

interactive insider

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

By Peter M. Zollman

Ten years later. It's a great time to look back, and to look ahead. And that's what we did recently at the [10th International Symposium on Online Journalism](#), where the conversation covered many of the same issues of the first conference in 1999.

- "What's the business model?"
- "Will online journalism be supported by advertising? Or something else? If so, what?"
- "Diverse business models – are we trying hard enough?"



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Funded in part by the Knight Foundation, the conference looked at the big questions of how (and whether) newspapers will survive. It studied some of the new sites that are supplanting or replicating newspapers, like [Politico.com](#) and [Malasiakini.com](#). We talked about social media and video and Twittering, and reviewed research on topics like "the effect of online news outlets on spreading democratic influences in China," and "the use of readers comments to online editorials."

While there were no easy answers, there were lots of directional recommendations:

- Don't be afraid to experiment.
- You'd better be actively engaged in video and mobile services, or you'll fall by the wayside.
- Interactive media are **not** about posting the news, or local sports. They're about engagement and involvement. They demand participation, action and reaction.
- The barriers to entry are still pretty low, so **if you don't do it, someone else will!**

Notes and quotes:

I spoke at the first symposium, in 1999, and was privileged to participate in an "update" panel this year with Gerry Barker of The Palm Beach Post, Steve Sullivan of The Baltimore Sun and Janine Warner of Artesian Media, a one-time director of online for the Miami Herald. (The latter two are affiliated with the AIM Group.) A video version of the panel is (or will soon be) available at <http://online.journalism.utexas.edu/>. Ordinarily I wouldn't recommend that you spend time watching anything like that, especially because it seems horribly ego-centric, but it was a **rockin'** panel with a lot of value. Give it a peek.

Three rules about generating revenue online, from Marion Streckler of UOL, the Brazilian portal:

- Try, try, try.
- Think about charging someone else.
- Think about charging for *something* else.

Katie King of MSN-UK: "There are lots of business models for online journalism, but there is no *one* business model for online journalism."

Paul Steiger, president and editor-in-chief of ProPublica.com, an online journalism site, said the business model he foresees online is one of "boutique publishers" who are "narrowcasting." To a degree they will replace metropolitan newspapers, which he equated to supermarkets or department stores. "These kinds of (boutique) operations attract enthusiasts whose coming together is facilitated by new technology."

Three likely areas for boutiques, Steiger said, are local reporting, international reporting and topic-focused boutiques like politics and healthcare.

"The future of newspapers is terrible, the future of journalism is good, and the future for journalists is mixed," he said.

Local-media sites have to serve three functions – town crier, town square and town expert – according to Anthony Moor of The Dallas Morning News. The town expert needs to be a “crowdsourced” product, he said. Right now in traditional newsrooms, the “town crier” function is too big, the “town square” is too small and the “town expert” is tiny.

The term “entrepreneurial journalist” came from Steve Sullivan, multimedia editor of The Baltimore Sun (and an AIM Group principal). He talked about how journalists have to now think about building audiences, and even building revenue, not just about reporting the story.

From Rosental Calmon Alves, a journalism professor at the University of Texas and organizer of the conference: “One of the things we have to be concerned about, teaching journalism, we have been training people to work for companies. Now we have to be concerned about training people to be an entrepreneur.”

Gerry Barker, of The Palm Beach Post, quoted media analyst Ken Doctor: “This is the end of the beginning, not the beginning of the end.”

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