

SUMMER 2009

INTELLIGENT DIALOGUE:  
**THE FUTURE  
OF NEWS**

Miss a day. Miss a lot.

**“What?”**

PORTER  
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Human Intelligence.  
Real Influence.

# INTRODUCTION

**THANKS TO THE INTERNET,** everyone's a journalist. Or are they? We all certainly have the tools to get our message out, whatever that may be. But does such access make us a new type of journalist? What does the future hold for a profession if anyone can take it up whenever they choose?

Your next-door neighbor may be a big fan of "Law & Order." But would you ask him to draw up legal documents for you? Or say your nephew is a whiz with a crayon and can build one hell of a LEGO mansion. Would you hand over drafting duties for your garage addition? Or maybe you are worried about recurrent pain in your stomach. Would you be satisfied with a diagnosis from your hypochondriac office mate?

There's no talk of "citizen lawyers" or "citizen architects" or "citizen doctors." Yet plenty of lip service is paid to "citizen journalists" these days. The implication is clear. There's no need to spend time working toward a journalism degree, or climbing the newsroom ladder to learn the trade. Via the Internet, anybody can disseminate a story. Anyone can latch onto a piece of gossip or a shocking photo, slap on a sensational headline and send it far

and wide. Anyone can read a piece of news, dash off a diatribe about the issue and share it with the world. But does that make them journalists? What of reporting standards, writing skills, source-vetting, libel laws, professional ethics, fact-checking guidelines, copy editing styles—the traditional building blocks of journalism? Will some of those tenets be set aside in the future? From a reporting perspective, what's the difference between an experienced photojournalist on the streets of Tehran and a protester with a camera phone and a Twitter account? Can they exist in harmony?

It's an idea whose time has come. Grassroots citizen reporting and everyman commentary via social media and blogs are a fact of life. In some cases there's an editorial process in place. For example the pioneering OhmyNews, based in South Korea, gathers reports from international "citizen" contributors but employs a trained editing staff to fulfill many of the traditional functions of a news organization. OhmyNews has been a critical and popular, if not financial, success, since its launch in 2002. The business model is struggling however, and a second outpost, in Japan, has been shuttered.

Then there's Twitter, where anybody can post whatever news they want straight onto the update stream as long as it's no longer than 140 characters. Yet despite its extreme popularity, it has no revenue model in place.

How does all this affect traditional news organizations? Until recently, their core offerings were pretty standard and familiar; journalists working with established processes delivering news to the public in printed or broadcast form. So what purpose do those organizations serve when on-the-spot citizen journalists get the scoops and feed them into interactive media instantly and for free? What happens to news as we knew it when traditional news organizations' advertising revenue and audiences are going online?

Over the past nine months nations around the world have watched in bewilderment as the automotive industry faces a massive contraction in demand that's affecting hundreds of thousands of jobs and shareholders. Over a longer period, in the background, the news industry has been facing its own slow-motion pileup. In this edition of Intelligent Dialogue we look at some of the key themes of one overarching question: What is the future of news?



SIGHTINGS  
from the  
ZEITGEIST

It's disruptive to business models, which is always terrifying to people in high-margin businesses. While the ability of anyone to be a journalist—and attract an audience—is noteworthy in itself, the serious threat is a financial one. And not because of digital copying or other such stuff. It's the erosion of the advertising model that has supported journalism for so long. —DAN GILLMOR, author, "We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People"





# WHAT IS THE STATE OF NEWS TODAY?

**IT'S WHEN UNDENIABLE** change hits, like now, that we get around to asking fundamental questions about the things we take for granted.

Old patterns of news consumption have irrevocably shifted: Print newspapers and magazines are struggling and folding by the dozen; audiences for traditional TV newscasts are drifting away. And that pace will only quicken as Digital Natives (who came of age reading news and watching “TV” online) populate more and more of the media market and become key decision makers. A few nostalgic members of our old-media guard will surely survive this downturn, but they will no longer be the major players they once were. So, getting down to brass tacks, what is “news” now?

Ordinary news consumers may not give the question too much thought. They simply want what they want when they want it. News industry professionals, academics and news addicts are more likely to have their own answers, ranging from idealistic (“information and an accurate account of events”) to bottom-line

(“content that attracts consumers’ attention and advertisers’ budgets”).

## > HAS NEWS BECOME A PRODUCT?

It’s a sign of the times that readers or viewers of the news are commonly thought of as “consumers.” And while journalists may not readily accept this growing perspective, they certainly have some idea of whom they’re serving. News purveyors have always been more or less aware of their typical audience profile. Some of the more populist titles have prospered by having a sharp sense of what their audience wants and delivering it; while loftier organizations have employed a “know-better” attitude and given the audience “what’s good for them.”



[Listen to your newspaper.]

**SIGHTINGS**  
from the  
ZEITGEIST

Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. —THOMAS JEFFERSON

However, as competition has grown and the influence of marketing has spread, media organizations have increasingly come around—willingly or otherwise—to thinking of their titles as larger brands and their audience as consumers. They have engaged brand consultants, conducted market research and paid ever more attention to what “plays” in an effort to increase their appeal.

## > HAS NEWS BEEN CONSUMERIZED AND DUMBED DOWN?

Some traditional outlets still cover news with a “long-form” approach, spending time (and money) producing pieces that require time and attention from a reader or viewer; this is especially true of heavyweight newspapers that see themselves as being standard bearers for their industry, such as the Financial Times, Le Monde in France, El País in Spain, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung in Germany, La Repubblica in Italy and the Volkskrant and NRC Handelsblad in the Netherlands.



They have shifted somewhat, with the addition of lifestyle pieces, Web presences and even iPhone apps (Le Monde, El País, de Volkskrant, La Repubblica). Even publications as highbrow as The Economist get playful with punny headlines and captions, not to mention that magazine’s semi-serious Big Mac Index and Burgeronomics.

But they are still demanding reads. And how much detail are readers willing or even able to absorb anymore, whether it’s current national politics or environmental issues, let alone treaty negotiations or long-running border disputes? How interested are they? Should they be interested?

Many providers have decided content needs to be “sexed up” with sensationalized angles (the Rupert Murdoch-ization of news). Short, punchy news moments are interspersed with lighter lifestyle spots to keep viewers entertained (descendants of USA Today, which has been nicknamed the “McPaper” since birth). Even the venerable BBC, Britain’s public service broadcaster, has come under fire for



dumbing down its content in pursuit of ratings, taking a more populist approach.

A quick glance at newsstands and TV schedules confirms that consumers have an insatiable appetite for celebrities and human-interest stories. News coverage of the controversial Iranian elections and street protests had begun to die down until the murder of a pretty 20-something woman, Neda, was caught on camera and video and broadcast worldwide, putting a captivating and tragic face on the events. News and social networking traffic spiked. Then Michael Jackson died and the world’s media suddenly switched gears. The news of the King of Pop’s shocking end triggered massive surges in both traditional media and new media traffic. Security and media analysts were concerned that the sudden loss of attention could give Iranian authorities the chance to crack down more heavily on opposition.



While news pros have always known that a story plays better when given a personal focus, has celebrity culture ever been so dominant? Maybe the easy, immediate access to breaking news amplifies our desire for it. But across the board, in print, on TV and online, celebrities sell.

## > IS DUMBING DOWN A GLOBAL ISSUE?

Looking outside the English-speaking world in which News Corporation's influence and uber-commercial sensibility is so strongly felt, the dumbing down of news is less pronounced. It's striking that even the most downmarket, mass-appeal titles in continental Europe feel far more subdued than their counterparts in the U.S. or the U.K.

Are consumers in those countries really less interested in pictures of pouting celebrities or stories of sexual shenanigans and greedy executives? What about school shootings, swine flu, serial killers and terrorists (all serious subjects yet ripe for screaming tabloid headlines)?

Or is it that "serious" news is still taken more seriously in countries that have a history of authoritarian government (Germany, Italy, Spain, former Communist countries)?

Porter Novelli China President John Orme observes that in China, the media's role is seen to be a social and political one (spreading information and knowledge rather than creating and selling stories for commercial purposes). Might this be a positive avenue to pursue for countries in which commercially produced news is becoming devalued and publishers and journalists are losing public trust?

In the Arab and Muslim worlds, investments in new technologies are increasing access to transnational television and Internet news and opinions that simply weren't there before, reports the

magazine of the European Journalism Centre. At a conference held last year by the Centre for Arab and Muslim Media Research (CAMMRO), researchers discussed how political news is currently covered only "superficially" by Arab



commercial satellite broadcasters—much of mass media in the region is entertainment-focused and ad-revenue driven, similar to the West. Yet entertainment programming does promote audience participation (call-in shows or text-in votes), empowering citizens to make their voices heard. That desire to engage and share opinions will likely filter into other areas of interest besides celebrity, and audiences will begin to demand it. Already tech-savvy Saudis and Egyptians are bypassing official controls to express their opinions.

## > SHOULDN'T NEWS ULTIMATELY SERVE THE COMMON GOOD?

Worldwide we see public ambivalence about journalists and reporters. In the U.S., there's a long-standing complaint about the media's "liberal" bias. In the U.K., critics cry "checkbook journalism" and newspapers publish titillating stories citing "public interest"; even the BBC is accused of having an institutional liberal bias. Other countries are also wary of press misreporting or misrepresenting the facts. Yet the traditional ethos of the journalism profession is more about exposing lies than inventing them. It's about discovering and reporting stories that matter. It's about finding and telling the truth.

Some journalists get the chance to do that and make big money; some decide

ethos is less important than the money. And most ply their trade as best they can.

Can we trust that market forces and consumer demand will continue to generate the cash that news organizations need to do their work? After 30 years of "free market triumphalism," there's a mood of market skepticism; in many areas of life (finance, health care, environment), free markets alone don't necessarily serve the common good. Actions that are beneficial in the short term to an individual or to a corporation may ultimately damage its fabric.

The most prestigious schools of journalism and news organizations inculcate the principle that journalists and reporters serve a much higher purpose than providing info-tainment and filling the space between advertisements. The ethos is embodied in the annual prize given by the French-based organization Reporters Without Borders: "This award honors a journalist who, by work, attitude or principled stands, has shown strong belief in press freedom, a media outlet that exemplifies the battle for the right to inform the public and to be informed, a defender of press freedom and a cyber-dissident spearheading freedom of expression online." Whatever other purposes news serves, in a world of complex issues and difficult decisions, news has a vital role to play; how else can citizens/voters/consumers make informed decisions about matters of common interest?

This is certainly the view of The International Center for Journalists, based in Washington, D.C. It describes itself as a nonprofit professional organization that promotes quality journalism worldwide in the





belief that independent, vigorous media are crucial in improving the human condition.

## ➤ WHAT'S THE JOB OF A JOURNALIST TODAY?

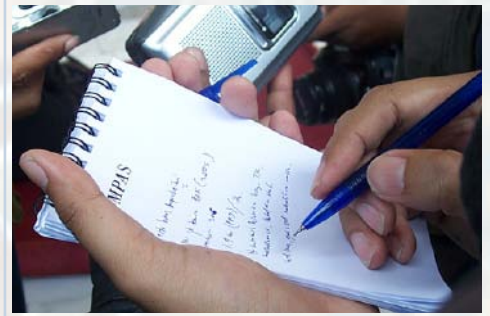
For many journalists, it's a bitter question; staff posts are being cut, experienced journalists are being laid off and the prospects for up-and-comers in established news organizations look grim. Experienced professionals talking to journalism school students find it daunting to tell them honestly just what faces them out there.

According to American Society of News Editors figures, U.S. daily newspapers shed 5,900 newsroom jobs in 2008, reducing employment of journalists by 11.3 percent to the levels of the early 1980s. In the U.K., the picture is similar; the National Union of Journalists reports 903 confirmed editorial layoffs in the regional press alone between July 2008 and March 2009.



In the past, journalists could focus on gathering the facts and assembling them coherently for editors to process and publish. Journalists didn't have to think about attracting an audience or understanding distribution; that was the job of the company that paid them. But as media titles themselves are struggling to retain existing audiences and reach new ones, journalists can no longer rely on them for exposure or pay. This issue was highlighted in a live discussion on "The Digital Future" hosted by the Guardian in the U.K.—itself a pioneer in opening its API (application programming interface) to Web developers.

According to multimedia tech journalist Robert Scoble: "Old journalists didn't have to worry about ... how their news or their words or their TV or their radio was going to get heard by people. If you're online, you really have to work at getting distribution, at getting people to pay attention to you. And that's a different skill than a lot of old-school journalists have." Veteran BBC journalist Rory Cellan-Jones noted a big change in skill sets of



younger journalists: "What impresses me is that there's a whole new generation of students coming out of universities who've got three times as many skills as I ever had. People are learning to adapt very fast. I'm meeting twentysomething journalists who can blog, create a Web site, shoot video, do audio and write."

Whatever the "higher purpose" of journalists may be going forward, the job of journalists is to create content in forms that attract and connect with audiences. They may deliver their content through established news outlets, or they may create their own news outlets. That may sound like a tall order, but most of today's established media started small too.

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# WHAT'S THE NEW NEWS BUSINESS MODEL?



**> IS IT POSSIBLE FOR A MODERN DEMOCRACY AND MARKET ECONOMY TO OPERATE PROPERLY WITHOUT RELIABLE SOURCES OF NEWS?**

There's a good case for arguing that news is a necessary utility, as much as water, power and garbage disposal. Democracy is based on the principle of informed citizens voting on issues that affect vital aspects of life. Could citizens be properly informed without news?

In the United States, even venerable newspapers have been scaling back operations in order to reduce costs, limiting their ability to provide their own in-depth investigations. In other countries, the pressures are less intense but the long-term trends still apply. Can news organizations be run as business conglomerates, applying principles as if they were factories? It's a tough call.



On one hand, Australian-born Rupert Murdoch's globe-spanning News Corporation has been doing it for decades. It's an organization run by news industry professionals and it makes money, although the quality of some of its products is often criticized. It encompasses 20 newspaper titles in Australia, several major titles in the U.K. (the Sun, the Times) and the U.S. (the New York Post, the Wall Street Journal), as well as Fox Broadcasting Company in the U.S., Sky Italia in Italy and 39 percent of Sky TV in the U.K.

Another example is Italy's Mediaset (privately owned, by the investment company of Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi), which owns TV stations that command 40 percent of the Italian viewing audience and a major share in TV production company Endemol.

On the other hand, the Tribune Group of property magnate Sam Zell has found the business a lot tougher. In June 2008, the debt-burdened owner of the Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Baltimore Sun and Orlando Sentinel told its newspapers that pages should be reduced to bring the ratio of advertising to editorial pages to 50:50. Six months later, the group filed for bankruptcy protection.

David Simon, former Baltimore Sun journalist and co-creator of HBO's "The Wire," testified to the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee: "When locally based, family-owned newspapers like the Sun were consolidated into publicly owned newspaper chains, an essential dynamic, an essential trust between journalism and the communities served by that journalism was betrayed."

"Economically, the disconnect is now obvious. What do newspaper executives in Los Angeles or Chicago care whether or not readers in Baltimore have a better newspaper, especially when you can make more putting out a mediocre paper than a worthy one? The profit margin was all. And so, where family ownership might have been content with 10 or 15 percent profit, the chains demanded double that and more, and the cutting began—long before the threat of new technology was ever sensed."

One of the big problems for news organizations is that the industry standard online (for readers) is "free"—as in zero cost. This is not just the case with users of

aggregators such as Google News, or public news services such as the BBC or CBC (Canada), which are in effect utilities. With most newspapers and many newsmagazines, consumers have a choice: Either pay the cover price for the printed version, or access the online or mobile version for free. Only a few mainstream news titles such as The Economist and the Wall Street Journal bar full online access without a subscription.

News Corp chairman Murdoch recently said falling print circulations and advertising revenues mean newspapers must begin charging for online content in the near future; readers will only get the main headlines and alerts for free.

## > CAN NEWS ORGANIZATIONS SWITCH TO PAID-ONLY CONTENT?

There's a clear business case for news content originators to charge for their product. The crunch question: How will they make it happen? As it stands, anyone can freely access major news titles in most any language in which they are distributed. If one of those titles decided to go subscription-only, would consumers pay up to access it, or would they just move on to the others? What would make paying the subscription seem worthwhile? Should online access cost less than the print cover price, since there are no printing costs and barely any for distribution?

Common sense suggests that competing news titles can begin charging for content if they all start doing it at the same time and at a similar price point. They will need to limit access to aggregators (such as Google News) to ensure no leaks—although it's a fine line because aggregators also serve to drive traffic back to the news sites. Then they will have to hope that new media services such as Wikinews and OhmyNews don't experience the same sort of rapid maturation that saw Amazon and iTunes overtake brick-and-mortar outlets. And they will have to hope that consumers won't decide that a combination of publicly funded news sources (such as the BBC and NPR), free-distribution services (such as Metro), bloggers and social media don't offer enough between them to rival the quality of paid-for news services. It looks like a long shot.





## > WILL A DEVICE (à la the iPod or Kindle) TURN THE NEWS GAME AROUND?

Through the 1990s and into the 2000s, the music industry saw CD sales fall while online file-sharing soared. For millions of music consumers, there was no contest; buy a whole CD at full price, or grab a few selected tracks online for free? The music industry reeled and couldn't get its act together to provide a worthwhile alternative to illegal file sharing. It took outsider Apple's iPod in late 2001 and the iTunes store in 2003 to break the logjam. It aggregated music catalogs from various corporations in one place, with a pricing model that worked for the copyright owners and for consumers.

The news industry faces similar problems in dealing with the challenge of online. It's not just that consumers are getting content free (though legally free in most cases). In their old-media form, the music industry and the newspaper industry presented a physical package of

items to the consumer—a CD or a newspaper. But online consumers can choose only the pieces of the package they want—a song or a story—and leave the rest. Once consumers have experienced this flexibility, it's unlikely they'll take a step backward and buy the whole package.

Following the iTunes model, what are the chances of a subscription-based aggregator for news? How might it work? Back in the 1990s, PointCast Networks had a hot "push" model—a piece of software that downloaded news content from major players. News Corp offered \$450 million for the service in 1997, but the deal fell through: Bandwidth limitations, intrusive advertising and other problems led to its decline and disappearance. But the time may be right for a third-party player now.

Amazon's Kindle has deals with book publishers and a range of newspapers available for subscription, although only in the United States. The New York Times joined up early; it's reportedly the best-read subscription-based periodical on the current Kindle, charging \$13.99 a month, ahead of the Wall Street Journal, which has reportedly sold 5,000

subscriptions at \$14.99 a month. However, while those prices may amount to less than a few lattes a month for a consumer, will they be low enough to tempt a generation that is used to getting news for free?

In a piece for Wired magazine on the Kindle and the newspaper industry, former publisher of HarperCollins' business books Marion Maneker wondered whether the Kindle or a similar wireless reading device could do for the news



Columnists such as Thomas Friedman (The New York Times) and Jeremy Clarkson (The London Times) are powerful "sub-brands" with their own pulling power; are they on the way to becoming media master brands in their own right? Both have best-selling books to their names. For a narrower but more devoted audience, tech luminary Guy Kawasaki is a bigger and more authoritative media brand than many mainstream titles. He has nine books and more than 150,000 Twitter followers, writes a regular column for Entrepreneur magazine and a biweekly column in Forbes. Virtually any print title or TV channel would make space for a Kawasaki piece if they could get one.



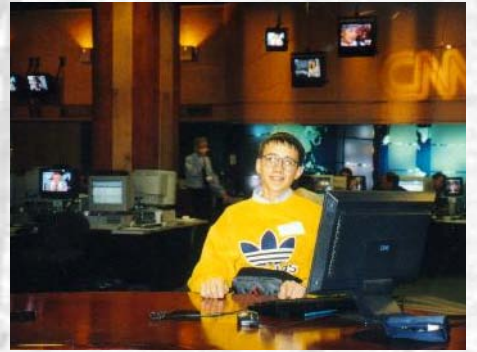
business what DVDs have done for Hollywood; he imagines a scenario where popular pieces in the newspapers are made exclusively available in a longer, more detailed “e-book” format on a wireless reading device.

In his new book, “Free: The Future of a Radical Price,” Chris Anderson (Wired editor in chief and author of “The Long Tail”) says that the digital age is pushing down prices of all digital goods; that means written words, sound and images in particular. He says success will come from using free content to cross-sell and upsell. On the other hand, fellow pundit Malcolm Gladwell pointed out in the New Yorker (in his review of Anderson’s “Free”) that the Wall Street Journal has found one million people willing to pay for an online subscription, and that broadcast TV (free) is struggling while cable TV (paid) is doing well. Gladwell wonders whether Apple

could soon make more money selling iPhone app downloads than it does from the iPhone itself: “Who knows? The only iron law here is ... that the digital age has so transformed the ways in which things are made and sold that there are no iron laws.”

## > HOW DID WE GET FROM AP TO API?

Like the music industry, the news industry faces the problem of how to protect its assets and make money from content that can be copied and distributed infinitely at virtually zero cost. What the news industry has done differently is to make its content legally available online for free. Most news outlets positively encourage consumers to copy, e-mail and link to their content. There’s precious little in it for them apart from keeping their name on the radar and maybe attracting pageviews to keep



advertisers happy. It’s not a money-making proposition.

Some forward-thinking titles have decided to open their API (application programming interface) to lure the entrepreneurial geek community to help them morph into the new news environment. They recognize that people outside the news business can provide new thinking and help them do some of the heavy lifting.

In March, the New York Times announced the long-awaited opening of its





We went round with mobile phones and left our cameraman behind in the car. We got some extraordinary pictures on our mobiles, just like the people of Iran have been doing. —JOHN SIMPSON, BBC world affairs editor





**SIGHTINGS**  
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**ZEITGEIST**

Newspapers as we've known them are doomed. The conditions which supported their business model have disappeared. . . . If experience is a guide, opportunities are more likely to be seized and defined by start-ups than incumbents. . . . New cost structures, new use of tools and infrastructure, new ideas about what content bundles are meaningful will all play a major role in what emerges. —MITCH KAPOR, founder of Lotus Development Corporation







# WHERE DO TARGETED, CUSTOMIZED 24/7 NEWS FEEDS LEAD?

**IN A CRINGE-MAKING** series of interviews with New York Times editors, Jason Jones of news-satire program “The Daily Show” asked, “Why is aged news better than real news?” While deliberately provocative and crass, the point was apt. News delivered on printed paper is at least a day old in a world where the news cycle is 24/7, with several waves breaking each day. What’s more, the whole package of the printed newspaper includes content many readers don’t have the time or inclination to read.

While print struggles, news feeds abound. With so much choice, consumers can pick

and choose the sources most in line with their political leanings, their preferred tone (highbrow, humorous), their interests (sports, technology, health, celebrity).

## > IS NARROWCASTING THE FUTURE OF BROADCASTING?

For anyone used to the big reach of traditional broadcasting, the notion of narrowcasting might seem claustrophobic. As a general rule, reaching a broad audience is better than reaching a narrow

one. But the essence of narrowcasting isn’t so much narrow as targeted. It’s about delivering content to a section of consumers who have actively expressed interest and are most likely to be receptive. There are plenty of ways to do it.

For example, with RSS (Really Simple Syndication), consumers can subscribe to a specific type of news. So they get only the content they want, and they can consume it when they want without worries about spam, phishing and other security issues. RSS content can include text, audio and video, such as podcasts, and can be

delivered to a computer or a personal mobile device. News outlets all over the world offer content via RSS feed. RSS adoption among U.S. consumers was up to 11 percent in 2008 from just 2 percent in 2005. "While more consumers have made a habit of consuming news daily via RSS readers, it's still a pretty geeky individual act," says Stephanie Agresta, global director of digital strategy and social media at Porter Novelli. "The real power of RSS lies in exponential growth via simple, popular social networking platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Friendfeed. You don't have to be a super-geek to become a curator of news using these services. In fact, average users have become citizen editors and the newsstands rolled into one. The ease of commenting and hitting 'thumbs up' has created an ecosystem for content to travel at a much higher velocity to many more people."

The specific technologies that deliver opt-in targeted news are still evolving, but the underlying driver is clearly a long-term trend: consumer control. If readers and viewers have the opportunity and the resources to get what they want and avoid what they don't want, they'll take it. It's human nature, and we see it in the success of everything from remote controls to personalized home pages, from



programmed DVRs to iPods. We even see the urge for control in something as simple as people's choice to drive rather than take public transportation. Narrowcasting and customized news feeds are just another example.

## > WHAT'S NEXT FOR 24/7 NEWS?

For many people, CNN was their first experience of a dedicated news channel with around-the-clock updates. Well into the 1990s, at any hour of the day or night, the channel would recycle stories until new news broke. News channels have proliferated since then, but still it often seems that over the course of a day, there's only so much news happening. There's only so much potential to fill in the gaps with analysis and discussion and speculation regarding what has already happened.

In our hyperconnected environment, chances are someone is reporting what's happening the moment it happens. And in many cases, it's not traditional news organizations that get there first. Celebrity news site TMZ first declared pop icon Michael Jackson's death, citing unnamed, unofficial sources inside UCLA

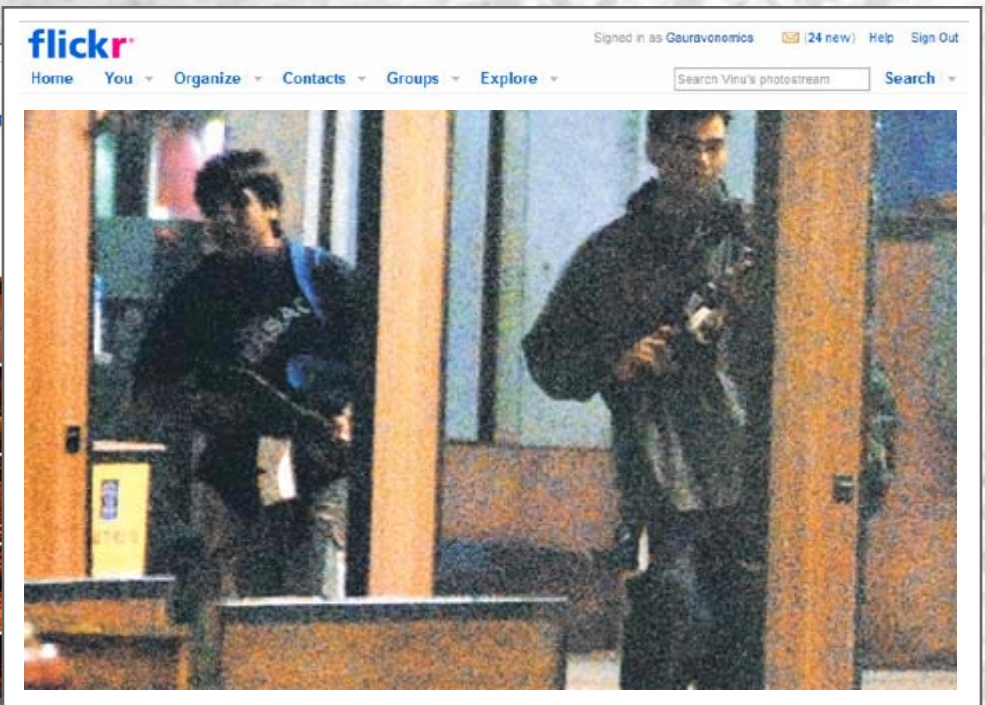


hospital, hours before major news networks confirmed the story via the coroner. By then the Internet was buzzing, with usage overloads reported at TMZ, Twitter, Google News and Wikipedia, among others.

Real breaking news is increasingly the province of citizen journalists too. When gunmen launched terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November 2008 it was Twitter and photo sharing site Flickr that proved to deliver the eyewitness account. And just a couple of months later in January 2009 it was a Twitter user who scooped the first report and photos of the US Airways flight that made an emergency landing in the Hudson River.

No news organization has sufficient in-house resources to be everywhere all the time; in fact many are more likely to be cutting back on presences right now. However, with citizen journalists thick on the ground, news organizations can be





permanently tuned in to where news may break. Before, they had to “watch the wires” (Reuters, AP, AFP) and watch one another closely; now they have to watch social media too. Before, they developed a network of stringers and paid them for tips. Now they have access to a virtually infinite pool of potential stringers via social networks, each with better news-reporting equipment than most official news agencies had a couple of decades ago.

All of this adds up to the rapid emergence of a new news “ecosystem,” with new niches and new species and evolutionary developments. However it’s still not clear what will feed the new ecosystem. In the old one, rivers of advertising brought in floods of cash that enabled organizations to grow; now the rivers are drying up. Species that thrive will be those that can adapt to surviving on less, or those that find new ways of generating sustenance (cash).

Now, distribution is fairly uncontrollable—anyone has access. And it’s not just spies using tiny cameras and dead drops to spread secret information; anybody with a camera phone can copy a document or film an event and send it to one person or thousands in a few seconds. It’s frighteningly easy for confidential memos and e-mails to leak. They can be sent to news organizations, raised in closed special interest forums, posted on individual blogs or exposed on mass social networks such as YouTube.

## > WHAT DOES THE NEW NEWS ECOSYSTEM MEAN FOR PROFESSIONAL INFLUENCERS?

The size of an organization and its wallet no longer guarantees influence.

A big, well-organized and well-funded PR department once set the agenda—it had a good chance of managing the flow of news and opinions. It organized set-piece events, cultivated the right contacts, conducted news briefings and worked the phones. News was fed in well-turned press releases with contact numbers to field any questions. Distribution channels were limited and pretty self-contained.

The challenge for marketers is to understand the nature of the channels and the way information and influence flow through them. The difference between the old news ecosystem and the new one is like the difference between a temperate forest and a tropical jungle: The forest has relatively few species and goes through predictable seasons; the jungle has untold species interacting at a furious pace throughout the year. Like field zoologists, professional influencers in the new tropical news ecosystem have to be constantly on the lookout. For example, the recent Domino’s Pizza case: An offensive video was posted to YouTube by an unhygienic prankster employee. Reaction and chatter spread fast and furious via Facebook and Twitter. The company was quick to act, but the video generated close to a million views before it was taken down. In the tropical news ecosystem, things propagate fast and far.





I do wonder why 24 news channels feel the need to 'sex up' and dumb down their content. Obviously one explanation can be the fact that they must fill the airtime they have allocated. Personally I have little to no interest in watching them pick apart an absurdly and questionably newsworthy topic in a vain attempt to "fill," I would much rather just watch an actual news broadcast 30 minutes in length. Instead I find myself often confused, bewildered and traumatized by the events on my TV screen. —DUMBING DOWN THE NEWS blog





SIGHTINGS  
from the  
ZEITGEIST

Back home in India, things aren't that bad. Circulation and readership numbers may not be galloping and keeping pace with rising literacy, income and urbanization levels, but they haven't dipped dramatically either. ... It is not television alone, but the combined onslaught of television and online media that our newspapers need to worry about. Online offers the immediacy of television and the tradition of print, plus the unique advantages of unlimited space, interactivity and commerce. What changes the equations now is that the Internet is accessible on the go on cell phones, and technology ensures that access levels aren't a pain. —PRADYUMAN MAHESHWARI, group chief editor at exchange4media

# HOW DO NEWS CONSUMERS KNOW WHAT TO BELIEVE?



**EVEN BEFORE THE** explosion of the blogging phenomenon, it wasn't always easy to know whom to trust. Even traditional news organizations can't guarantee 100 percent accuracy. Despite ethics training and editorial process, as well as real risks of legal action and high-dollar punitive damage payouts, unscrupulous reporters do exist (Jayson Blair at the New York Times and The New Republic's Stephen Glass are famous examples). Sometimes an editor's objectivity will falter, or he or she will run a story in order to get attention, especially where politics or celebrity are concerned. Libel damages were recently awarded to



soccer star David Beckham following a front-page report in the U.K.'s Daily Star, and TV personality Sharon Osbourne won damages from The Sun.

In the short term, people may buy more papers, but in the long term, can the publication really retain any more credibility than a citizen journalist with a cell phone?

Add to this, bias. Readers and viewers commonly perceive most any given news source as having an ideological leaning, and therefore



being untrustworthy (if he or she falls at the other end of the spectrum): Conservatives are quick to spot bias in liberal news sources and vice versa. Bias is normal, but ideally there are enough competing outlets to offer a balance; consumers do have access to alternate views if they care to seek them out. However, in countries where free speech is not the



norm, the news media generally toe the government line or risk getting harassed or closed down. Consumers in such countries become adept at reading between the lines and looking for alternative sources to find out what's really happening. Even in "free-speech" countries, traditional news media may fall under the sway of a particular interest group.

In Italy, for example, tycoon turned Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has substantial media interests and exerts a lot of influence on sources outside his direct control. According to Alexander Stille, writing in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, political news on Italian state television (RAI) is required to present the government's point of view, followed by a sound bite or two from the opposition and concluded with a rebuttal from the government. Social scientists have found that Berlusconi's control of the media has been a major factor in gaining votes.

Nevertheless, all news organizations have processes in place to do the best they can to ensure accuracy and integrity of journalists and the news items they produce. The processes may not always work as intended and they may not guarantee balance, but they try. They have a reputation to maintain, from an ethical, legal and commercial (the brand being acceptable to investors or advertisers) perspective.

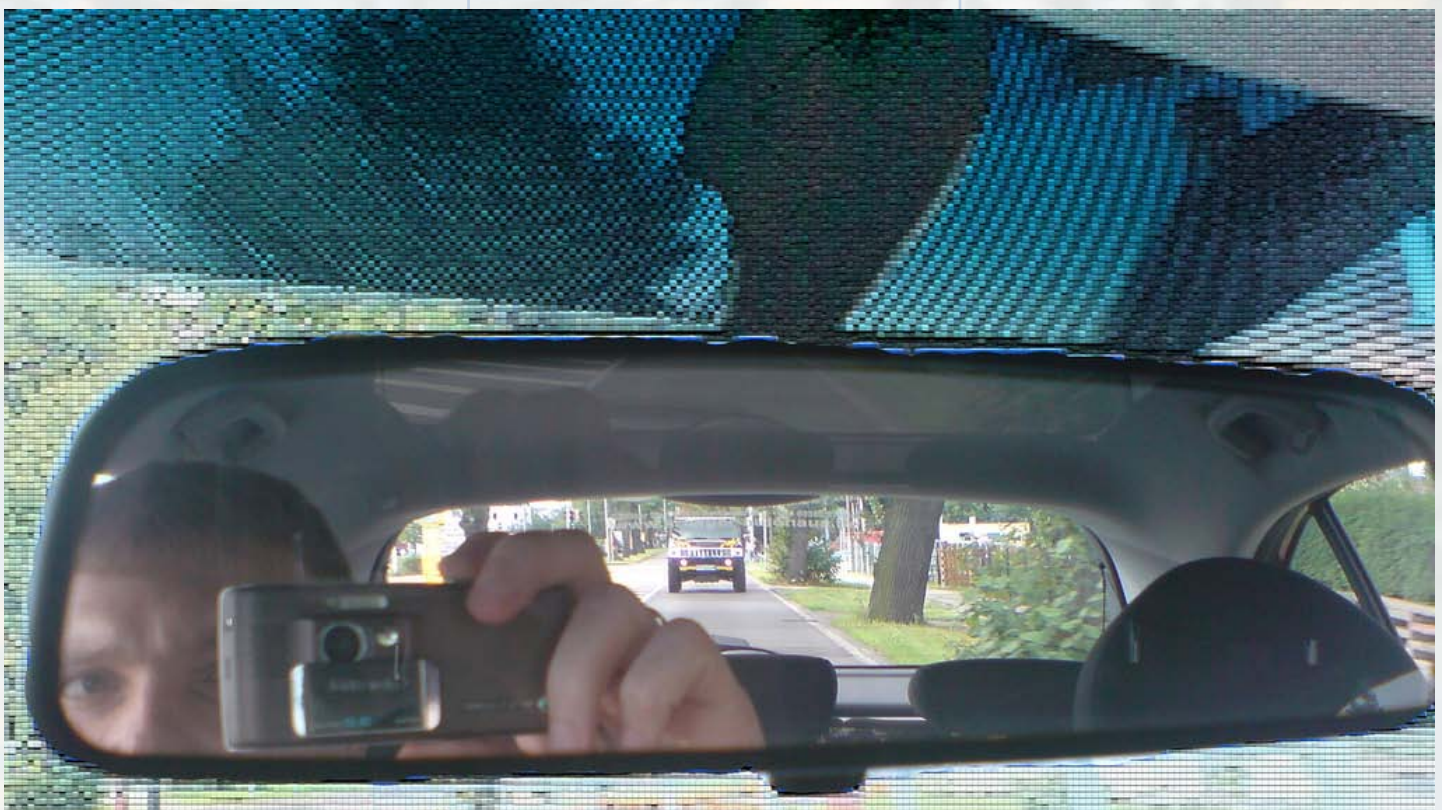
Now the old guard has been joined by waves of user-generated content—countless points of view from right-wingers, left-wingers, paid news and anonymous bloggers who may or may not be guided by their own set of editorial principles. How can a reader judge whom to trust?

In the events that followed the contested election in Iran, Facebook and Twitter became channels for on-the-spot reports from protestors; the White House even asked Twitter to delay planned downtime to avoid cutting daytime service to Iran. Many Westerners followed apparently Iranian Tweeters involved in the protests, but within a day there were warnings about government agents using Twitter to spread false information. How were those not on the scene to tell the difference between information and disinformation?

Alongside trust in traditional news organizations' journalistic process, are there ways consumers can judge whether what they read is true?

## > DOES THE WIKIMEDIA APPROACH MAKE FOR MORE TRUSTWORTHY NEWS?

Like Wikipedia, the Wikinews format encourages contributors to cite references and sources, so readers can cross-check for themselves, ensuring credibility. The





If the searing image of Vietnam was the AP photo of a girl stripped naked by napalm, if the image of Tiananmen Square was a young man facing down tanks, well, the iconic image of Iran is a cell phone video of Neda Agha-Soltan dying on the streets of Tehran. And this time the message was in the momentum. The mournful video was passed from a cell phone in Tehran to an e-mail address in Europe, then to Facebook and YouTube and finally CNN. All in a matter of hours. —ELLEN GOODMAN, Truthdig.com





**SIGHTINGS**  
from the  
**ZEITGEIST**

Twitter trending topics have replaced CNN as the town crier for online citizens. Anyone can quickly scan the list for breaking news stories. But absorption of detailed, complete information usually requires a visit to another site or sites. Journalists and media companies, who exist to generate attention, can do a better job of using these new tools to tap into new audiences and spread their message as well or better than "blog celebrities." Until they embrace all the tools and maximize the medium, of course the business model won't find synergy. —STEPHANIE AGRESTA, Porter Novelli global director of digital strategy and social media

guidelines for contributors are extensive, ethical and clear. Items either contain original reporting (first-hand reporting or interviews) or synthesis of various cited, already-reported sources.

Wikinews' verification procedure, like traditional news reporting, inevitably slows the process, as compared with Twitter, Facebook or other social media. Yet verification ensures objectivity and clarity. Although individual contributors may or may not be trained journalists, they are tasked to abide by established journalistic standards.

The Wikimedia brand itself should be reassuring; it's a nonprofit foundation with the idealistic spirit of the open-source movement. However, Wikipedia is far from a trusted source; although it's the default encyclopedia on the Internet, it's the butt of many negative comments. It does have advantages, however: While it

doesn't stand up as a reference on its own, it's a place to start for initial research that links out to primary sources. It's free and often more extensive than any single online encyclopedia.



So what of Wikinews? While it may score on accuracy, in a fast-moving news market with a lot of established players, will the model work as well as it has done for reference information? Or will it succumb to lack of speed and reader trust?

## > CAN A COMMERCIAL BRAND BE TRUSTED AS A NEWS ARBITER?

One way or another, we trust commercial brands with significant parts of our lives. We trust supermarkets to provide us with food that is safe; we trust automakers to provide us with cars that are roadworthy, and service centers to keep them that way;

we trust pharmaceutical companies to foster our health; and we trust financial institutions (some more than others) to look after our money.

As a Porter Novelli staffer recently asked, "Why not trust a brand to see and speak the truth on our behalf? Is this the new summit for a trusted brand?" Of course we can't expect consumer brands to take responsibility for verifying news from the Middle East, or from criminal courts or even celebrity shenanigans. But brands may find it worthwhile to work at becoming a source in their own area of expertise. For example, Microsoft earned respect in the highly critical development community by hiring Robert Scoble as "technical evangelist" from 2003 to 2006. Scoble covered technical news via his blog, and despite assumptions, he was sometimes critical of Microsoft and sometimes praised competitors.

Could this be the simple formula in which commercial brands become trusted news sources? Respected expert(s) + privileged access to information + branded platform + editorial freedom = credibility + respect.





**SIGHTINGS**  
from the  
**ZEITGEIST**

In theory, journalists are accountable to readers: If they report crap, readers will stop reading the publications they write for, which is incentive enough for those publications to avoid the crap. The problem is that readers out there want crap. They want man bites dog, they want Match Ka Mujrim, they want heroes and villains in their narratives, blacks and whites, and so on. There's no getting away from that. But such readers are everywhere in the world, and tabloids will always thrive. That is not the problem here. The problem is that here, we have little else. In England and the U.S., you have the tabloids, and you have the respectable press doing good, solid journalism. —AMIT VARMA, IndiaUncut.com, named by *Businessweek* one of India's 50 most influential people in 2009



# HOW WILL TECHNOLOGY SHAPE THE NEW NEWS?

**TECHNOLOGY HAS** always shaped the news—both literally (through its delivery format) and via consumers’ expectations and experience.

Through the 19th century and into the early 20th, newspapers were the only method for mass distribution of news: the printed word with some graphics, mostly consumed in silence at home. News was a written narrative.

Then came newsreels, which documented events that happened within reach of a movie camera. News became part of the collective entertainment context of the movie theater. News was a spectacle in which seeing was believing.



Then came broadcast TV news, where the studio anchors became the central figures—reading items, describing footage, interviewing public figures. News joined the entertainment context of the living room. News was events of the day explained in words and images by trusted, familiar figures.

With the advent of cable, satellite and Internet, broadcast news morphed into today’s 24/7 sexy anchors, catchy graphics, sound bites, live feeds, blogs and Twitter feeds. News is whatever it takes to hold the attention of consumers who (are presumed to) have a low boredom threshold, a short attention span and plenty of alternatives—including

constant news, photos, video and commentary via multiple online and offline channels.

## > DOES TECHNOLOGY MAKE IT HARDER TO “CONTROL” THE NEWS?

The yang of new technologies is the at-times chaotic, overwhelming torrent of unfiltered news. In many cases there’s content (X is happening) with no context (Y is the background to X). Getting breaking news online can be like drinking from a fire hose.

The yin of new technologies is that consumers have unprecedented access to the news and some measure of power to change the news itself as a result. While it’s not always a good thing, it’s truly revolutionary in places where news is



tightly controlled. BBC World Affairs Editor John Simpson, who was on the plane to Tehran with Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 as he landed to seize power, gave a resounding and moving endorsement to the potential of new media in 2009. Reporting from Tehran after the recent elections, Simpson said: “This is a revolution sparked off by ordinary people with mobile phones. It is the most extraordinary thing I have ever seen and I have covered many revolutions. They were all more ... traditional. But this time photos and videos can go instantly on YouTube to be seen by millions and Twitter and Facebook can allow the voices and thoughts of ordinary Iranians to be heard worldwide. It is the most remarkable thing.”

What’s more, Simpson and his colleagues decided to employ the technologies used by the citizen journalists: “The people don’t need broadcasters or reporters so much because they have mobile phones and can film themselves. We were at the demonstration on Saturday when that poor girl was shot and thought it would be too difficult to film with even a small camera. So we went round with mobile phones and left our cameraman behind in the car. We got some extraordinary pictures on our mobiles, just like the people of Iran have been doing.”

As professional news organizations embrace consumer tools, the look and feel of some of their output have become rougher around the edges and more like citizen journalism. In a news environment where celebrities and slick presentation are the norm, along comes shaky and blurred video, crackly audio and occasional typos—now touches of authenticity.

## > DOES TECHNOLOGY MAKE THE NEWS SHALLOW?

Nobody doubts that it’s better to have a well-educated society than a poorly educated society. And few

would argue that it’s better to have a well informed society than a poorly informed society. The acid test of how well or badly informed people are is not how many factoids they can play back, but how well they can interrelate and make sense of them. In a media environment of tweets and sound bites and news flashes, there’s a risk that consumers get only the content (headlines) without the context (the real story and background details) that gives the headlines meaning. That’s shallow news.

Just as it’s possible for people in an all-you-can-eat society to be overfed but undernourished, they can be deluged with news but underinformed. While good quality may be available, people lean toward easier, faster, cheaper options.

An eight-minute Flash presentation called EPIC 2014 succinctly pointed to this risk of the new news. The presentation became a viral sensation on the Internet, sketching out a fictional time line of evolving media from 1989 to 2014. It posited a vast online web of information called EPIC (Evolving Personalized Information Construct), devised by Googlezon (Google + Amazon). At its best, EPIC is “a summary of the world—deeper, broader and more nuanced than anything ever available before ... but at its worst, and for too many, EPIC is merely a collection of trivia, much of it untrue.”

For consumers with the time and the interest, technology offers multiple perspectives, the chance to dig deeper for

background information and to debate events. But for many who don’t have the patience, technology can become a kaleidoscope of disconnected words and images flitting by on the edge of awareness on TVs, computer screens and mobile devices. Gone are old-style focused sessions of news-consuming via the TV or newspaper. The emerging form is quick sessions of grazing multiple sources. News about a military coup may jostle for attention with a text from a friend or a work e-mail or a Twitter update from Oprah. If Microsoft’s Surface technology catches on, we could even see tabletops in diners, hotels and waiting rooms delivering content alongside menu options and interactive games.



For consumers seeking a broader, deeper understanding of news, technology is providing the means to get it. By the same token, for consumers who prefer to confirm what they already think, technology is providing the means to avoid accidental exposure to alternative views; they can hang out in their preferred mind-set compounds. As a Time Magazine writer put it: “For many of us ... technology has actually lowered the odds of bumping into inconvenient knowledge. ... When I’m abroad these days and have to go without my newspaper, I often turn to the most e-mailed stories on news Web sites, which are generally opinion pieces (rather than news stories), from which I cherry-pick arguments or facts that comport with my pre-existing views. Reading this way, I rarely stray from the familiar and soothing.”





**SIGHTINGS**  
from the  
**ZEITGEIST**

In principle, journalism should be in better shape than ever. The core competence of journalists is to generate attention. ... There are today three business principles for journalism: one that sells content to the audience (e.g., newsletters), one that sells the attention of the audience (e.g., ad-based publications) and one that gets sponsorship for delivering information to the audience without biasing the message in favor of the sponsors (e.g., public service).

All three business models depend on one thing: loyal attention from the audience. In order to draw loyal attention from the audience, the journalist has to be loyal to the audience. This is the difference between journalism and PR. Public relations works on behalf of the source. Journalism works on behalf of the audience. If journalism loses the attention of the audience, it will not have customers. It will not have advertisers. It will not have **sponsors**. —DAVID NORDFORS, founding executive director of VINNOVA Stanford Research Center of Innovation Journalism

# Reporter's

## Note Book



YouTube is starting a Reporter's Center, for which I've revealed all of journalism's secrets—which boils down to how to cover a crisis and not get shot. The center goes live in the wee hours Monday morning, and I'm looking forward to seeing what colleagues in the news biz have done for it. You can also see my video on my YouTube channel. Lemme know what you think. —NICHOLAS KRISTOF, Pulitzer Prize winning reporter and journalist, New York Times' On the Ground blog

IF FOUND, PLEASE CONTACT



## IN CONCLUSION

**THE ADVERTISING-BASED** news industry model is destined to shrink even more over the coming years. For decades, advertisers have in effect been subsidizing newsgathering and distribution in order to reach end users; now they can reach end users at lower cost without relying on the audience pull of the news. And consumers now can get their news for free on the Internet or via ad-driven free-sheets, or at low cost on cable TV.

This situation is at its most extreme in the United States, where the news industry is almost entirely commercially based. It's less drastic in countries where broadcasting is funded by the state, but

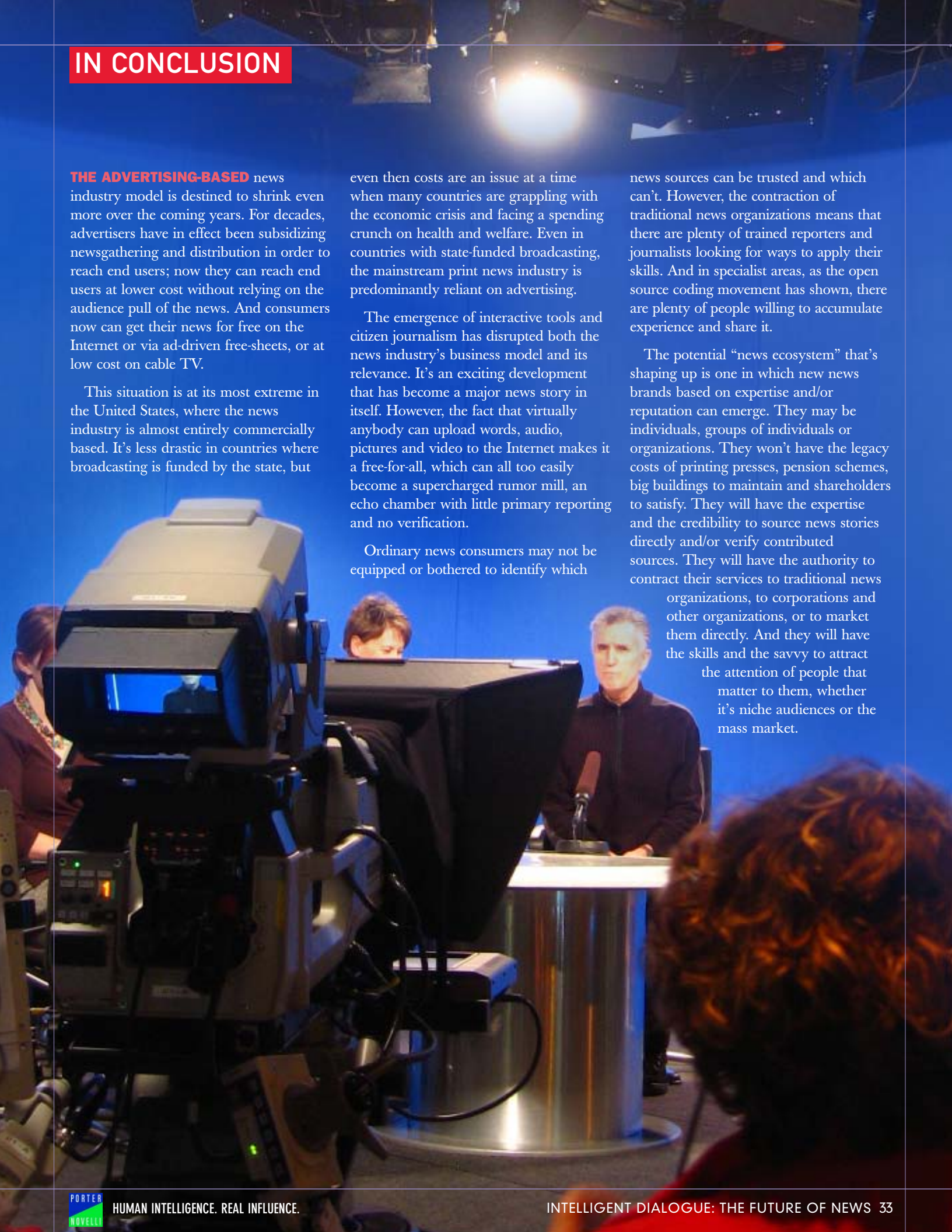
even then costs are an issue at a time when many countries are grappling with the economic crisis and facing a spending crunch on health and welfare. Even in countries with state-funded broadcasting, the mainstream print news industry is predominantly reliant on advertising.

The emergence of interactive tools and citizen journalism has disrupted both the news industry's business model and its relevance. It's an exciting development that has become a major news story in itself. However, the fact that virtually anybody can upload words, audio, pictures and video to the Internet makes it a free-for-all, which can all too easily become a supercharged rumor mill, an echo chamber with little primary reporting and no verification.

Ordinary news consumers may not be equipped or bothered to identify which

news sources can be trusted and which can't. However, the contraction of traditional news organizations means that there are plenty of trained reporters and journalists looking for ways to apply their skills. And in specialist areas, as the open source coding movement has shown, there are plenty of people willing to accumulate experience and share it.

The potential "news ecosystem" that's shaping up is one in which new news brands based on expertise and/or reputation can emerge. They may be individuals, groups of individuals or organizations. They won't have the legacy costs of printing presses, pension schemes, big buildings to maintain and shareholders to satisfy. They will have the expertise and the credibility to source news stories directly and/or verify contributed sources. They will have the authority to contract their services to traditional news organizations, to corporations and other organizations, or to market them directly. And they will have the skills and the savvy to attract the attention of people that matter to them, whether it's niche audiences or the mass market.



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# The Porter Novelli **INTELLIGENT DIALOGUE** Principle

## WHAT PORTER NOVELLI UNIQUELY OFFERS

can be summed up in two words: Intelligent Influence. It's our philosophy, our mind-set and our passion. But what actually is it?

It is engaging people in dialogue, which we have proven is more effective than bombarding them with messages. By sparking INTELLIGENT DIALOGUE, we encourage people to question and ultimately change their own actions and viewpoints.

It is knowing what genuinely motivates and moves people across the world. We have the ability to connect with them wherever they are, allowing us to more easily shape their behaviors, beliefs and attitudes.

This is Intelligent Influence. And we work hard to achieve it on behalf of the brands and clients we work for.

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**ABOUT PORTER NOVELLI:** A global public relations leader, Porter Novelli was founded in 1972 and is a part of Omnicom Group Inc (NYSE: OMC). With 100 offices in 60 countries, Porter Novelli helps clients achieve Intelligent Influence—changing attitudes and behaviors by having the right conversations with the right people at the right time. Human intelligence. Real influence. Visit [porternovelli.com](http://porternovelli.com).

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