taken place. There are regular reviews of videos, usually by an experienced producer from outside. Other than that, training has been very much on the job.

BIGGER WEB 2.0 PICTURE
All things digital

Digital media content can be converted to different forms (eg text to audio) and sent out in diverse packages, through various channels, to scores of platforms.

That's given millions access to content as consumers and producers - hence the explosion of content out there in general.

Information is less and less a scarce commodity. What's scarce is attention.

Competition now is with all kinds of institutions and individuals who become media-tised via Internet publishing.

It used to be that a media company operated most of its own information gathering, editing, packaging and dissemination, all for a fairly loyal audience. This integration is being dis-articulated:

● **Information gathering**
Besides reporters, there's "citizen journalists", "user-generated content" and "imports" of content from elsewhere (eg YouTube via embedded links).

● **Editing**
Look at increased outsourcing (eg of subbing), and involvement of audiences in rating and ranking what content plays prominently online. In a wiki, content is crowd-edited ... without end.

● **Packaging**
Third-party aggregators like Google bundle media content in different guises. Individuals and institutions "mash" it into their own published packages.

● **Distribution**
Think RSS feeds, content placed on other websites, and what's circulated by users.

● **Consumption**
Consumption online is driven through links (via search engines, RSS and social network recommendations). Audiences are opportunistic and transitory.

● **Advertising**
News audiences that shift online do retain some loyalty to old media brands now in cyberspace. But advertising is not migrating to news sites to the same extent. Advertisers have their own online platforms; search engines offer highly focused targeting and measurable returns. Subscription revenues for online news have failed. But the billing culture of cellphones has potential. – *Guy Berger*

The people are coming ...

Blogging

Editors are increasingly dealing with outsiders who blog on the website of your media house. You probably have staff who do likewise and who may also maintain blogs elsewhere.

Here are some guidelines – drawn in part from the BBC.

Staff who blog should be:
- Encouraged, because it helps enrich and diversify the content on offer.
- Sensitive to possible conflicts of interest like disclosing confidential in-company matters.
- Required to indicate, where appropriate, that the blog expresses personal views, not those of the company.
- Advised to avoid taking up a position on controversial subjects where this can be seen as compromising their journalistic work.

With blogs, it's not content that's king but conversation around that content. So staff who blog need to be responsive to public comments on their company sites as part of the job, and they need to get time to do so.

Outside bloggers:

This kind of user-generated content is one part of a wider field of public contribution to the media, including citizen journalism and general participation. Guidelines here can be the same as those for citizen/community contributors.

Citizen/community contributions

A distinction should be made between general *community participation* and *citizen journalism.*

"Participation" includes things like ranking content, commenting on articles or blogs, and submitting community information (like anti-crime forum meeting times).

"Citizen journalism", on the other hand, entails reportage. Users of news website blogs may not always be doing journalism with this technology and genre, but equally they may sometimes be doing what are often called "acts of journalism".

Part of the ethos of public involvement is a context of moving away from content being treated only as a one-way broadcast, to it becoming a dynamic and continuing conversation.

Although just one percent of a site's regular users will usually be active contributors in the various forms, their input can add enormous value to a website.

All should be clearly signalled as community input, and be limited by clearly posted parameters about hate-speech and defamation.

Special guidelines can be set out for those contributing "citizen journalism" (whether articles, images, video or blog postings):
- Contributions need to meet the company's standards of accuracy, fairness and editorial policy.
- Would-be contributors should not risk their safety to collect content.
- They should respect people's privacy – and where appropriate, may need to demonstrate that they have the consent of the people featured in their contributions.
- Citizen journalists may be asked to verify factual accuracy, and convince a media house they have not manipulated or pirated digital images.
- They should declare any vested interests (such as content collected on behalf of a lobby group).
- They should know that the media house may be required by law to pass materials to the police, even the identity of the contributor.
- The contributor will have to cede defined rights – exclusive or partial – to the media house to publish the materials.
- Payment for such contributions is at the discretion of the company.

As part of "public journalism", a media house can offer online or workshop-based classes to help amateur journalists do a more professional job and enhance the quality and uptake of contributions.

On the other hand, there are also many cases in the US where amateurs, precisely because they were untrained, have picked up on major news which was overlooked within the routines and expectations of professional journalists.

It's not essential, therefore, that all citizen journalists need to be trained to be the equivalents of traditional free-lancers, even if courses and critical feed-back might make sense with particular contributors.

Social networks

More and more people are using the internet to join communities, and astute editors will find ways to coalesce some of these loose groupings around their media content niches.

But all viable communities need leaders and systems, and a media house has to contribute to these functions if its hosting of networks is to succeed.

It's probably impossible to create a community (local or interest-based) that does not exist in some latent form, which also means a medium cannot impose itself as some kind of executive mayor on a community.

The point is that a social network involves a media house *communicating with* an audience, and facilitating their intra-communication ... not just *communicating to* them.

Community management

Some media abroad have appointed community managers to be responsible for servicing online social networks, although it is also often seen as important that newsroom staff also contribute to what has been called "community gardening".

The role of community management (perhaps spread across a number of employees, fulfilling various roles) means listening to niche communities around your content, giving feedback to the editor and staff, acknowledging and engaging with the people participating in communities, tracking significant trends, commenting on outside blogs, overseeing keywords and links to relevant content and getting employees involved as well.

As one observer noted: community management means keeping conversations going and avoiding the development of virtual "ghost towns".

Another duty is to act as neighbourhood cop and curtail "trolls": disruptive people who harass and alienate others.

Editorial decisions need to be made about whether community management includes monitoring and moderating for quality, language use and/or legal issues.

These matters can have substantial implications for human resources. Many sites seek to avoid this issue by disclaiming direct responsibility and instead providing ways for people to report "inappropriate" content which can then be investigated and possibly taken down.

Best practice is that community management is not just restricted to online interaction, but that the staff most involved in this function also attend, and even convene, events in real life that are relevant to those people who participate.

Crowd sourcing

Whereas citizen journalism is usually initiated by individual members of the public, "crowd sourcing" tends to be at the initiative of the media house and is an appeal for mass, rather than individual, involvement in newsgathering.

At minimum, it can be a form of polling people for their opinions. It can also be a way to canvass interest in a particular story.

And in a celebrated case of investigating sewers at Fort Myers in the US, "crowd sourcing" successfully elicited people's experiences which were then incorporated into published content (see www.news-press.com/apps/pbcs.dll/section?Category=CAPEWATER).

While this kind of involvement is powerful, in some cases an editor may wish to keep an investigation confidential rather than reveal it through "crowd sourcing".

What do you put online?

Online publishing or broadcasting should not be an afterthought, fed only with scraps from the main table. It needs serious exploitation because a time will inevitably come when this offspring is likely to become your major platform.

By then, you need to have built your brand and engaged an audience.

George Brock, 2007 president of the World Editors Forum, has warned of a large disconnect between the thinking about the future newsroom and the actual preparation, training and resources that editorial organisations seem to be giving to this project.

So, human and other resources should be invested in online. Indeed, such online activities can also enrich your primary platform through "reverse publishing" where appropriate.

However, the two realms of traditional and new do need to be co-ordinated. For instance, many media houses abroad are moving to a "web first" policy, not just with breaking news alerts, but even with scoops and exclusives.

This is a key issue that needs to be decided and then reviewed from time to time.

Another important issue for editors in the transition to online is that content on this platform needs to be broken up into screenfuls and/or streams.

In some cases it may include the story behind the story: how the content was created.

In addition, there's the opportunity to configure or reconfigure it so as to include a fun or game element.
– Guy Berger

Build a bouquet

The rhythm and form of editorial output continues to change.

In the US, Associated Press has a model of "1-2-3 filing". This starts with a news alert headline for breaking news, usually followed by step two as a short present-tense story predominantly for web and broadcasters. The third step is to add detail and format the content for different news platforms, for example as a textual news analysis, a multi-media piece … or nothing if the story doesn't warrant it.

This kind of approach has been elaborated by Paul Bradshaw who points to two dimensions: speed and depth.

For **speed**, content can be generated and distributed as:
- An alert (mobile, e-mail)
- A draft (such as a blog)
- An article/package (print, audio and/or video forms)

For **depth**, the following levels of complexity can be mounted:
- Context added (hyperlink, and embedded content via widgets)
- Analysis/reflection (an article/package in various formats, based on research and assessment)
- Interactivity (flash, chats, forums, wikis)
- Customisation (RSS, ratings, social networking)

Bradshaw acknowledges that this diamond model (see opposite) is not necessarily a linear one, and several of the story treatments he describes can unfold simultaneously, depending on how a newsdesk judges the story at hand. The point, however, is the many options possible in an era of digital information.
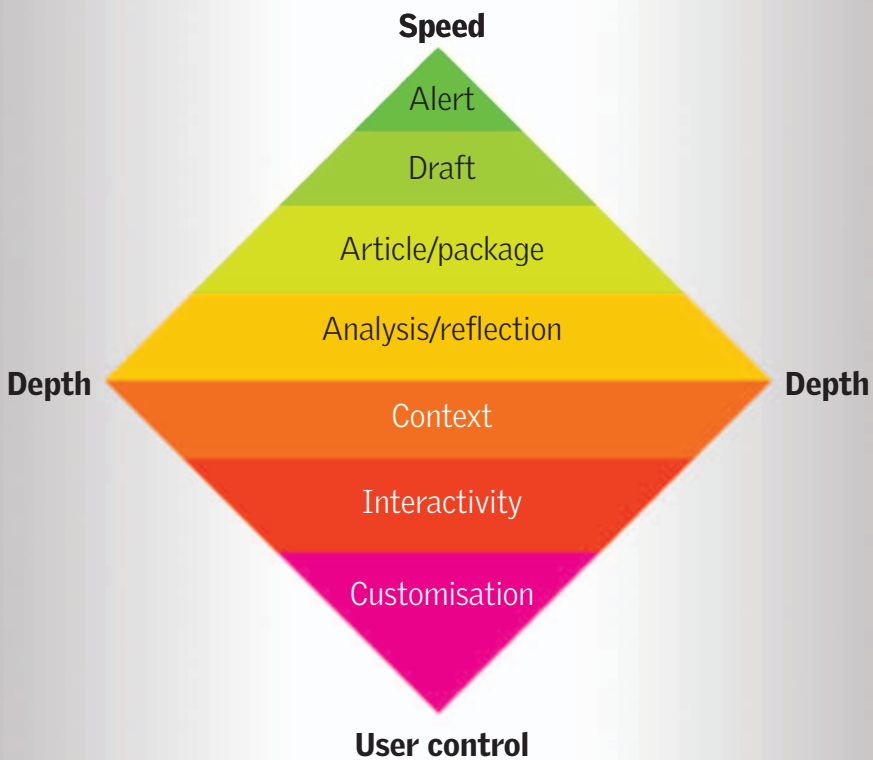
Editors need to give leadership on these issues.

Hyperlinks

Among the policies needed is one on hyperlinks. Many companies over the years have decreased the use of this content-enriching capacity, especially in regard to links pointing to rival media.

But things are changing as the media industry begins to close ranks in the face

Paul Bradshaw's 'news diamond'

Speed

Alert

Draft

Article/package

Analysis/reflection

Depth Context **Depth**

Interactivity

Customisation

User control

The many options possible in an era of digital information. Discuss 'A model for the 21st century newsroom' on Bradshaw's blog: http://onlinejournalismblog.com

of competition for other forces online. As we have seen, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* have agreed to collaborate in linking to each other. And more fundamentally there is the point, as web expert Dave Winer states: "People come back to places that send them away."

Online-only visuals

Another issue about online content is the option to provide data in diverse formats, especially in various visualisations that cannot easily be done on other platforms. For instance: maps showing crime hotspots, interactive graphs and graphics, geo-located cases of xenophobic violence. These are instances when the full visual and interactive potential of online can really be exploited.

Be out there

Commentator Kevin Anderson has written: "The day of building a website and expecting everyone to come to you is

over." Instead, you have to free up your content to *follow* the audiences and be where they are.

Increasingly, people come to websites only indirectly – through various back doors and outside aggregators of content (often non-human – like Google News). That means:

- Providing RSS feeds so that people can check your headlines, and visit particular stories, without the schlep of having to visit your site (or, more likely, not) to check if there's anything of specific interest to consume.
- Ensuring search engine optimisation (SEO) so your online content gets to users when they do a Google search.
- Having a presence in social networks like Facebook, Flickr, Youtube, Twitter and their South African equivalents like Myvideo.co.za.
- Providing widget links so others can easily embed your content in their blogs. – *Guy Berger*

Unpacking the jargon

Web 2.0 is the term informally used to describe the evolution of the web in three respects:

1. Metadata or tagging

It's all about the internet changing from being a static documents resource into a database with metadata about information. This transformation enables unprecedented linkages and new meanings to emerge. Here, keywords or "tags" have become fundamental to the architecture of the internet. These labels on content are what enable people, for instance, to find Africa photos on Flickr, or allow your website to send out very specific content feeds. This is the early phase of what is dubbed the Semantic Web, where meaningful connections can be derived from online content in interoperable ("open") formats between different sites.

2. Read-write web

Whereas the web used to be one with a substantial division between users as producers and consumers of content, increasingly members of the "audience" are adding to the mix through comments, posting photographs and setting up blogs. Many people are now living a lot of their lives online in public.

3. Social networks

This refers to people (higher numbers of women than men) using the internet not only to connect to electronic content, but also to other people such as friends and family, and strangers. Many social connections are also often around, and about, this content – whether it is through games, debates, re-publishing, appropriations and "mash-ups".

This social relationship in part replaces isolated surfing or searching for relevant information. Accordingly, your communities recommend content to you via utilities like Twitter (micro-blog messages online or on phone), e-mail, links from their own blogs, or on the pages within social network sites.

The result is a surfacing of content, where relevant information finds individuals, not vice versa. An example is the World Association of Newspapers' editors weblog, which constitutes a resourceful community of editors.

More broadly, though, the social network phenomenon means for editors that there is a new force in society that takes the place of your editorial decisions about what's relevant to an audience that once relied on you. These communities now decide whether to highlight your offerings or not – and you have to find ways to be valuable to them.

Mobile media

Most South Africans will experience the internet on cellphones long before they have regular access on desk- or laptop computers. Millions are already doing so in the form of the enclosed service provided by Mixit.

But the question is whether mobile devices will really become instruments for more than interpersonal conversation or messaging – that is, also become a means to receive and produce journalism. The answer is in the affirmative.

On the hardware level, the form factor of small screens is not really a deterrent.

And as regards software, there is Google's Linux-based and open source operating system, called Android, that will span numerous makes of mobile devices.

Once South Africa begins digital broadcasting to the new generation of receiver-ready cellphones, the public will become accustomed to seeing these devices as media tools.

The mobile model will also open a whole new market for location-based information services, and probably substantial audio options, that forward-looking editors can begin to anticipate. Because the public is acculturated to paying for telephony, a business model could include a mix of subscriptions and advertising revenue sufficient to enable the content costs to be covered.

Content Management Systems

As editor, you'll probably find a content management system (CMS) in place that predates you. However, any CMS should be regarded as an iterative process, rather than a final product.

For instance, at the *Grocott's Mail* the paper's open source system, named Nika, began only with workflow management – then evolved to articulating the newspaper content with a website. The third phase will give Web 2.0 functionality (blogs, networks, comment functions), and the fourth will include mobile, audio and video components. It will probably need the ongoing addition of features in response to the emergence of new functionalities and externalities (like interfaces to receive and publish video from phones).

To keep up-to-date and make tech work for you (rather than vice versa), you need to initiate action for updates or alterations to your own CMS, to suit the changing editorial process.

Some considerations:

1 **Workflow:** Does your CMS allow proper version control and electronic performance monitoring? Are there too many clicks before a story is completed? Do word-processing and photo-editing interfaces work as seamlessly as they should? If not, try to get them revised.

2 **Knowledge management:** Is the system optimum at enabling the generation and capture of the institution's knowledge of processes, systems and personal learning? Is your intranet up to speed in terms of dissemination, and does it include style-guides and administrative forms, and internal blogs?

3 **Database/archive:** Is your database set up for maximum searchability of text and images (internally, and even externally depending on to policy), and have you given sufficient thought to what metadata fields are required for this to happen?

4 **Copyright:** Does your system allow for digital rights management – and is this driven by an agreed policy of intellectual property among stakeholders concerning both current information and archives?

5 **Enterprise-wide IT:** Can this be integrated so as to seamlessly access data from, for example, your switchboard, or to export comments on your blogs to customer relations management software?

6 **From a content management point of view, you will need to guide the technical side. For instance in terms of:**
- Helping you figure out the content strategy of how to play online or to cellular ... and back.
- Deciding what will be automated, versus what will be customised.
- Thinking ahead – for instance, you can't easily automate feed streams via SMS at a later date, if you haven't been storing your content data with appropriate metadata keywords and classifications.

7 **Dynamism:** How fixed/dumb is the system as compared to one that is intelligent and able to allow flexibility and change according to users' actual patterns?

8 **Your software system:** Many newspapers today are using open-source software CMS's, especially Drupal. Examples are the *New York Observer*, *Al Quds*, *Die Welt*, *Die Zeit*.

9 **Finding free tools:** Are there tools "in the cloud" that you can make use of? Can you use Wordpress for blogs to feed into your site, Twitter to feed in SMS, Youtube to host your own and other relevant video, and Skype to do podcasting? How about Ning.com or Google-Friends to provide at least interim support for your social network experiments?

– Guy Berger

Whose side are you on?

Do you support the Professionalistas or the Populists? The career journalists or amateurs? Here are the arguments:

Harden D. Pro: Part-time and semi-skilled people can't do the job, and the idea that they can is only of benefit to the bosses who think they can source content without having to pay for it. But it takes investment in beat expertise to report on complexities, have inside-insight and dig out scandals – and this won't be done by "citizen journalists".

Citizen J: Grassroots people can send in newsworthy information, even if we can't always do the legwork that pro's do.

Harden D. Pro: Citizen content requires extensive checks and editing – which we don't have time to do. You are not in our core business supply chain.

Citizen J: Well, you can't stop the trend. People want to see their voices in the mainstream; you'll be marginalised if you resist. Some of us do secure recognition for our work – certainly we don't usually do it for the money. The industry should appreciate and value this energy.

Harden D. Pro: Sorry, but your output is amateurish, opinionated, unsubstantiated.

Citizen J: Your mainstream journalism claims independence, but the reality is you being fed agendas by politicians or corporate interests – or your own colleagues are playing political games.

Harden D. Pro: Accepting the standing of citizen contributions reduces journalism to the lowest common denominator: – every Joe Soap is then treated as an equal of, say, a prize-winning photojournalist.

Citizen J: At least we are usually explicitly advocacy-oriented, whereas your journalism is skewed to status quo elite sources, and ignores grassroots views. We fill a gap, especially at the community level, because the mainstream can't afford or does not bother to send reporters there. Your people miss serious stories and sometimes have preconceived – and wrong – ideas about what audiences want to know.

Harden D. Pro: Everyone can concede that the eruption of user-generated content does deepen the public sphere – but that doesn't make it "journalism" in most cases.

Citizen J: Our brand of journalism is often closer to truth and justice than so-called "journalists" in state-controlled media. But basically, our work should be taken as complementary to, rather than competition with, mainstream reporters.

Harden D. Pro: There's no clear difference between what you do and a student who thinks his or her Facebook posts amount to journalism.

Citizen J: Community participation is not automatically incompatible with journalism. Anyone with a connection can do journalism on Facebook, a blog, a Twitter stream, or by giving content to the mainstream as a freelancer would. And, there's enough mainstream content – like lifted chunks of press releases – that barely counts as journalism.

Harden D. Pro: But many of you people seem to target us en bloc, presuming yourselves to be a 5th Estate watching us. It seems you want to supplant us.

Citizen J: A dose of your own medicine? But many people – audiences and amateur producers – are unhappy with the state of the mainstream. It is a different question whether our journalism can address your problems, but the mainstream should look to improve itself with or without competition from us.

Harden D. Pro: I accept some citizen journalists do investigate, check their facts, keep independent. But the real value to me is that you put information into circulation, which can be mined for nuggets by us traditional journalists.

Citizen J: No one realistically believes traditional journalism can or will be replaced with citizen journalism. But we keep you on your toes and add to quality content. And increasingly there are hybrids possible, like "pro-am" collaborations and "open source journalism". Try some of these exciting possibilities The basic difference is that you are no longer secluded kings of content.

– Guy Berger

Blogging

Andrew Trench
Deputy editor of the *Daily Dispatch* and *DispatchOnline* editor

Our first tentative steps into blogging were in mid-2007 when we started working seriously on relaunching our *Dispatch* website, which hadn't had a makeover in about 10 years.

My initial idea was to start a blog built on the *Dispatch* brand, to play around with it as a medium and, most importantly, use it to start getting a better idea of our online audience.

Andrew Sherry, a deputy managing editor for online news at *US Today*, inspired the idea at a workshop in Johannesburg where I asked him how we could put together a quality online offering without millions to invest.

"Use blogs" he replied: they are easy to operate, they empower writers – and are useful as a radar to "get out in front of your readers". So Dispatches from the Trench was born.

I used the blog in the beginning to talk about things going on in the paper, decisions we were making and what we were thinking regarding online plans.

It had a great response from the start – as if there were hordes of readers who had been standing behind locked doors dying to talk with us.

The experience was the most invigorating of my career. Here was an opportunity for journalists to speak directly to readers, for this to be instantaneously a two-way street and for the relationship between reader and newspaper to deepen in ways we had never imagined. I rapidly became a blogging evangelist within our newspaper.

Anyone who thinks this is a medium for the young, think again. One of our most successful bloggers is 60-something Investigations Editor Eddie Botha, whose blog is a must-read.
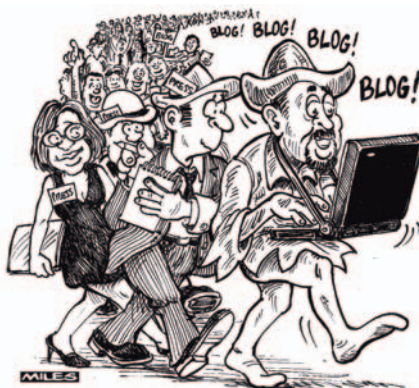
At last count we had 13 blogs running within *Dispatch*. But the two that I find most exciting, in how they have broadened our traditional horizons, are Epozini and Bloos-Kaap Blues.

As their names suggest, one is in Xhosa, the other in Afrikaans. Epozini is a hub of debate and discussion in a language we do not traditionally publish. Who would have thought we would now be a publication of English, Afrikaans and Xhosa? Thanks to blogs.

Our blogs are now so important that we run our dynamic news content on our new website through a feed off our Dispatch Now breaking news blog, and run a feed of comments from our blogs on the home page. Readers are now an integral part of our content.

Blogs have extended the role newspapers have always had in a community. They make our journalism better, our paper more transparent and accountable to its readers – and we are learning more about them every day. We also get dozens of story tips.

The most important lesson is to trust your staff to speak to your readers directly. We had a quick meeting of our bloggers, decided on some basic rules and let our bloggers do their thing.

Sometimes I see some blog posts by a young reporter that make my toenails curl. But, you know what? I've yet to see a complaint from an online reader. Meanwhile, our reporters who are blogging are writing more than ever before – and that can't be bad.

Extra work and other multi-issues

"Who here is paying their staff extra to work across multiple platforms?" a speaker recently asked 35 editors and media managers from all over Africa at a Sol Plaatje Media Leadership Institute meeting in Kampala.

Not one raised a hand.

Many editors around the world are currently expected to deliver more and new kinds of content with fewer or the same resources, partly due to the market imperative to go to web and multimedia without guaranteed advertising income for the new platforms, partly due to a loss of advertising revenue to new media.

And they have to do it *immediately*, while continually adapting to fast changes in the media world. A headache for editors – and one often dealt with by having lower standards for web content.

At the same time, journalists are worrying about their jobs – and one big aspect of this is the extra work required.

When this issue comes to a head, it sometimes leads to renegotiation of contracts, sometimes to stand-offs with unions and sometimes to discretionary salary increases for those individuals who have taken on new tasks.

In many cases, media just rely on the enthusiasm of journalists on their staff: counting on ambitious volunteers to take on the new work.

It is a lot clearer where there is a separate digital operation from the original media: those people are employed to do that work, and then journalists from the other media (the newspaper or magazine) who also write for web, either do it voluntarily or get paid as a freelancer.

It is also clearer with freelancers: but their contracts need to state whether their work can be published on multiple platforms or whether they are paid extra.

The problem comes with bringing web operations and multimedia into a newsroom where previously content was produced for one platform, with predictable deadlines. For example, a reporter covering a story previously wrote an article, sidebar and opinion piece; now he/she may have to file breaking news headlines, a short story for the web, a longer one for print, the opinion piece, plus carry a digital camera and file photos or video, do a short radio comment and update a blog – with continuous deadlines. Are they now "churning"?

But journalists are rarely just concerned about being paid fairly for work done: there are a variety of interrelated spin-offs.

Here are the issues that will be worrying your journalists, which editors need to decide how to handle.

1. More work

Are journalists being asked to work more than their 40-hour week, or just work faster? Is the need to interact more with readers, or to blog frequently, creating a burden on reporters' time? Can your overtime arrangements (extra pay or time off) cover any extra hours worked? Do your performance agreements spell out how much work a journalist is expected to do?

2. Extra responsibility

If journalists are given different, or higher-level, responsibilities, this is usually a grading issue. Can you upgrade those who take this on? And how about those who just take on *more* responsibility: can you re-negotiate contracts or performance agreements? Is this an "operational requirement" that workers cannot refuse, or a change in working conditions?

3. New skills

Are journalists being properly trained (formally and on the job) to take on new tasks? Can you create training programmes to give them speed, competency and confidence? Do you need any journalists who do not master new skills (such as writers who have no visual ability to take photos) to still practise them? Do you multi-skill all reporters, or specialise some, and to what extent?

4. Lower quality

If journalists are "churning", is the quality of their work dropping? Can you find

ways to ensure your journalists have some time to boost their creativity and avoid burn-out or boring "event-based" journalism? How will you still get good scoops, original writing and in-depth analysis while having to feed the 24-hour monster that is the internet? Is this a problem for retention of good staff?

5. Lack of clarity on job roles

There is no doubt the boundaries between media jobs are blurring more than before, though on small media such as community radio or papers this has always occurred. Do your reporters now have to sub their own stories? Who writes the text for picture galleries? Does a technician end up writing headlines for web stories? Can you create guidelines on who has to do what, when?

6. Lack of checks

Are the stories, video, picture galleries or podcasts put on the web, or headlines sent out on mobile, going through the same set of checks that a newspaper arti-cle or radio bulletin goes through, or are corners dangerously cut?

Newspaper articles usually go from journalist to news editor, to chief sub, to sub, to revise and to page proof – that's five checks, and mistakes and legals still get in the paper! Can you afford to have only one check before a web item is posted, or can you put similar checking structures in place while still ensuring speed?

Finding solutions

Multi-media and multiple platforms are changing the lives of journalists. Some will respond positively, realising they must adapt and learn to further their careers; others will want to stick to the job they applied for in the first place.

Some of these issues need to be nego-tiated with your staff as a whole, some with unions and some with individuals. And some can be resolved by good com-munication, consultation, training, guidelines, planning and structuring the work.   – *Elizabeth Barratt*

What is this 'churnalism'?

It is not journalism.

It is the rapid recyling of information which is not properly verified, often due to the pressure on journalists to produce reports at great speed ... or to a lack of will to stick to personal and ethical choices.

In its most negative form, it is the prac-tice of regurgitating material, rapidly and under pressure, from outside sources with-out checking, corroborating or investigating.

In his book "*Flat earth news*", British National Union of Journalists (NUJ) member and *Guardian* freelancer Nick Davies writes that most UK journalists do not research or check information back against **original** sources – especially in regard to the Iraq war. They use second-hand material: stuff already published by others, thereby some-times republishing lies, manipulation, or propaganda.

In South Africa this cannot yet be blamed on the pressures of internet report-ing, but it was seen in how the media mass-reported the incorrect fact that Judge Hilary Squires had said there was a "generally cor-rupt relationship" between Schabir Shaik and Jacob Zuma.

Unless editors are vigilant, there will be many more such problems – exacerbated by the pressures of 24/7 publishing. This is a clear case of where change can threaten important editorial values, unless media leaders underline the importance of the jour-nalistic standards that need preserving.

"We don't hire editors any more,
we hire content strategists.**"**

– Jack Griffin, president of Meredith Publishing, in keynote speech at
the 2008 FOLIO: Publishing Summit (February 21 2008).