

Newspapers: Here Today, Here Tomorrow

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Amanda Clark graduated from East Carolina University in December 2002. Though she received her Bachelor's Degree in English, she minored in journalism and went on to pursue a career in the journalism field.

Amanda began her journalism career in May 2003 with a staff writer position at The Times-Leader, a small, weekly newspaper in Grifton, North Carolina. In just one year, Amanda was promoted to Managing Editor. She remained in that position until March 2006, where she accepted a position at The Nashville Graphic in Nashville, North Carolina.

Today, Amanda still works for The Nashville Graphic, where she covers a variety of events. She is also pursuing a Certificate in Technology and Communication from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she will finish in Spring 2008.

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“Newspapers cannot be defined by the second word -- paper.
They’ve got to be defined by the first word -- news.”
New York Times publisher Arthur Sulzberg, Jr.

INTRODUCTION

Newspapers have been a source of information for citizens for many centuries. Their demise has been predicted multiple times but each time, newspapers have come out on top. With the introduction of the internet, newspapers now have one more obstacle to overcome. This time, however, some predict newspapers won’t survive and will soon become a thing of the past.

The Internet has created multiple facets of competition for newspapers, from blogs and social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook, to advertising sites such as Craigslist. Younger generations are turning more towards online news and in the process, pushing away the printed version of the newspaper. To stay alive and in the homes, newspapers are looking at new and different ways of evolving into this technology era.

HISTORY

The newspaper has been around for a long time. Citizens have long used print media to get news and information out to their fellow man.

Historians date the first newspaper back to 59 B.C., when the Roman *Acta Diurna* appeared. This newspaper came about after Julius Caesar wanted the public to know about important social and political happenings (History, 1). The *Acta Diurna* wasn’t actually printed on news print. Instead, news was written on a large white board which was displayed in popular places.

Different forms of newspapers evolved over the years, with the first printed one said to have been in Germany in the late 1400’s (Brief History, 1). This news came out on pamphlets and was often sensationalized reports (Brief History, 1).

In America, the first successful newspaper was the *Boston News-Letter*, which was published in 1704 by postmaster John Campbell (Brief History, 2). The newspaper came out just once, after being subsidized by the government. In the 1720’s two more newspapers appeared, in New York and Philadelphia (Brief History, 2).

Following the Revolutionary War, there were 43 newspapers in print. By 1814, there were over 300 newspapers and in 1880, over 11,000 newspapers were recorded (Brief History, 2-3)

The invention of the telegraph in 1844 caused an explosion of newspapers. Print media could be transferred in just minutes after being reported. Getting the news out became a quick and easy thing to do, by early standards. By the mid-19th Century, newspapers had become the primary means of getting and receiving information (History, 2).

EARLY COMPETITION

During the earlier days of newspapers, local governments tried to keep newspapers from printing. Some of the first newspapers printed just once because of this suppression. In the end, newspapers overcame the suppression and expanded. However, in the 1920's, newspapers faced another obstacle: the radio.

Broadcast radio quickly became a hit in the 1920's and as a result, a direct competition for newspapers. (History, 2-3). Before, newspapers had been the public's only source of information. The development of the radio forced newspapers to take a step back and reevaluate their methods. Many newspapers revamped their paper's format to try to broaden its appeal. Stories were also expanded to provide more in depth coverage (History, 3).

Newspapers faced yet another obstacle, and competition, with the introduction of television. Television became an even tougher competition for newspapers and circulation in newspapers dropped between 1940 and 1990. (History, 3). Despite the decline in circulation, newspapers remained active. To fight the competition, newspapers began using color and "short, quick to the point" stories. (History, 3). However, even with the competition, newspapers remained a vital part of society.

A GREATER CHALLENGE

Today, newspapers are faced with an even greater challenge with the Internet. The Internet has created a place where a plethora of information can be found. Thousands of Americans have their own web sites today and just as many have their own blogs.

The Internet provides an immediacy that print newspapers cannot. That immediacy is causing many newspapers to take yet another step back and see how they can compete. For many, that competition has caused them to simply join in and create their own online content.

Many newspapers today have their own websites. But online, newspapers cannot seem to gain the revenue they do in print. This has caused many larger newspapers to shrink in size.

The New York Times has shrunk in pages and in January, The Wall Street Journal will shrink to 12 inches wide, from its original 15 inches.(Schwartz, 1).

In “Newspaper Companies Put the Squeeze on Print; Dailies Trim Sizes, Shift Content Online,” Matthew Schwartz predicts the decline in circulation and size may be a sign of a doomed future for newspapers (1).

“With declining circulation, a relatively flat ad market and sluggish stock prices, some analysts say the writing is on the wall for newspaper companies. In an increasingly digital age, newspapers must decide what content is better suited for online than print” (Schwartz, 1).

Even journalism professionals are predicting the demise of newspapers. Phillip Meyer, a journalism professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is just one of the skeptics. In his book, “The Vanishing Newspaper,” Meyer predicts that in 2043, newspapers will cease to exist (Who killed..., 1).

Meyers also adds that to combat the problem, newspapers are raising costs. “Meyer points to a business theory that says ‘when a new technology comes along to replace you, and you can’t think of any other way to fight it, the only way is to increase prices, reduce quality and take as much money out of the company as you can’” (Dotinga, 2).

In “Who Killed the Newspaper?; The Future of Newspapers,” newspapers are cutting costs as well as jobs. “Newspapers have not yet started to shut down in large numbers, but it is only a matter of time. Over the next few decades, half the world’s general papers may fold” (1).

NOT WITHOUT A FIGHT

Newspapers aren’t just sitting back and watching. Many have stepped up and tried to jump on the Internet bandwagon to attract, and keep, its younger readers. Many have employed the controversial citizen journalism concept, allowing everyday citizens to provide input into news coverage. And many journalists have their own blogs as well.

Newspapers are also using the Internet to their advantage by offering news both online and in print. Though online news has created a decrease in revenue for advertising, newspapers are finding ways to compete with its Internet counterpart.

SOLUTIONS

There are many suggestions newspapers could follow when looking for a way to stay alive. Most suggestions center on newspapers trying to use the Internet to its advantage instead of looking at the web as a direct competition.

MySpace and Facebook are two popular social networking sites that could be, and are, utilized by newspapers. Reporters are already using these sites to find out background information about their story subjects. More and more people are living their lives online and doing so, providing another tool for journalists to employ.

“The sites may change, but social networking is here to stay and so is its place in a reporter’s toolbox,” Brian Houston said in “Found in MySpace.” (Spencer 38).

Others suggest smaller, local newspapers will take over the future of news. In “The Future of News is ‘small,’” Max Kalehoff state that “It all comes down to trust and accessibility” (1).

CONCLUSION

Larger newspapers have lost a lot of trust by its citizens with the plagiarizing that has been uncovered over the years (Dotinga, 1). People no longer trust journalists and that definitely needs to change. Making news that people can trust is a key for newspapers to succeed. And making news better than before is also important.

Yes, newspapers are struggling. But struggling isn’t a new concept for newspapers. They struggled when radio was introduced, they again struggled with the introduction of television and now, they will struggle to keep alive during the Internet age. Many predict they won’t survive but there are many more who predict, with some changes, newspapers will be just fine.

So, as for the future of newspapers, it’s not bleak. In fact, it’s quite the opposite. But for newspapers to survive, and thrive, they will have to jump on the technology bandwagon but also keep their print editions just as strong, if not stronger, to attract an audience. In the end, even in 2043, newspapers will still be here. They’ll just be a little different.

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