

The Future of Online Newspapers

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The Future of Online Newspapers

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Frederick Zarndt, Global Connexions:

So, my job is easy. I'm going to introduce everyone and sit down and stay out of the way. I'll start by introducing myself. I'm Frederick Zarndt. Why am I here? I'm a software engineer and physicist by training. I've spent 30 plus years developing software, the last 10 of which have been software for digitization and workflow, and much of the digitization that we do is newspaper digitization. Hence I know all of these folks from elsewhere. I'll start by introducing Chris Cowan, who is on his way. Chris is the vice president of publishing at ProQuest for the past 11 years. He was in charge of ProQuest's Historical Newspaper project and is currently in charge of their genealogical businesses as well. He spent time before joining ProQuest in the information and publishing industry, including a length of time with the Thompson and Cox newspapers.

Chuck Palsho is the President of NewsBank Media Services. He arrived here yesterday after six days without power because of a snowstorm in Connecticut. Debora Cheney is the Larry and Ellen Foster Communications Librarian at Pennsylvania State University. She's spent 16 years managing the library, microfilms library, news library, and she teaches communication and journalism and social studies majors how to use their information services. Debora I see quite frequently at the IFLA Newspaper Section conferences where she presented a number of papers, and when she heard that Chuck was without power for six days, she told a story that 10 years ago about the same time of year, Pennsylvania had a snowstorm. They were caught without power. Many families had to move out of their homes into hotels and they were kicked out of their hotels, or invited to leave the hotels, because of the Pennsylvania State football game which was planned to continue, without power. So please, Debora.

Debora Cheney, The Pennsylvania State University:

Libraries have long played a significant role in collecting and preserving historical newspapers. But today many librarians are confused about what role libraries, specifically, their own library, can and should play in collecting, preserving, and providing access to news content and newspapers. Today, we hear a great deal from the news industry about news readers—whether (or not) they are reading the news; what forms (online, television, print) they prefer; and what exactly do they prefer to read (local, national, international, sports, front page, etc.). The news industry, however, is much less concerned with the long-term and ongoing needs of news researchers.

In today's information environment, libraries can seem to be irrelevant to the news research process and to the preservation of news content, as news appears to be freely available all around us. Yet, librarians know that only when researchers want yesterday's or last year's news does the disconnect between readers' and researchers' needs become apparent. Libraries still play vital role in ensuring news researchers have access to the news content they need. Unless libraries take responsibility for these roles, it is likely that today's news content will be less accessible to tomorrow's researchers. However, before libraries can begin to think about the role libraries will play in preserving today's news content, they must first understand what forces and trends are taking place in the news industry.

Changes in News Content Creation and Distribution

Changes in Content

- "Newspapers" are giving way to "news content" as the news environment and news formats become increasingly complex and virtual (increasingly, much news content will never be

available in printed format); in addition, news content also includes more visual elements—photos and video, for example.

- News content is becoming more observational, rather than journalistic style reporting; citizen journalists, cell phone video, Twitter, and blogs are being used to generate news as it happens; such news forms will both drive news reporting and masquerade as news.
- New distribution models are being created and readers will no longer rely on just a few major established news companies; news will be generated through hyperlocal news sites and *ProPublica* models, and many more new and developing models.
- Overall there is less original reported news and more website news aggregators (*Google News*; *Huffington Post* and *Slate.com*); this blurs the distinction between who creates the news and who provides access to the news; many readers will no longer know or be able to tell the difference between an aggregator and a news agency; this will present challenges as we assist researchers in locating and using news content for research.

Changes in Delivery and Access

- More paywalls/pay-per-view will be established; already there is less free news content on the Internet; researchers will be surprised by this and the libraries will be an alternative source for fee-based content.
- News is now more immediate—(i.e., we now live in a minute-by-minute news cycle, especially for major news events).
- News content will be delivered to readers based on their expectations and requests, not as a pre-determined “package” (i.e., the newspaper); users increasingly expect the news to come to and find them based on their preferences and interests and preferred delivery model.
- News publishers/providers of every size will continue to try to find ways to “monetize” their content—this will result in some newspaper’s content becoming less accessible in aggregator databases. Example: while more local news is being reported in local newspapers, it is likely much of this reporting will be less “freely” accessible, even in aggregators.

Impact of These Trends on Libraries

In the past, libraries dealt with a single print object. And while newspapers were ephemeral in nature and some found their content questionable and of little value, these objects could be saved, micro-filmed, scanned, and digitized. Over time, these historical newspapers have become a valuable part of many library collections for a wide range of research. Today, what constitutes the news is less clear—there are more sources for and streams for news; the news comes in more varied formats; and we are less able to capture and preserve all of this news because there is no longer a single object to capture or save.

Such is our challenge today that much news content is born-digital, not as a digital object, but rather as a series of digital streams from disparate sources and in many forms and formats. As in the past, some of us may find portions of this content questionable and of little value; we may question the its editorial quality; and we may prefer print forms to digital forms; but, regardless of what we think about the form and the content of today’s news, it does represent cultural norms and original forms of reporting just as the non-news parts of the newspaper of the near past.

How libraries can begin to preserve today’s digital news content for tomorrow’s researchers continues to be challenge for libraries and the news industry. A recent report *Preserving News in the Digital Environment: Mapping the Newspaper Industry in Transition* (Center for Research Library, 2011; available at: http://www.crl.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/pages/LCreport_final.pdf) demonstrated the complexity of the newspaper production process. With the help of this report, it is very evident that scraping or harvesting news webpages will not provide immediate solutions due to a wide range of copyright and technology issues.

How Libraries Should Respond to this New News Environment

For the future, libraries must begin to change most of our assumptions about providing access to and preserving news content and develop new approaches which will prove as effective at preserving

news content which is born-digital in many different forms and formats and from many, many different sources. For example:

Whether Microfilm

For most of today's news content (as distinct from newspapers), microfilm serves no preservation role. However, microfilm is capturing the last vestiges of the print newspaper and it is the only preservation media in the absence of a news deposit law or other large-scale non-industry based preservation efforts. However, libraries and librarians must not delude themselves into thinking that because we are keeping microfilm we are keeping all of the news content that we may need in the future.

Whether Aggregator Databases

Libraries have been loath to consider news aggregator databases as part of a long-term access strategy. Yet, whether libraries should rely on aggregator databases for long-term access to newspapers and news content has already been largely decided by the nature of today's news content. Libraries must be prepared to move almost entirely too online forms as soon as they become viable for a wide range of news content. It is clear that newspaper databases can provide access to a great deal of news content for the last 10 to 15 years that we do not have in academic libraries in any other format.

Conclusion: Act Local, Think Global

The coming years will continue to bring change to the news industry and libraries will need to re-think, re-position, and possibly re-invent their role, collections and services in this changing news information environment. Until libraries develop a long-term preservation plan for born-digital news content we must work collaboratively—with database vendors, with news publishers or news content providers, and with other libraries—to address this lapse. As we work within our libraries, we can no longer afford, in every sense of the word, to collect news resources just in case we will need them. We must use a local patron driven model for selecting and providing access to news content and focus on more providing access and less on ownership. We need to streamline our collections retaining the

most unique parts. We need to fully understand what news is being used regularly by our users within our aggregator databases. And we must create relationships with local newspapers in an effort to help them understand the role libraries can play in improving and providing access to their content.

As we think globally, we must stay up to date on research trends: what types of research methods are new faculty and graduate students, in particular, using which require news content, and make and adjust our collection decisions accordingly. We must become advocates for preserving news content in our libraries and in the profession. We must, as a profession, stay informed of trends in the news industry and what is being preserved for ongoing access. As libraries we must communicate fully with database vendors and press them to develop new purchasing and access models to create news content. As a profession, we need to also begin to think, plan and implement strategies to preserve born-digital news content if we plan to have it for our users in the future.

In the future, library news collections will be focused on local needs and interests; they will rely more on database aggregators; and focus more on access rather than ownership. Libraries will become an important source for access to news only available behind pay walls or no longer available on the Internet. And, finally, libraries will provide important supporting news research and reference services as well as play a role in teaching students the critical thinking skills required of a complex news environment.

Chuck Palsho, NewsBank:

When I first learned I might be coming to Charleston, I was quite excited; that was two months ago. After three days of no heat or running water, I got more and more excited. I was feeling bad—my wife kept asking me if I really had to go to this conference as it was getting colder and colder in the house, and luckily the power came on yesterday and I was able to leave them in warmth and with running water.

All news is local. I've been with NewsBank for 17, going on 18 years, and I've just been in the licensing end of it for the last four or five years. If I use this example of a freak snowstorm in Connecticut this past week, and throughout New England, that was real local news for us; that was important news. My kids are eight and twelve, and they got to see snow before Halloween; they got to live for six days without power; they had Halloween canceled. That is a lifetime memory event: the town canceled Halloween and is moving Halloween to Saturday. There is another group of folks who are protesting that, but that is a different issue. This was covered well; we have a great local weekly newspaper with a great website. We also have our own in town online-only newspaper with great coverage. It was covered on the local news channel; they even interviewed my wife as we were filling up our jugs at the town hall. But none of that will be preserved, because none of those organizations have archiving systems. So it will be up to folks like you who want to see that material archived, and folks like us at NewsBank, and Chris at ProQuest, and other vendors, to help harvest that material and to provide a means to archive it where it doesn't look like there will be a means going forward.

So, the figure shows Kermit the Frog who has gotten an x-ray and what Kermit doesn't realize is that there is a human hand inside of him. Now, Debra did a very nice job laying out what the menu will look like for the future of online news, and I thought I would take you for a step back into the kitchen and we can look at what is really happening with the newspapers and news organizations. I travel around the country visiting newspapers and all types of news organizations, so I have a pretty good sense of what they're going through and particularly the challenges they face in putting out their news content, preserving it, and providing it to vendors like NewsBank.

So, a couple of quick items. Trends: What we're going to see is further consolidation and downsizing of papers. We've already seen the bankruptcies, the closings, and the layoffs, over and over again, and I think what we're going to see now is further consolidation of big groups of newspapers that consolidate certain areas of operations. For example, there was a big announcement two weeks ago

about two large totally separate newspaper chains now being run by a common new media company, so that new media company is taking over the operations.

"Daily" no longer means seven times a week. We saw this already with newspapers, such as both the Detroit papers, closing down certain days of operation. They are trying to figure out, and a number of them *have* figured out at this point, that they can exist on a different model; not just the web, but cutting the print. If they can gain 70, 80, or 90% of their ad revenue and still only put out six days a week, they're going to do it. And I think you'll see that go to five days, or three days, or some mix of that. But they are finding that they can keep a certain amount of that ad revenue and they don't have to put out a paper that many days a week. And of course they'll just put more on the websites. A big one is further reduction of the traditional archiving processes and the value in archiving. Over the last five or six years, I've seen layoffs after layoffs where the news librarians that we typically work with are leaving the news organizations. They are being terminated and laid off. That has impact in a couple of ways: Number one, there is nobody tending to those archiving systems out there. Let's say you're a top 100, top 200 newspaper, and traditionally in the past those were mostly the papers that could provide a feed to vendors. They had quite an operation in those newspapers in which they had an archiving staff do enhancement overnight. What that meant was the front end system of the paper would dump an electronic file into an archiving system, and then a news librarian would sit down with the paper and go through it, compar-



ing what was in the paper in the headline and the first paragraph and all the markings, to what ended up in the archive. They would have to do cleanup work, and that's why your data feeds would not get to you until seven in the morning, or eight in the morning, or sometimes a week later or two weeks later. If the archivist went on vacation for a week, we saw weeks where we didn't get a data feed from a paper. Many of those individuals are now gone from the newspapers, so you're losing that cleanup stage. They also would do the indexing for the newspaper, so you would lose that as well for the products in which the indexing came through.

The archiving systems are growing older, so more of this means that there are first-to-web content management systems in which they are not thinking about printing the newspaper. They are thinking about getting the news out to the web, and print is secondary. That brings up its own complexities because you've got blogs, and you've got web articles. What's the difference between a web article and a blog? What are the rights differences? What if there are photos or audio or video associated with the article? Where are the rights?

There's a lot more investment from corporate newspapers and corporate news organizations on mobile and social. In terms of their product lines they are thinking not just print, but print, web, tablet and other mobile devices, and Facebook, and Twitter, and any other social network items. What Facebook is telling the newspapers, and it's true, is that if somebody is linked from an article on Facebook over to the newspaper site, they will go to the newspaper site and spend 3 to 5 more time on that site, and that is rich with newspapers because it would keep those visitors.

Greater use of pay walls, metering and e-commerce nets: I use the term nets because all of these have different purposes. A pay wall simply means you've got to pay to get in. Metering might give you 10 to 20 articles and then you have to pay, but they also have nets out there in which they will appeal to certain groups of users and let them through the net, but other users who want specific areas of content must pay. I think you will also see publishers that simply are not interested in getting their news content out to aggregators. We still see that today with

small newspapers, and some large papers, and certainly some online only news organizations in which their view of the world is that if you want their content you come to their website.

There will be fewer newspapers microfilmed, no doubt. We see this already happening. I've seen it in the last few years. For the newspapers, it is a matter of fact that they don't see the value in having their newspaper microfilmed. They have resources, in the most basic way, they need people to box these up and send them out to the vendors. They don't want to spend that resource. They don't see the value of that microfilm for use internally, and they figured out if they have PDFs, which they're using to print the paper anyway, they'll put the PDFs on the server and use that instead of microfilm.

So, there is a tremendous opportunity to challenge the capture of this new news that's out there, and you know, I wouldn't use the phrase, "if you have a lemon, make lemonade," but in this case there is really an opportunity to go out and get lots of great new news sources. No doubt it is changing, but with the vendors like NewsBank, ProQuest, and others, you're going to rely more and more on them to work with the newspapers, and to work with news organizations to determine how to get that content out. Is it print, is it web, is it blogs, is it PDFs that they have for whatever form they might have?

So you will see a deepened partnership between news providers, news aggregators and news buyers, basically us, trying to determine with the news organizations, as Debora mentioned, to make the best use of all of this new local news content. You will see a strengthened relationship and understanding between the news buyers and the news users, that is, you folks and your users. It is not enough to know that a title, one title or the next, is being used a lot. You're going need to need to know why. Why are they using the Miami Herald if you're in Philadelphia? What are they looking for? And this is an unprecedented opportunity for libraries to bring value to their communities. This is really a great chance for you all to become the experts in news and to demonstrate that value within your organizations. Think of the users out there that are trying to figure out what news sources to use. That is an

excellent opportunity, within the next few years, to bring that value to your organizations and to shepherd those users through this maze. Thank you.

Chris Cowan, ProQuest:

Well, it's really appropriate that at a conference that's entitled *Something's Gotta Give* we're going to talk about an industry that gave. Five years ago it really began to collapse, and so I want to be able to spend my time to talk about the transformation of newspapers. The news world is changing dramatically, and I'll talk about that a bit and give you a business perspective of that. My grandfather was an editor of newspapers in upstate New York. My publishing career began battling newspapers, with local business newspapers, and I got lured away by the newspapers to start new media businesses, and so worked with newspapers, and now the last 11 years I've been allied with them at ProQuest and trying to help them bring their information into the research community. So, I've got news in my blood and I want to talk a little bit about the business of it. The changes that Debora and Chuck have been addressing, you'll hear some common themes there, and then I want to talk a little bit about the impact on research and how libraries should be prepared to respond.

The Transformation of the Newspaper Business and Its Research Impacts

Newspapers have weathered many historical threats. Despite earlier predictions of their demise against “new media” competitors with the emergence radio, broadcast television, and more recently cable news, newspapers adapted, survived, and continued to prosper even while losing market share. The challenge of the internet as a medium for disseminating information, however, is different. In the past ten years, newspapers have been caught in an increasingly intense life and death struggle that is forcing dramatic and lasting change upon the industry.

While newspaper publishers were initially slow to recognize and respond to the emerging online challenges, they are now fully engaged in shifting their business models from a once-a-day printed and delivered product to a continuously publishing digital

online service. There is no clear solution to ensure the future for newspapers, and publishers hurriedly experiment with different business models while simultaneously driving staffing and cost reductions as they shrinking their traditional print business.

These seismic shockwaves rolling through the newspaper industry are changing the nature and even definition of news. These changes will present challenges for the research community and, particularly libraries and the role they play in the future.

**The Nature of Change:
What Was Is Not What Will Be**

Longer term, the days of newspapers as a printed entity are numbered. As the last generation that embraces printed newspapers ages (e.g., baby-boomers), the circulation of print newspapers will continue to decline. There will be limited exceptions to this general trend in developing nations and with a few powerful brand titles; but, the daily print product as an industry will not be a sustainable business. Consequently, news will change in a myriad of ways:

- Online news is transcendent and will incorporate video, audio, and graphic elements in new and valuable ways. News becomes instantaneous, no longer once per day.
- The editorial voice and objectivity of news reporting are being subsumed in a cacophony of “columnists.” Anyone with a keyboard, thumbs, and internet access can become a citizen journalist, an opinion maker, or worse. Self-publishing has been around as long as the printing press; but, tools and apps are making it rampant.
- News now comes from sources no longer under the control of traditional news publishers (i.e., twitter, Facebook, et. al.).
- Professional journalism will still play a role in the future of news; but, it will have to interact and embrace the “non professional.” Beat reporters will become topic reporters and community facilitators. News will be the seed for online communities interested in specific topics.
- Local printed news will disappear relatively rapidly. Community newspapers will soon

be gone and new local online information and community models will emerge.

- Less news will be formally created, edited, and distributed; but, more information, and opinion will be created and passed along.
- Aggregation of news will become simultaneously easier with technology, yet more challenging with the proliferation of news sources. There are major challenges with vetting the quality of news sources.
- As it becomes digital only, news will be recognized for what it always has been, but was obscured in the printed format. At its digital core, news is comprised of discreet units of information. Articles are being dissected into disaggregated units of information. With disassembly of news, researchers will create a fundamental shift in how we understand and utilize news in scholarly pursuits. Technology applications will play a prominent role in how researchers investigate and study the historical news record.
- Newspapers were designed to be consumed daily and then discarded. Publishers did not worry about the legacy and value of news from an historical perspective. Libraries and archives stepped forward to be the preservers of the historical record. As news migrates to the online world, it changes constantly and is discarded even more quickly. Publishers are not maintaining a digital archive that captures everything on their web sites. This lack of permanent archiving creates a void in the historical record.
- News will become a pay-for-access business. While publishers experiment with different commercial models for online news, some form of a paywall will become the norm which will financially challenge researchers wanting accessibility to the information. Advertising will be highly integrated into the content distribution channels and may make its way into library databases.
- The push model of newspapers has become a pull model of end-users controlling the information content they want, when, where, and how they want to consume it.

The Change in News and the Impact upon Research

As the form, function and nature of News rapidly evolves, how do libraries maximize the research value of News and how can they stay relevant in meeting the research needs of the future?

- Content will still be king; but, it will be harder to sift through, identify, and evaluate for its quality. Libraries will need to stay vigilant in providing their researchers with the key news content to support scholarly study.
- Social media challenges our perspective about value of news. End users reactions to and utilization of news create a new source of valuable information for scholarly study. This social media development leads to a rapid acceleration in volume of content and presents major challenges for libraries about how to archive, research and evaluate the information.
- News is highly end-user centric to be utilized when, where, and how the end-user desires. Libraries will need to provide access for their end-users that aligns with their consumption behavior or risk losing relevance.
- News is already highly mobile and will be more so in the future. News will require instantaneous distribution of the latest news as it is being reported while still providing researchers the ability to plumb deep archives.
- Tools for researchers will be more important and require more sophistication and functionality. As the volume of information expands, tools to make it comprehensible, usable and insightful will take on a greater role. Data and text mining, semantic analysis, relational and visualization, interactivity, sharing, etc. will be required for researchers in the future. How libraries facilitate this research will play a major role in the value they provide scholars in the future.

Conclusion

Just as every part of the creation, distribution, consumption and analysis of news is being technologi-

cally challenged and transformed, libraries will also be challenged in addressing researchers' needs for news. Libraries cannot stay relevant unless they are also embracing the changes. The news transfor-

mation, moreover, is providing a unique opportunity for libraries that are attuned to their end-users to become more meaningful and valued in the research community.