What We Heard, What We Learned: Exploring the Fusion Power of Public and Participatory Journalism

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This was a really great opportunity for Canadian newspapers to be a part of this conversation. As many of you know, newspapers are often accused of being resistant to change and not exactly cutting edge. But in reality, Canadian newspapers recognize that they need to adapt to the changing world around them or they will be left behind.

Newspapers are a trusted brand, and those that build on that brand will be the winners. Many have recognized that blogging can be complementary to traditional media. It gives the story behind the story. It allows more interaction with readers.

I hope we all come away . . . with a sense of the challenges and the better opportunities that lie ahead. This is such a timely conversation, with Canadians just coming out of an election and Americans being in the midst of one.
Last night, when we were at dinner, Dan Gillmor of the San Jose Mercury News said that there was a time when public journalism seemed like it was sort of moribund. We didn’t know exactly what was going to happen to it.

I’ve told the story of our first (Public Journalism Network) meeting where Chris Peck put out his right hand, then his left hand and said, “We look like we are about to be book-ended,” by which he meant we had a start about 1988 and we were about to end in 2003.

But, as Dan said yesterday from his observations, something miraculous happened in the last 18 months. It seems journalists everywhere suddenly seem to get it, or at least some form of it.

They know that the practice of journalism is broken and the public journalism has some answers on how to fix it. Of course, if he is right, and I think he is, it’s really gratifying because a lot of the people in this room were at the forefront of the movement when it was quite difficult to be in the forefront. The movement grew out of the 1988 presidential election. Spin doctors controlled the national dialogue, the news media acquiesced, and so instead of reading or hearing things of substance, we visited flag factories and saw the Dukakis photo in the tank and had to deal with Willie Horton, a black man, set up as a symbol of crime in the USA.

Fortunately, some journalists and academics thought we could do better, and a public or civic journalism movement was started. We asked people—the public—what’s important to you... but, we found that once we got this movement started that it wasn’t so easy to change institutions. From the beginning, the public journalists encountered resistance. However, since...
1988, progress has been made... we have a body of information to critique this election. And people, even though journalism might be doing it the same old way, are aware that there might be something wrong with the way they’re doing it.

So we feel pretty good that public journalism is on the right track, and it’s not just about elections, it’s about treating our audience as citizens rather than just consumers. It’s about knowing that there’s not just the right or left, or the two extremes of a story, but that there’s a whole lot of middle ground. Suddenly, everything we were trying, often with face-to-face meetings, was happening at lightning speed, thanks to the fusion power of technology.

In the public journalism movement, we were trying to get citizens involved in the news-making process. Now, it is happening at lightning speed. OhMyNews, which is the South Korean participatory newspaper, has 30,000 citizen reporters writing for it. They have about 200 articles every day, just about all of it citizen-produced.

We can now do creative things that were unheard of before. Advances in technology and the reduction in the cost of it are pushing the transformation. Today, as we all know, and we must keep in mind, everyone can have their own printing press with the blogs—but it’s not just the blogs we should be thinking of. We should be thinking of how we can use all the tools to get our audience involved.

Here’s an example. I don’t know how many of you have heard of audio blogs. With an audio blog, I can lift up my telephone, talk into my telephone after punching in a key number, interview someone if I want with my telephone, push a button at the end of it, and instantly that conversation pops up on my Weblog site.

Now, so what, on one level. But for $9, for three months, 13 calls each month, I can actually broadcast to the world. And if I hold my camera out here and take pictures, I can have photos to go with it. So that costs me nine bucks. Think what it costs CNN to broadcast.

Take newspapers, for example. When a poet comes to town, they can call him and say, “Look, I’m going to give you this number and you can call it and just speak into it.” Anybody can do that. You can have the smallest newsroom in the world because all it requires is that poet make a phone call and the audio pops up on the Web site. So those are the kinds of things you should be thinking of. Whether you’re small or large, it doesn’t matter.

Joichi Ito, a blogger, gave an outline at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland of what the blogosphere looks like. In the blogging world, there are A-listers at the top and a whole lot of other people below them. But because they’re all linked, they feed off each other, back and forth. So blogging is naturally what we’re trying to do in public journalism: a lot of citizens and journalists trying to work together.

However, it’s not an easy process. Orville Schell, dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley, using blogs as example, gave the New York Times a perfect example of the dilemma journalists face. He said of blogs, “If they adopt them, it’s like having a spastic arm—they can’t control it. But if they don’t adopt it, they’re missing out on the newest, edgiest trend in the media.”

This Fusion Power conference is a step to adopt this new, chaotic arm in a way that it serves journalism and the public.

For Leonard Witt’s extended thoughts on this issue see his article: “Is Public Journalism Morphing into the Public’s Journalism?”, published in the National Civic Review, Fall 2004, Vol. 93, No. 3. Available the PJNet.org Web site’s PJNet Academy.
Panelist Dan Gillmor
former San Jose Mercury News technology columnist
and author of We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People.

We need to be training ourselves and the people we work with—our audiences—that there are a variety of tools out there. Here are just a few:

• **Radio frequency identification**—The tools of this new movement are getting pretty powerful, and much more progress is yet to be made. . . . Ken Sakamura from Tokyo is working on embedding very tiny radio frequency tags into everyday devices and products. Aside from the questions all of this raises about privacy, one of the important things to recognize is that not only will every person have a story in the future, but every object will have a story.

• **Barcode reader databases**—Marc Smith at Microsoft will be able to go out with a barcode reader on a handheld that goes to a barcode database to find what the product is. Then he goes to Google to “Google” the product. The implications are pretty interesting when you go out to find out if the shirt you’re looking at in the store was made by slave laborers, or if some product you’re about to buy was recalled for some safety hazard. Powerful implications.

• **Digital cameras**—With digital cameras everywhere, we are again entering a world with interesting implications, positive and negative, but for journalism there are powerful implications, and that is the people in our audience can now be a part of the new-gathering process from the photo and soon the video point of view. I raise this for journalists because we need to have our audiences, our readers, our viewers prepared for big events. I don’t want another earthquake in northern California, but I know there will be one, and I hope that we have a site ready where people can send their pictures.

• **Really Simple Syndication (RSS)** creates new ways of viewing Web content. RSS can bring the news to us and help us distribute it. It enables people who want to roll their own news reports to get a better news report than they’re getting today with more nuance, more sources, everything.

• **Short Message Service (SMS)** delivers short messages to your mobile phone. When SARS struck in the Guangdong province in Shantou City, the doctors via a SMS were telling people, including journalists, that there was something really bad going on. This is in February or so of 2003. Long before it reached the media, the news was spreading through a new kind of media.

• **Wiki** is a Web site where anyone can edit any page. Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia that is not perfect, but is increasingly credible and is the first absolutely open-source journalism project that I can name in every respect. If you know something about a subject, and you go up here to see what it says, I would predict the odds are strong that you’ll find they’ve done a very good job. And if you don’t like it, you can change it. And if you change it and someone doesn’t like your change, they can change it back. It gets into very interesting wars over subjects, but basically people tend to agree and you have to remember that you’re writing something that people of all persuasions will agree with.

How do citizens find time to participate online?

I do this for a living so I have time, but it’s an important question. It’s the only resource that is totally finite in our lives. We need better tools to sort through this growing global conversation that we have available today, but they are coming along. . . . People want some guidance on what’s important and what isn’t as much as they want to be able to find things for themselves. . . . Basically, the daily paper was the guide, and now there are different ways to get it. I don’t have some magic solution.

—Dan Gillmor
If blogs were a political candidate. . .
Here’s how to get them elected

Panelist Warren Kinsella is a blogging, Toronto-based lawyer, consultant and best-selling Canadian author whose latest book is Kicking Ass in Canadian Politics (Random House, 2001).

One of the things I do is run political campaigns in this country, so what I wanted to do is take a crack at blogs as a political commodity as if you were trying to get blogs elected, ‘cause I’m not sure if blogs have been fully elected yet. And for the sake of argument, the Mainstream Media (MM) is the enemy. As I told a reporter last week, blogs are punk rock media, independent and anti-authority if they’re doing what they’re supposed to do. Thus a corporate blog is an oxymoron.

So the Daily Blog Campaign, like a political campaign, is organized around major questions. The first one is what’s the big deal about them? Second is who’s my target? Next, what’s your message? Why should anybody care? So, are blogs powerful? Most of us think so, but what do we say to the many skeptics?

You can say that they have significance because:

(1.) Firstly, they’re free to do, free to use and free to see. Free gives them an edge on the mainstream media.

(2.) They are proudly biased and do not play the objectivity game like the mainstream media, and we know that most readers and certainly most voters don’t believe the MM is in any way objective anyway.

(3.) They are easy to access. Blogs are a potential 500 million-channel universe.

(4.) And they’re populist. blogsearchengine.com says 55 percent of bloggers are doing it because they have a desire to inform, 67 percent because they have a desire to write, 75 percent because it’s fun, and 86 percent because they don’t want ads on site.

(5.) Google power. They’re significant because you do a search and they show up, infiltrating the mainstream. Specialists as well as generalists are welcome. Interactions are welcome.

(6.) Blogs invite criticism, queries and commentary.

(7.) They’re pithy as heck, and we all know the MM can be pedantic and long and boring.

(8.) And I guess this is the criticism. They’re rather faddish at the moment. So are blogs the next digital pet rock? Someone said the Internet is the next vanity press for the demented, and maybe that guy’s here today. It’s a bunch of angry white males raging against Michael Moore in some corner of the ether, but I don’t think so. I think there’s some thing that we can do and should do to make sure they don’t go the way of Hula Hoops and lawn darts.

My tips on ensuring they last past Christmas

It’s possible in a few years most of us will be embarrassed that we came to this conference. I found some old pictures of my wife in the garage wearing those

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shoulder pads. It could be the same thing, but I think there are some things we can do.

(1.) You tell a story, because facts tell a story and make it real for voters and readers. If you’re not communicating in stories, you’re not communicating.

(2.) Be brief. Your readers demand it; they don’t have time, so the KISS-rule applies to blogs, in my opinion.

(3.) Leave no charge unanswered. This is crucial in this 500-channel universe.

(4) Make it current and exciting for people.

Building an audience and building power

That works for the audience, but who is the audience? Now, we have to be honest with ourselves. Nobody does it for themselves; they do it so they can get read.

So how do you get read? How do you get an audience? You want to be read, so you don’t try to be all things to all people. You do not need 100 percent of voters. Your target audience is not the world, but people you want to get on your side. I call this the Pyramid of Power. There are the people at the top who think they’ve got power, then the big-shot journalists and officials who tell the people at the top that they do, in fact, have power, whether they do or not. And third, you have the chattering classes of people who read about those who think that they have power.

And then you have the rest of us who vote governments in and out, and who actually have power now, perhaps as a consequence of this technology. And they to me are what blogs are by and for and about.

They are the most important commodity, the ones who can turn the media on their head and are doing that now. They’re a threat to media dominance. In the Kerry election campaign, you saw many corporate blogs, many media blogs, and they were—with greatest respect to those of you who were doing them—they were pathetic. They were terrible. It was just an extension of what the people were doing in their daily journals. They were boring. Those blogs forgot what blogs are supposed to be about, which is to be a little bit snotty and independent.

All of you own PCs, which means that you are by nature suspicious and paranoid, like me. People power works; you cannot ever ignore it, certainly in a political campaign because they are the ones everybody is afraid of. The soccer mom story we all know about in the 1992 presidential campaign, people who were looking at issues according to their own self-interests and didn’t really have a generalist look at politics anymore.

Same thing in the Canadian Federal Election in 1993. (They) principally were women, but in Canada were new Canadians and young people. So you grab them, and you get yourself elected. You have to watch it when they get mad, because they are much more influential than that top rung and the second rung put together, because they determine who is the hero and who is the zero. They are us. You’ve gotta reach out and hold on to them. The MM finds this suspect, but I guess... conversely, this bottom rung finds the MM very suspect themselves.

Another example from the Canadian Federal Election campaign: The last weekend of the campaign, everything that the conventional media had been telling people was going to happen was turned on its head—the conservative party was going to win and they didn’t. So all the mainstream media commentary was wrong. There were no exceptions. So people are very suspicious now of the MM agenda, and bloggers are uniquely poised to address that.

That’s who our audience is, so let me tell you who I think our audience is not. I have committed the sin of daily journalism—one of my colleagues is in the back of the room—and I have even taught unsuspecting youngsters how to be journalists, and I can say not all journalists are bad. But the MM’s design to absorb the blog culture will not work and cannot work because the MM is different from the rest of us.

Why the mainstream media hates bloggers

And this is what I would tell you if you were a

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political client. Media are different from you, wired different. They’re interested in failure, misery and disaster. It’s like Sally Fields says, except in reverse. They really, really hate us (bloggers.)

I think there are three reasons for that. Firstly, it’s beyond their control. It’s a loss of control for the mainstream media, this blog culture. Secondly, there is no higher authority that bloggers have. They may answer to their spouses, but basically just answer to themselves. The mainstream media find that frustrating. Thirdly, bloggers always have the last word.

In my experience, when I am contacted by a reporter about politics, I find now that they are a lot more careful with me than they used to be because they know probably that I’m taping the conversation, but also that whatever they say, if the quote is wrong or the emphasis is wrong, or their conclusion or whatever, I’m going to say something about it and then some people will read that.

Everybody’s heard of Roger Isles, of course. He was a young guy who started off—remember the Mike Douglas Show? Everyone remembers the Mike Douglas Show, popular daily television program at one time. And Roger Isles started off promptly, a very bright guy who proceeded upward and became the executive producer. And he had a great line. He said if you have two guys on stage and one of them says, “I have a solution to the Middle East problem,” and the other guy falls in the orchestra pit, who do you think will be on the news that night?

Why should anyone care about blogs?

So I guess that is the thing about the mass media: they do have a slightly different political emphasis than blog people. So the final question best expressed is this: So what? So what about blogs? Why should anybody care about them or what bloggers have to say? In my opinion, most of the time people don’t care, certainly at this stage. And that’s not because people are dumb, but because they’re busy taking their kids to hockey practice or ballet lessons or trying to catch up on their sleep, so they have not entered that realm yet. The comment that was made a while ago that I certainly agree with is that we’re kind of group talking to ourselves in large part. We have one of those people in the far left wing the Canadian Liberal Party, and I always have candidates saying to me that they need a Web site. I say who cares? They’re always horrified, and I say, “No, honestly, who gives a shit?” Because in terms of our voters, the voters we want are people who generally are not extremely wealthy. A lot of them don’t own computers. So sure, we can do a Web site, but no one will pay attention.

You’ve got to be interesting and make people care so you’ll get read. And if you get read a lot, then you are powerful; and if you are powerful, then we’re interested. Same thing for blogs.

Three tips for a blog that works

Final three points are my tips I would make to you as you’re beginning this campaign together:

(1.) You’ve got to be unique. You deliver a message the opposition in the form corporate media cannot. A good example of that: Hebrew National produces kosher food products in the United States. They were up against Oscar Meyer with the wiener, and Oscar Meyer was like a giant wiener group. So Hebrew National came up with this brilliant campaign many years ago where they had this guy in an Uncle Sam uniform holding a hot dog and looking heavenward and saying, “We answer to a higher authority.”

(2.) So it was funny, and clever, and it said something that the opposition could not. You’ve got to be clever, and you’ve got to be relevant, too. You’ve got to meet that so-what test and put a human face on your issue, your story, or commentary or whatever.

(3.) And, finally, be repetitive. Simplicity, repetition, volume. Simplicity, repetition, volume. That’s what works, because if you believe as I do in the Shenk Data Smog thing, that people are just being bombarded by images and words every day, being clever is not enough. You’ve got to really push your message through. You can’t let people change the channel on you.

And now I’m going to let you change the channel on me. Thanks very much.
Blogging advice

PressThink equals complexity, length, depth and nuance

Panelist Jay Rosen is chair of the New York University journalism department and a founder of the public journalism movement. He now blogs at PressThink.org.

What I would like to do to make this more concrete for you, to show you where blogging is at in one corner and to completely override the wisdom of simplicity, repetition and volume that Warren (Kinsella) just gave you, which I think is totally disastrous advice and constitutes treating people the way the media treats them in the guise of being an alternative.

So this is how PressThink operates. Instead of simplicity, repetition and volume, it’s complexity, length and depth—and nuance. So this, of course, limits the success of my weblog because Warren’s laws do apply, but I want to limit the success of my weblog. Five thousand to 6,000 readers who are educated and interested in what I am is fine for me and works for my purposes. Sometimes it balloons higher than that and that’s nice, but I really can enjoy myself and do something good at this level.

So right away I’m in competition with the mass media, because my ethic of drawing people to my side competes with theirs. Theirs is everybody should be drawn, and mine is I don’t care if you don’t like it. It’s only for a certain kind of reader, a certain kind of user. And if those people self-identify and hang around PressThink, that’s good for me.

In a sense, I’m trying to compete with the mass media by adopting a different attitude toward the audience. And the very last thing I would ever assume about my audience is that they need something drilled into their head. And they need slogans and catch phrases, and they need to have this truncating of discourse in order to “get it.” It’s the opposite. They need space to advance their own thinking, and this is what I tried to do in this post.

The idea of my weblog PressThink is when something odd happens that can’t be easily explained, that’s where my weblog can make a contribution.

Excerpted from Rosen’s explanation of how he blogged the Democratic National Convention, readable in full at the PJNet.org weblog: http://pjnet.org/weblogs/pjnettoday/archives/000472.html

Q&A

What’s a mainstream media editor to do?

Michael Skoler of Minnesota Public Radio wanted to know how to use the power of public participatory journalism in a newsroom setting, and the conversation switched to Weblogs. Here is an answer from Jay Rosen:

Four steps to mainstream media blogging

First, the question of employees doing a blog is important to raise within your organization, because it’s going to force you to confront issues of freedom of speech. And independence. And it needs to do that, those organizations need to loosen up. . . .

Second thing is, if you want to start tapping the power of blogs, you should find the person who is most enthusiastic about that form who is maybe young or old, doesn’t matter, but who’s already got a feel for it or wants to do something different or doesn’t care about succeeding in the same way, and has a very open and independent mind.

And you just ask that person—instead of deciding and assigning—ask that person to study the blog world for a month. Two weeks. Just read, follow around, go places. See how others do it. Take a look at the most successful Weblogs, which are not hard to find. In about five minutes, you can find lists of them. And look at them, study them. What is it that makes them good? What is it that makes them effective? What model of effectiveness?

And if that person has been chosen well, if you picked the right person, they’ll start having ideas immediately for what a Minnesota Public Radio blog could really be about. That’s the second thing.

The third thing is start local. You ought to take a beat in Minnesota or within the Twin Cities area or something. You’ll figure that out. Something local and real to people. An example would be faith and spirituality in the Twin Cities area. Take somebody who really wants to blog about that. And put everything into that one Weblog, including editorial oversight, a team of people to bounce ideas off of, and so forth.

And give that person a lot of support, because the very first Weblog a mainstream news organization does that really takes off in the community is going to point the way to all the others because somebody’s going to see frankly that one of their colleagues became a star in town. As soon as journalists realize that, they’re going to say, “How do I get me one of

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Will Weblogs get co-opted by mainstream press?

Warren Kinsella:

I’m writing a book about punk rock. I was in a punk band when I was a teenager, and I guess one of the things that attracted me about blogs was that they were . . . exciting and interesting. . . and I didn’t like the demographic. It did seem to be a lot of angry white males, so that was one of the reasons I wanted to get involved and shift that a little bit. I’m white and occasionally angry, but not right-wing. So the thing that has distressed me . . . I was watching the (Democratic National Convention) invitations that went out, ’cause I’ve worked for political parties. I know how political parties think. When they see an uncontrollable element in the chemical table, they try and absorb it. Popular culture does the same thing, too. . . I don’t know if the world changed in a weekend as a result of bloggers being there (at the DNC), but I’ll bet you bloggers changed because they got sucked into the mainstream.

Jay Rosen:

Well, we’ve gone through this hundreds of times in American and popular culture where something starts out on the margin and has devotees intensely involved as participants. It succeeds . . . and becomes absorbed by a wider arena, and the original enthusiasts inevitably bring the same charges of being sold out, it’s watered down, the mass media’s going to kill it. I mean, we’ve been through it a hundred times unfolding exactly the same way here, so there’s nothing new about that, nothing interesting about it.

But here’s what I would say. There’s no question that the Democratic National Committee had . . . political aims in inviting bloggers to the convention. It’s not like here’s our contribution to public truth and discourse. It was part of a political strategy to reach new audiences, let’s say. And also probably to appear, yeah, cutting edge, hip, and the truth is it was very successful in generating news stories about the convention. But that’s not very hard because anything new in this formula is going to be seized on because there’s so little news there. And that’s certainly why they did it. But it’s really kind of dumb and constricted to assume that because they had a narrow aim, therefore the experience of the bloggers there was narrow or that their effects were narrow or that their coverage was.

The truth is that once you got there, you’d do anything you want. And they wanted us to kind of hear from the DNC and maybe they did think some of them would pass along the party’s message. But I don’t think the bloggers actually felt any obligation to do that at all and if they did they shouldn’t have been there. They were the wrong people to be there.

So, I felt free—and I did, I criticized the party. I criticized the convention’s CEO, the man who decided to bring the bloggers in, in my Weblog during the convention for having his own narrow mind about things. So there’s a difference between their intention in inviting the Weblogs and their authors, and what people do with that opportunity. And I think that’s the way we should evaluate it. Now, their performance can be critiqued, and lots of people think that they were boring. Not a very interesting alternative, and we can debate that.

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these Weblogs?”

Finally, it would be great if journalists understood just one thing about this phony competition between them and the bloggers, which is really dumb. And that is that the Webloggers . . . they know how to use it. They know the art of linking, which is the most valuable thing a journalist can develop. As soon as the talented and incredibly resourceful people in media learn the art of linking, learn how a Weblog is a flexible, interactive form, they are in many ways the most prepared people to do a Weblog well. They have all the skills of reaching for information, putting things together, writing quickly, shortly, getting to the point, summarizing. Every single skill a journalist has is tapped by the Weblog. So when journalists find they can do that and become stars, or at least very important for a group of people in the community, that will show you the way. That’s how I would do it.
Enough about blogs. . . let’s talk

PARTICIPATORY JOURNALISM

Jan Schaffer is executive director of the J-Lab at the University of Maryland and former executive director of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, which closed its doors in spring 2003.

I am going bring this back to participatory journalism because I don’t think this is supposed to be about blogger.com. And having run the Pew Center for 10 years, we were on the cutting edge of interactive journalism before it was digital. Interactive in those days were town hall meetings, focus groups, deliberative polls. If you submitted those now to the Batten Awards, they wouldn’t even make the finalists list at all.

We’re seeing entirely new forms of participatory journalism emerge, and I think that they have the potential for having the same kind of impact that we saw civic journalism having. We know from our pilot projects in civic journalism that the Pew Center funded 120; 600 others emerged around the country. The take-away from those was that they were not conflict-driven. They were more explanatory. They developed tremendous goodwill among the community. They built audiences, and they galvanized the community to action. I think that we’re seeing participatory journalism emerging because there are some big challenges in the media.

Journalism problems today
Right now, the way journalism is happening, it’s scorecards. It’s stenography. Incremental developments. A lot of gotcha—and I would add convergence to that list—is a bad habit of journalism. It’s news put on three different platforms and it’s a lot more noise. Not very meaningful. . . It’s all about speed, delivery, mixed revenue and what I call moving parts. Can we add a few bells and whistles? Can we make it stream? Can we make it talk back at us? And again, it’s about more noise.

Participatory journalism’s benefits
I think as we look at participatory journalism, and where it is fighting some of those bad habits of journalism, is that it’s focused on people, on relationships, on interactions, on conversations, community-building watchdogs, and ultimately it’s focused on attachment. And I think that when you have, like anything in your life, an attachment with something, an involvement with something, you have something that’s meaningful, and in journalism, I would suggest that’s where you have meaningful interaction.

I would suggest to you that’s the story that we are all missing. It’s not about blogs, but it is about media participation. What is media participation? Well, I think it’s as much about story-making as story-telling. It’s about, yes, constructing the stories like we always used to do, but it’s also about deconstructing them into their component parts. It’s about news experiences, as well as news stories. And it’s about civic participation in a new way.

Here’s what I mean about this election being about media participation: Think of the barometers of civic participation that we saw in this election cycle. We saw e-mails of Dean’s scream being shared one to another. We saw it being scored to music. We saw the Bush ad contest at MoveOn.org. We saw movies being produced: “Fahrenheit 9/11,” “Out Foxed.” And I would suggest to you that these are the forms of participatory journalism that are emerging around the country and they are emerging as an alternative to mainstream journalism. And that in future years the barometer of civic participation may well not be turnout at the polls. It may very well be how much citizens have participated in public life through the media. That is the story that no one’s writing.

Storytelling: the old way vs. story making, the new way
So let’s look at story-making vs. story-telling. I see two kinds of story-making emerging. One is internal; it’s consuming the stories that people make. One is external; it is making the stories that people consume. Internal stories, think about how you get your news today. Individuals as news aggregators. People are not reading, consuming, a finished product. As much as journalism schools teach people to do that, that is not how people are consuming the news. They’re consuming a component of the product—a headline, a cutline, a deck head, a main head. They’re listening to radio on the way to work, they’re getting e-mails when they come to work, they go to their We-
blogs and use their cell phone, they watch Jon Stewart at night. And out of that they make a story. Call it what you will, but they develop an internal sensibility about the news that day. And it’s their story.

External story-making is very much citizen-created content. Yes, there are blogs, there are e-mail correspondents, there are citizen journalists, and there are hyper-local citizen’s media. I think that future news for people is very much going to be about building, constructing and making those stories. Very much participating in the telling, and the learning and the watch-dogging.

We see the rise, especially in the last 18 months, of an enormous number of hyperlocal citizen media outlets. GothamGazette.com is one of my favorites. Marvelous community gazettes that go into detail of 51 districts in New York City. GoSkokie is a capstone project at Northwestern University and the NorthwestVoice.

**The future of news is deconstructing stories**

I think that future news for journalists and educators is something different. It’s very much about learning how to deconstruct the stories. It’s about building components that are going to help people participate in the news. It’s about building the components that help users co-author, co-make their stores. If it’s online, future news is not just something you read, it’s very much something you do. It’s an experiential kind of thing. It’s a news experience. **Not a fan of blogs—Inefficient, narcissistic**

The new news experience as we see runs the gambit: blogs, games, calculators, clickable maps, choices and simulations. There are places that I think blogs can be useful, but I will have to confess to you, and at the risk of being provocative—I’m not a fan of blogs. I think they are not very useful. They’re terribly inefficient. They are narcissistic. They are niche. I think that right now we’re seeing their merits in the form of participation and introducing the public to that, but I think that there are a lot more possibilities here for participatory journalism than blogs.

**Participatory journalism is the 5,000-foot view, blogs the 50-foot view**

And I hope that we will develop templates that are every bit as exciting as the templates we developed in civic journalism. And I think there’s a lot of promise for that. But I really do think we need to sort of take the 5,000-foot view, and not the 50-foot view. Blogs are the 50-foot view. Participatory journalism is a 5,000-foot view, and I think that there’s a lot more promise and possibility here than narrowing the discussion to blogs.

For examples of Jan Schaffer’s participatory journalism templates see her talk to the Unity conference at the J-Lab Web site: [http://www.j-lab.org/UNITYtran_intro.html](http://www.j-lab.org/UNITYtran_intro.html)
Blogging gives citizens power of printing press, broadcast tower

Jeff Jarvis is former TV critic for TV Guide and People, creator of Entertainment Weekly, Sunday Editor of the New York Daily News, and a columnist on the San Francisco Examiner. He is now president and creative director of Advance.net, and blogs at Buzzmachine.com.

As Rosen rebutted Kinsella, Jarvis will rebut Schaffer. And I would say the problem with established media, to use your term for it, is that it’s become useless, too often, and narcissistic too often, and that it’s not niche; it doesn’t know how to speak to people. And the citizen’s media, which is the 5,000-foot view of blogs because it’s more than blogs, tries to address that, I think.

So parts of this are from a presentation that I made at the Aspen Institute two weeks ago, and where I saw myself more as Blog Boy than Media Man. It’s about control. Forget Gutenberg. The most important invention in the history of media was the remote control because it put the audience in control of content. Now, add blogging tools to that, and suddenly the citizens cannot only control content, they can create, they can distribute it. As I’m fond of saying, blogging brings the power of the printing press and the broadcast tower to the citizens. It destroys the barrier to entry to media, to our business.

As Jay Rosen said at the first BloggerCon, the readers are now writers, and the writers are now readers. I hope I got that order right. Citizens are creating their own media and even their own media companies.

Witness Nick Denton’s Gawker, which is now a successful, profitable company. There are a few, very few, bloggers out there that are making up to $150,000 a year doing this.

I depressed the heck out of a magazine writer recently who came to me and said, “I want to get into this blogging thing. I need a place for my column.” And I said, “It’s not a column, man, it’s got links.” And he said, “Well, I need a salary.”

And I said, “Sorry, you’re not going to get much of a salary. There are bloggers out there who work for Denton and companies like that are doing this for $500 or $1,000: if they’re lucky, $2,000 a month.”

And he said, “What? I’ve spent my whole career building my bread”—that’s what he said—“and now there’s somebody who’s earning $2,000 a month who’s going to compete with me?”

And I said, “It’s worse than that, mate—there are people doing this for free just because they love it.” And that’s the new world order.

Any journalism student can be a media entrepreneur

For the first time in the history of our business, in the recent history of our business, a journalism student can think like an entrepreneur. Can come out of school and create a media property, and I think that’s a very important thing to consider here.

This is all happening in text now, but TV and radio are next. The equipment is good and cheap, the editing tools are getting better and cheaper. I use a $90 camera and a $99 piece of software to create my own Andy Rooneys. Distribution is about to become cheap and ubiquitous, even for video.

The TV industry itself is starting to disassemble, too. TV will explode, but text and blogs are exploding first. All this changes our fundamental relationship with our public in many, many ways. First, the people we used to call an audience, and they’re not really an audience anymore, now have a voice.

The people have the printing press

The first question is: Are we listening? To the questions asked before about, well, what do I do about blogging, what I always tell editors is that the first thing you should not do is write a blog. The first thing you should do is read the blogs.

We’ve owned the damn printing press for centuries; now, the people have it. They’re speaking—the first thing we should do is listen. Read the blogs, quote the
blogs, make the people the star, show that you’re listening. Involve them in what you produce out of their blogs. They do it because they care. We should listen to them.

Are they competition or cooperation? I think it’s really dumb to look upon bloggers as competition. They absolutely complement us in a variety of ways. For example, they give us new sources of news and information. Is it news? Yes, I say it is. Is it journalism? Yes, I say it is, and we can debate that all day long, and I hope we don’t.

**Fox News is more fun**

Weblogs can provide us with diverse viewpoints. Pew’s finding recently that two-thirds of consumers like the Internet because of the ability to get news from many sources. Half valued the ability to get different points of view apart from news and government outlets. With the commoditization of news, perhaps viewpoint is a key asset of ours. I say that’s a lesson of Fox News. The people haven’t gone to the right because they watch FOX News, they’re going to a source that’s more interesting or fun. And we have to give the audience credit for really truly knowing what fair and balanced are. If we stick up our noses at FOX News, we reject our public, and I think that’s dangerous. And if you don’t like that example, then fine, use the Guardian, or use weblogs.

**Bloggers as fact-checkers**

Bloggers are correcting us as Ken Layne, a blogger, famously said, “We fact-check your ass.” And that’s a good thing for us. Note the relationship that Dan Okrent, public editor of the *New York Times*, has with bloggers; it’s a good relationship.

Note when the *Washington Post* Baghdad bureau chief had to recant his statement that Paul Bremer had not given a farewell address to the Iraqi people. He acknowledged that bloggers forced him to do that.

Jay (Rosen) tells a great story of the *LA Times* having succumbed to a cynical blogger’s pressure to report similarly on a liberal Supreme Court justice as they had on a conservative Supreme Court justice. And they were amazed, the blogger was amazed, that the *LA Times* listened to him and did a story. And Jay can tell that story better than I can, but the paper listened. The audience spoke, the paper listened and

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Jeff Jarvis: “We owned the damn printing press for centuries; now, the people have it.”
Jarvis—Continued from previous page

it turned out that news was improved.

Tearing down big media’s authority

Citizens’ media tears down the authority of big media and establishes the authority of the audience, and that’s not as ominous as it sounds. When it comes time to decide what cell phone to use or what babysitter to hire, who are you going to listen to? A fellow consumer, the audience.

The audience has authority, and I think it’s time for us to recognize that. Weblogs are essentially social. We do not sit in our underwear blogging all night. We actually like to be with people, we go to BloggerCon, we get together, and that’s an important thing to keep in mind. This is a community and the question is, “Can we join in that community?”

Before I went to the Online News Association, where I saw Jan the time before last, I asked my blog readers what I should say and a cartoonist, ad man and blogger named Hugh McLeod replied, and I quote, “Perhaps online newspapers should stop seeing themselves as things. Rather as a point on the map, where wonderful people cluster together to do wonderful things. A brain trust held cohesive by a good editor. Some of the cluster will be paid, the journalists; others won’t, the audience; but everybody is welcome to contribute.

“The audience has authority, and I think it’s time for us to recognize that . . . this is a community and the question is, ‘Can we join in that community?’ ”

—Jeff Jarvis

. . . working together for the same goal to create the most vibrant, intellectual cooperative that they can.” I like that, a few words of wisdom. I like this one: “A consumer, which is really like audience, is an industrial-age word, a broadcast-age word which implies that we are all tied to our chairs, head back, eating content and crapping cash.”

See news as conversation

The Cluetrain Manifesto, which Doc Searls co-authored, said that “markets are conversation,” and I think that’s very important. I answer that news is a conversation.

We tend to think news is done when it’s printed and it’s fish-wrapped. That’s when news begins, because that’s when the conversation begins. That’s when the people we’re serving, the audience, start asking more questions, and react to it, and tell us facts we didn’t know and give us perspectives we didn’t have. Through that process, news improves.

Understanding hyperlocal journalism

All right, let me tell you a little bit about hyperlocal, which is something we’re doing in Advance—which we’re trying to do at Advance.

There are three things here. I think the hyperlocal in citizens’ media gets us to newspaper nirvana, which is hyperlocal coverage. At a time when classified and retail revenue is sinking bad, it’s hard to imagine how we can expand newsrooms, yet we have to expand our coverage against new competitors.

How can we do that? I think we can enlist our audience to help us. At Advance, we’ve created hyperlocal Weblogs in test markets in Massachusetts and New Jersey, those are just a few in New Jersey. We’re holding meet-ups to try to get more people to blog, whether on our site or not on our site—it doesn’t matter. All blogs rise on the tide of links.

We think this would be a good way to add to the conversation that we now have in forums, where we have a hundred million page views a month. If this works, we’ll end up with a critical mass of content we could not have afforded to gather on our own, and I can’t wait to hear more about what’s happening in Bakersfield ‘cause what’s happening around that is great stuff elsewhere, too.

We get a critical mass of local content from the people. You then get a critical mass of audience because the audience markets for you. And then you hope that you get to the really Holy Grail of the business—you get a new population of advertisers.

Finally, you can hyper-target the advertising, you have no cost of sale, no cost of production, and now you can make the price low enough that the pizzeria comes in for the first time in our products. And that supports our business, it supports journalism in new ways, and the audience helped us do that.

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Technology and cultural change

Now, I’ll talk about two more things that I think are changing our business and our culture as a result of all this. The first is that there is the most profound change technology is bringing to journalism and culture that has nothing to do with silicone or software. It is instead a world view accepted by the current generation and expected of us. It is a culture of transparency. This has its roots in many technologies—Weblogs are all about transparency.

The open source software movement believes, to use the title of James Surowiecki’s book, The Wisdom of Crowds. To our consternation, many believe that intellectual property should be open and free for all.

This is a gift economy; it’s not a theft economy. People believe that if they share what goes around will come around, and that’s the culture that exists here. It’s a very social movement, not geeky loners. This movement craves conversation, two-way conversation, and we’re used to one-way. So how do we make this truly two-way? It’s a culture built around merit, but it’s also essentially egalitarian.

On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog, but people do know whether you’re a genius or an idiot. And that matters here. So it’s about merit and egalitarianism. It’s about populism, and it’s about democracy.

Movement is about transparency

This is a movement about frankness and finally about transparency, and if we have expected transparency of everyone we’ve covered over the years, of government officials, business leaders, and civic leaders, then why the hell shouldn’t we be more transparent than any of them? It is time for us to open the shades and show our processes, and our prejudices, and our biases, and involve people in a conversation.

Now the audience seeks news

One more. The architecture of news and information has changed. The parameter of it has changed. Now, if you want information, where do you go? Google. What do you do? You search. What do you then do? You link. This has a profound impact on how we give information to our public. It used to be that we waited for the newspaper to arrive, news show to come on. Now, the news waits for us to come to it.

I went to a focus group the other day for a surprise we’re working on that I won’t tell you about. The thing that I heard from casual news consumers and rabid news consumers, loudly, absolutely loud from both groups—your stories are too damn long. You’re repetitive, and you’re boring me, and you’re wasting my time. Stop it. And that’s why they like these little thin things that they get now, because they’re busy. They’re not stupid, it’s because they’re busy. . . .

Link to the world

Shouldn’t we link to other sources of news? If we know the audience is doing that through Weblogs, they love seeing all these sources, why don’t we just show them what we have? Why don’t we show them the world? Shouldn’t we present news from many and varied viewpoints? Shouldn’t we more than anything give those people we used to call the audience a voice? They’re speaking. They should speak through us and with us. We should also learn some lessons from user interface. I think that we tend to be disorganized and the Web has a different sense of organization. . . .

A once-in-a-lifetime occurrence

At the Online News Association, Andrew Sullivan said, and I love this quote, “This happens once in a lifetime. You don’t stumble across a new medium every day.”

I say amen. I got to start a magazine. I’ve been lucky. I’ve done new things, and this is the most exciting thing I’ve ever done because I’m witnessing the beginning of an entirely new medium where the control is shifted.

We have to give up a lot of that control to gain here, and this is a wonderful new medium and we really have a chance to take part in something new. If we don’t take part, it’s going to happen anyway.
Don’t forget roots of public journalism

Panelist Lewis Friedland, professor
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Public journalism about solving problems

I do want to make two points... Public journalism was originally about trying to create public and civic space for citizens to solve problems, to do public work. It wasn’t about expression, expression through the media, although that certainly was a big part of it.

It was about giving voice to things that people couldn’t solve by themselves to create a voice they could use together that would actually go out into a large public and civic domain and be able to be used by people to do work—work in their communities in some cases or work in the national and political community in others.

I just want to lay that out there because it seems like that dimension of what was once a very important part of civic journalism has been touched, but it hasn’t been a central part of the discussion so far.

Delusional to think blog means global voice

I want to point out is that blogs, like everything else on the Net, are subject to certain laws of exponential traffic, sometimes called Power Laws. And while there may be 1.65 million blogs out there that are semi-active, there are a tiny, tiny handful of those notes that are actually read. And they, in fact, do control traffic; that’s the way traffic on the Net works.

To say that because anybody can be a publisher, that that opens up a broad range of voices, is a delusion, really. Yes, new voices will enter the mainstream consistently but they will not be trafficked to simply because they are smart and clever.

Some will, but—and this is my third and final point—much of the traffic on the Net when you start investigating structure of the blogosphere and structure of the Net very much represent the horserace political commentary of much of the mainstream media. It’s clever, it’s more up to date, it has more voice, there’s more opinion, it’s sharper; but if you look at the blogosphere as a whole, with some important exceptions, much it consists of a lot of he-said, she-said political commentary not any different from what you would find on cable news networks.

Jeff Jarvis responds—See Page 22

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Doing face-to-face public journalism

Panelist Neil Heinen, editorial director,
WISC TV, Wisconsin

If I had a presentation to show you, I’d have been forced to leave it in my room simply to complement what I think is my role here.

I’m the dinosaur. I’m the manual typewriter of this convention. The mainstream, conventional, useless, narcissistic medium, or at least the project that I represent is.

And I guess I’m here to tell you how “We the People/Wisconsin,” which is I guess one of the longest continually operating public journalism projects in the country, continues to perform. We have created a certain currency in Wisconsin that has formed the backdrop of this day in the blog atmosphere.

The theme of my remarks is face-to-face, and this is a public journalism project that is still struggling with simply trying to get people to talk to each other. To talk to elected officials, to have the types of conversations that civic journalism and public journalism once considered at the bedrock of democracy.

We are doing, again this year, a political project. Over the past 14 years, we’ve done issue-based projects on everything from healthcare to the (state) budget, and they have been in the traditional town hall meeting, some polling, some non-traditional reporting, types of old civic and public journalism practice.

“We’re still trying to get citizens to talk to each other and face to face.”

—Neil Heinen

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Heinen—Continued from previous page

But lately we’ve been doing primarily election-based projects, and to some extent that is because it’s become expected of us.

We’re still out there dragging the candidates to the citizens and trying to break down as much as we can the traditional barriers that journalists have thrown into that process and giving citizens as unfettered access to them as possible.

For the second election cycle in a row, we’re going to go one step further in our debates and eliminate the moderator. We’re going to simply put the candidates on a set and tell them: “All right, talk to each other.”

In the last part of that hour-long show, we will have citizens ask questions of the candidates, based on what they did not hear from the candidates, on questions that were not answered.

Again, traditional, public journalism stuff that we’ve been talking about for a long time, but I really want you to know that we spent an inordinate amount of time trying to figure out how to work Internet questioning into this process.

We wanted the last 15 minutes of the broadcast to have these candidates answering questions from citizens that were e-mailed in, and whether we get there or not I don’t know. ...we’re still trying to get citizens to talk to each other and face to face.

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Are bloggers just elites talking to elites?

Rebecca MacKinnon

I’m currently with the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard. I formerly worked for CNN.

I have a question for Jan, and maybe other people might want to comment because I do agree with you that blogs are the tip of the iceberg when it comes to participatory media and the future of participatory media. And I do agree that in many ways they are primitive and inefficient and so on; however... what really differentiates the blog at this point from all other potential forms of participatory media is that with a blog you can be a high school student, you can be a factory worker, you can be a housewife, you can be whatever. You don’t have to know html, you don’t have to know anything about Web design, you don’t need to hire anybody to help you, you don’t need to be part of an organization. You just sign up on TypePad or Blogger.com and in 20 minutes you’ve got a blog and can create your own media. Which, other than blogs, I haven’t seen any other tools that approach that degree of accessibility.

Jan Schaffer

You know I think that the bar is very high for blogs because I think in reality they’re not accessible to people who don’t have good English skills, or people who don’t have good grammar skills, who don’t have the confidence to write at all—spelling, grammar or whatever. And so you’re really dealing with a very niche audience who does have the confidence of the education level to do what they want to do with a blog. And your interactions are going to be limited to people who have the confidence to post something. The United States is populated by minorities who will be majorities for whom English is not their primary language.

Dan Gillmor

I take it for granted that tools will be cheap enough and ubiquitous enough in a few years that anyone can do it. Moore’s Law tends to solve all affordability problems over time. But, the ability technically to do a blog or some form of grassroots journalism is irrelevant if the education system has failed the people who might want to do it. We need to separate the potential from the reality in some cases, and it’s a bigger question for society than whether people can do grassroots journalism; it’s whether people can read and write.
I’m happy to be here and share what we’re doing in Bakersfield. In May, we launched a project called the Northwest Voice. It’s a community publication that includes a print edition, as well as a Web site. And what’s different about the Northwest Voice is that nearly everything in the publication is contributed by people in the community.

The community comes to this Web site, NorthWestVoice.com, submits articles, pictures, events—whatever it is they’re interested in. It goes into our administrative queue, and we review it. Our policy is to publish everything to the Web site, provided the content is local and legal. We take as many items as we can, and we include those items in a bi-weekly print edition that is distributed free to 22,000 homes in Northwest Bakersfield. We have another 6,000 copies that are distributed in racks.

Harnessing the audience’s creative energy

My personal background is in both newspapers and technology and then back in newspapers. I was sort of seduced by the promise of the online world and particularly self-publishing. I just love the idea that everybody can publish whatever they want to online, but our challenge in newspapers and in journalism is in really harnessing the power of that. If you’re an individual blogger, and you can figure out how to make a name for yourself and find an audience, that’s wonderful.

But how is it that we in journalism can take advantage of this great momentum, all of this creative potential that we see out there? And so the Northwest Voice is an attempt to kind of harness that, to tap into it, to say that even though we use a blogging metaphor for this site, this isn’t a blog because we are looking at everything before its published; however, it is come one, come all, just like blogs.

We’re just trying to define the rules of the road a little bit, so that there is a context for participation, and there is a context for community. It’s not just voices in the wilderness. It’s people who have something in common, which is where they live; people who have a lot in common psychographically, in terms of the audience and how can we create a product; kind of a scaffolding, an environment in which people can contribute and participate and take advantage of all the great stuff that’s going online.

We began this process by thinking first about who our audience is, so we first targeted Northwest Bakersfield because it’s the fastest-growing area of our community. We have a very high percentage of homeowners, a lot of folks with young families, and we felt there were a lot of common threads in schools and in

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youth sports. And if you look at the church news, we have a lot of churches in Bakersfield, and so we just looked at these categories and said OK, how do we organize this for the community so that we don’t just say, “Hey, send us whatever you think is good.” But we kind of provide some structure for them.

**A lot of community outreach**

The next thing we did was to go out and do a lot of community outreach. I met personally with every school superintendent, with the principal of every school in the area, with the people who run the youth sports organizations, our North of the River Parks District. I told them about the idea, asked for their participation and support, and asked them to ask the people who work for them to participate. That was very helpful in terms of getting to word out.

I also always ask people what they think people are interested in the community, and the same answers kept coming up over and over again. What people really love are horses. We have one of the highest-per-capita horse ownership rates. People really like off-roading to get out of town, and ride their motorcycles and stuff in the hills.

We also looked for columnists, people who could write consistently every single week on topics of interest to the community. And that’s important because you want to have some consistency on content week after week; in other words, you want to have a little bit of predictability so that not everything is coming in over the transom every single week, and you have some basis and stability. So we have that, and we have a small staff of folks. We do this with three and a half people plus me. And we have an editor who writes maybe 10 to 15 percent of what you see in the paper on the Web site.

We started in May and since then we’ve had about 240 content contributions, most of them through the Web sites. The most popular type of content is pictures. People love to send you pictures of every little thing, and we love to publish them, so we get a lot of pictures, a lot of school news, a lot of youth sports stuff. It really is kind of an act of faith in community.

I think you have to believe that people in the community want to participate, that there is a desire to be part of something larger than what we are, but sometimes we don’t know how.

**Building a successful business**

We’re interested in building a successful business, so I worry about advertising. We’re doing very, very well for a new product; we’re about a page and a half of advertising from being break-even with the products, so we’re doing well. I worry a lot about that; that’s a traditional thing.

On the non-traditional side, I worry about how to say yes to as many people as I can who want to participate and contribute. For example, we have local businesses who want to participate and contribute content. Now, the old-school person in me, ‘cause I used to be a print person, said, “Wait a minute, can’t do that.” And then I thought well, now why should business owners be the only people in the community who can’t participate? We’ve got to find a way.

So we had to create some rules of the road for that, and so we did sit down as a team and say OK, here’s the rules and each business can write one article a year, and it has to be about their local expertise. We created a local experts area. They can participate in that way, and it can’t be about how great their business is. It has to be about what they know and their adding value as a local expert in the community.

Because it is a work in progress, we’re going to run into more of those things, I’m sure.

**Trying to make people feel important**

We have a different set of rules. We say yes to everything, provided that it’s local and it meets our terms of service. Not that we don’t look at it, but we don’t sit in judgment and say that because there were some little girls selling lemonade down the street to raise money for their local librarian who has MS, that’s not news.

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**“I think you have to believe that people in the community want to participate. . . that there is a desire to be part of something larger than we are. . . .”**

—Mary Lou Fulton
Publisher, Northwest Voice

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Bakersfield—Continued from previous page

I think one of the things that unfortunately journalism has become really good at is making people feel unimportant, making people feel that what matters to them and the things that are meaningful in their life don’t have any place at all in what we do. And so I want to take that whole thing away and say, “Hey, if you want to write it and you want to send it in, as long as it’s local, we’ll publish it.” And we do.

If someone wants to write in about their kid or send us a picture of their kid, that’s fine as long as they tell us that it’s their kid. And then everybody can make their own judgments about that. In terms of mainstream news, I used to work for more mainstream organizations, and I have always wanted to do something like this. I have always believed that these stories are so important and, you know, journalism is public service, and part of how I define it is giving people a way to share their voice with the rest of the world.

I think that we unfortunately have put a lot of rules in place and a lot of gatekeeping that prevents these stories from getting out. They’re good stories, and meanwhile there are fewer and fewer people wanting to get through the gates. I think that’s the problem with being a great gatekeeper: You’re keeping people out instead of letting people in.

Selecting content for the print edition

In the beginning, everything that was online was also in print. Today, because we’re getting more and more content, not everything that is online is in print.

The rule of thumb is we try and err in terms of the diversity of the content and the contributors, so if somebody has already published something in the Voice, we try and give somebody else an opportunity to do that. We look for diversity in terms of categories of content, but it’s an inexact science.

We have an editor, Lauren Ward, and she and I do all of the editing and publishing of the material. If we think it would be good for print, we queue it for print. And when we figure out how many pages we have, we figure out, you know old newspaper stuff, how much can fit into your news hole. But there’s more stuff on the Web site now than you’ll find in the print edition.

It’s not delusional: Don’t think mass audience; think niche

Jeff Jarvis responds to Lew Friedland (Page 18)

Power law is old-media way of looking at this, where only the big survive and succeed because only they can afford to.

In this new world, there’s a million different power laws. Power law is like this: It’s down in the meaty elbow of where the action is. And someone may have an audience—Jay Rosen, he doesn’t want five million people. He wants his 5,000. That’s his power law and in that world that’s it.

There’s a blog I love called Kunstspaziergänge that goes out and takes pictures of public art in Berlin—that guy’s the king of that power law. And so you’ve got to look at it in a new way. This is a world of niche. Mass market is dead; the mass of niches is going to take over media.

And I think that it’s important to rethink the power law calculation. That’s the old way of saying you can only have one paper in town; now you can have a thousand. They’ll all have their audiences.

—Jeff Jarvis
Global possibilities: public & participatory journalism session

Session summary by Rebecca MacKinnon, blogger and fellow at Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard.

Most of the PJNet conference dealt with public participatory journalism in North America. People had different views about the importance of blogs, but there was general consensus on one point: The Internet is the best thing that has happened to public and civic journalism in a long time. In fact, it could be their salvation.

But what about the rest of the world?

Developing a global digital commons

We are witnessing—and participating in—the growth of a global “digital commons:” a town hall in cyberspace in which people from anywhere in the world can share ideas, debate issues and get to know each other. In the ideal world, such a new, borderless digital commons would democratize the global flow of information, build understanding between people in different countries, etc. The reality is more unbalanced. Right now, the digital commons is predominantly first-world, affluent and English-speaking. Some digital communities have begun to emerge in other languages (such as Portuguese and Chinese), but most of these groups aren’t interacting much with the main English-speaking group. Different groups are holding separate conversations amongst themselves. How do we join these conversations?

Watching the Iranian example

Hossein Derakhshan (otherwise known by his nom-de-blog, “Hoder”) has done pioneering work in building an Iranian blogosphere, blogging largely in Persian. He has joined this Iranian conversation with the rest of the world through a number of English blogs written by Iranians. These Iranian bloggers show the world a side of Iran—and share information about life in Iran—that most westerners are not getting through their mainstream media. Internally, the Persian blogosphere has become a new place for relatively free political discourse in a closed, controlled society (although they do have problems with government filtering). He says blogs have encouraged a young generation of Iranians to become politically active and have given them a voice. They have helped to bridge conversations across generations and across genders. Politicians now keep an eye on blogs to see what the young generation of politically-minded Iranians is thinking.

As tensions between the United States and Iran increase over Iraq and over WMD, these issues are naturally getting a lot of mainstream media attention in the West. Something to watch: Can the Iranian blogosphere play any role in the way in which the Iran story is reported? Can the voices of young progressive bloggers influence the way in which the Western world—and Americans especially—view Iran and different potential policies toward Iran? This will be a fascinating question to watch—and blog—closely.

Public and participatory journalism in the context of extreme poverty

But don’t expect similar blogospheres to crop up in every country on earth. Much of the planet is simply

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too poor and unwired. The digital divide is too huge.

Take Africa. Melinda Robins of Emerson College taught civic journalism in Ethiopia. She points out that maybe 50,000 people out of 70 million Ethiopians have Internet access. And Internet access is the least of people’s concerns when it’s hard enough to get electricity or running water or decent sanitation or health care or basic medicines.

Laying the problem of poverty and Internet access aside, a more fundamental point is that you can’t really talk about how to use the Internet to bolster civic or public journalism in a given country unless you have a critical mass of people who understand what good civic journalism is, and why it’s in their interest—and in their country’s interest—to practice civic journalism. And I would add that if the journalists aren’t interested, you at least need a group of concerned citizens wanting to fill the void, as in Iran.

In other words, people need to be taught that there can be much more to “news” and “news reporting” than simply parroting what the president and his cabinet did on any given day.

There must be a demand or desire, somewhere in society, for something better. Local journalists must learn to focus on the most fundamental problems their countries face, and ask the tough questions like: “Why are there thousands of families living on the streets?” Robins asks: Why are the journalists not talking to these people? The fundamental first step is for journalists—be they professionals or citizen journalists—to see the value of asking such questions in addition to having the courage to ask them. The tools you use to ask the questions and disseminate your findings are secondary to the values and practices of civic journalism themselves.

Dealing with the digital divide

Terry Thielen has worked in a number of countries, including Jamaica, on projects related to civic engagement and the media during times of democratic transition. She strongly agrees with Robins on the digital divide issue, and also points out that North Americans tend to take the idea of civic engagement for granted. She points out that talk radio and community radio can be much more effective as a civic journalism tool than the Internet in countries like Jamaica, where there are few decent roads, let alone Internet connections.

She has also found that in some places, grassroots forms of community and civic journalism are already much more well developed than people realize. But it is adapted to the local economic and infrastructural situation—which in many cases means that it is not likely to make the jump onto the Internet any time soon, because the communities they serve are simply not on line.

Nikhil Moro of Kennesaw State University points out that there are also many people on this planet who may have the ability to connect to the Internet, but for cultural or other social reasons, are not interested in joining the global cyber-commmons. He also points out that freedom of expression is not a core value for everyone, on the Internet or otherwise.

On the other side of the digital divide, Chris Waddle of the Anniston Star in Alabama is working to make global news locally relevant to Americans in the heartland. Again, his focus is more on the method than medium per se—his newspaper’s techniques can be applied in old-media newspapers, or in new-media Internet formats. At the end of the day, the challenge lies less in high-tech bells-and-whistles than in finding ways to make connections between the hometown and events going on half a world away. Waddle believes that by focusing on local angles of international stories, they’ve succeeded in getting more international news into the paper—news that the community is truly interested in.

Finding niche international audiences

One great benefit of the Internet is that it allows us to engage niche audiences on specific international issues in ways that were not financially feasible before. One example of this is my experimental weblog focused on North Korea, www.NKzone.org. Launched as part of my research project on international news and weblogs for the Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, NKzone has built an “information community” of people who want to know more about what is happening in and around North Korea than the mainstream media is able to tell them—not only by providing links to information but also by inviting people to share their own information and discuss North Korea-related issues with each other. If public journalism’s raison d’etre is to find ways to engage and educate the public about critical national security and foreign policy issues, perhaps this interactive

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format could be a useful tool.

The advent of bloggers in countries like Iraq and even Saudi Arabia has for the first time enabled ordinary citizens in the West to converse directly with citizens of those countries. People can get firsthand perspectives on what it’s like to be an Iraqi or Saudi Arabian without the intermediation of a professional journalist. Such direct conversations, I believe, make those countries much more real—and highlight the complexity of their problems—in ways that are much more lasting and memorable than just watching a TV spot or skimming a newspaper article.

Certainly, there are major challenges when it comes to internationalizing public and participatory journalism through the Internet. But we must not forget that what distinguishes public journalism from commercial journalism is the commitment to serve the greater public interest by informing citizens of our democracies about critical policy issues so that people can cast informed votes. It is a responsibility that commercial media has largely forsaken, especially when it comes to foreign news. At a time when corporate-owned news media is increasingly failing to inform the public on critical foreign policy issues, it is the responsibility of public journalism to find innovative new ways to fill in the gaps, and find ways to make international news both relevant and real to the publics we serve. New interactive tools that allow cross-border conversation and information sharing will hopefully help us to do that.

(Thanks to Canadian blogger Joey DeVilla for his excellent notes.)


BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Bloggers on mainstream media vs. bloggers

Compiled by Jim Elve with notes from Joey DeVilla

About 12 to 15 participants were led by Warren Kinsella for a structured discussion based on a pre-designed agenda. Many of the participants, including Kinsella, are active Canadian bloggers.

The first question we discussed was aimed at defining three important messages news organizations should be thinking about in this era of new journalism. Narrowing our ideas into three main messages was a bit difficult.

(1) One thing that was generally agreed upon was that the rise of the blogosphere has been largely driven by a failure (or “perceived” failure) on the part of mainstream media to deliver the type of content blog readers want. Blogs are often “niche” efforts and perhaps relate more closely to specialty cable channels or special-interest periodicals than they do to daily newspapers. This was echoed by a statement that today’s media audience is very fragmented and a single voice does not resonate with everyone. The ability to personalize the delivery of web-based content was mentioned.

(2) The group felt that the mainstream press does not really “get” blogging and probably feels that they are already providing blog-like content in the form of op-ed pieces and specialty sections. This, we felt, misses the instantaneous interactivity afforded by blog comments sections. Some media outlets do,

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however, allow readers to comment on controversial news items—notably, BBC news online.

(3) The phrase “Nintendo generation” was brought up, and it was felt that the big media was not aiming content at this sector. Young news consumers want conciseness, “non-fluffy” reports. The idea that there needs to be a single lowest common denominator was challenged. Different parts of a publication can be aimed at different levels of reader sophistication.

Next, we were asked to consider the opportunities that blogs might present for big media and what possible pitfalls they might create.

We felt that the blogging model offers news organizations the opportunity to learn a lot about their audiences through feedback mechanisms. The ability to interact and have a two-way conversation with news media was seen as something that would generate good public relations. Bloggers see the blogosphere as a largely untapped source of expert and informed opinion on which news organizations can draw.

The idea that the audience can instantly talk back on a Web-published piece was seen as a challenge to the conventional “one to many” publication model. We felt that it would be difficult for big media to do a good job of adopting blogging’s greatest strengths: unabashedly opinionated op-ed, fisking/fact-checking and analysis. The fact that the blogger is his own editor and he has no deadline to work to was seen as an advantage for the blogger over mainstream media.

We then talked about the action steps that news organizations might take. We generally agreed that newspapers should proceed with caution regarding integrating blogs into their content. Not every reporter can be a good blogger, and not every blogger can conform to the needs of news organizations. Again, we came back to the idea of using bloggers as sources for background info and informed comment.

We all agreed that most online news outlets don’t understand the importance of outgoing links. Linking out almost always results in others linking back in. We felt big media should give more freedom to reporters and columnists who wish to blog outside the corporate domain; i.e., on their own personal blogs. We also agreed that news organiza-

Andrea Frantz asks a question during a session.

Andrea Breemer Frantz, professor, Wilkes University, roundtable discussion leader.

The roundtable discussion on teaching opportunities in public journalism focused on the curricular possibilities and challenges faculty face as they incorporate participatory journalism into existing courses or plan new ones. The following summary outlines key assertions

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offered by participants in this roundtable discussion.

Most important messages

While group members acknowledged many messages that were relevant to an ongoing discussion about public journalism education, we agreed that posing questions as issues was more reflective of the field at the moment. We tend to have more questions than answers at this point. The following list illustrates the wide range of issues teachers face as they work to incorporate participatory journalism strategies into the classroom. Posed as questions, they may well be seen as fruitful areas for research.

How do we teach public journalism? This is both a pragmatic “how to” question and a philosophical/theory question that went off on several tangents. Of all of our questions, this was perhaps the biggest and most fruitful. We train students to deconstruct existing methods and texts, and we train them to pursue civic and participatory projects, but when they go out, what will they face?

How do we teach them to sustain the ethical and community-oriented model beyond their experience as undergraduate and graduate students? How do we teach students to champion participatory journalism when they enter the field as professionals—how do we sustain the pioneering spirit in them beyond school? Where can students interested in practicing public journalism go after they graduate? How do we help guide with internships through advising?

One discussion in response to the original “how to” question was to engage students in a civic mapping exercise that encourages awareness of various levels of community constituents. This is both inexpensive—free—and valuable in terms of bolstering awareness and research skills.

How does public journalism change how we teach ethics? We are focused on graduating “good citizens” but how does an emphasis on public journalism impact that? Has the diminishing role of gatekeeper for bloggers, for example, changed the nature of news and its delivery?

How does valuing civic and participatory journalism impact how we teach writing? How do we create a new “norm of acceptance” in terms of language creation?

How do we garner new resources for the classroom? For training in technology and software? How do we encourage administration to value this effort on campus and see it as community investment?

How does participatory journalism impact the role of the journalism educator in the classroom?

This question was actually addressed on a number of levels and led to an interesting conversation about the issue of “authority” and the importance of teaching students basic skills. Public and participatory journalism is just one of several strands students need to have in their skills boxes. They need to have exposure.

Classroom opportunities in participatory journalism

Roundtable discussants agreed that civic and participatory strategies in journalism courses offer a range of opportunities for both faculty members and students. The following list outlines a few of those advantages:

• First and foremost, civic journalism opens up options. It is for the people and by the people, and practitioners don’t necessarily need a journalism degree to do it. In addition, it offers options to those students who have an interest in different kinds of writing, editing, designing, but who have little interest in the mainstream media approach to reporting.

• A public/civic approach is an extension of learning through self-discovery. Public participation using blogging; interactive tools on websites such as maps, games, polls and face-to-face strategies all offer ways

We train students to deconstruct existing methods and texts, and we train them to pursue civic and participatory projects, but when they go out, what will they face?
to allow for personal growth. This is true not only for audiences/participants, but for students and teachers as well.

- Participatory journalism is feminist pedagogy in practice.
- Participatory journalism is very exciting and enlightening for both students and faculty. It gets us out of the traditional classroom and it forces us to recognize the world/community as the classroom.
- Students also gain an emotional investment in the community—one they may not have seen previously as a place to invest in, given their traditionally transient nature.
- Civic journalism challenges students to be public with their work. While there is inherent risk with that, it affirms the importance of ethics, good writing and research, accuracy, fairness and attention to detail.

Challenges, pitfalls of teaching participatory journalism
While the excitement and enthusiasm for teaching public/civic journalism outweighs potential deterrents, it was evident through our discussion that with change comes challenge. Interestingly, some of the most exciting “benefits” to participation also lead to some of the greatest challenges. The following list offers a glimpse at key challenges our group discussed.

Blurring of roles
Students need to learn from some sort of authority. Critical thinking comes from understanding your own ignorance. But participatory approaches may encourage students to value the particular too much and ignore important generalizations and the need for connections across ideas.

Grading, evaluation, assessment. Assessment is always a challenge for teachers, but in participatory journalism will we need to adjust what we value and how we grade? Should there be different standards?

Demonstrating value of participatory journalism. Even if students don’t land a job at a paper or network after graduation that actively engages in participatory journalism, they need to be armed with rationale and skills to articulate how and why it is of value. When we introduce some of these skills, they may not be appreciated by first or second employers.

Focusing on the tools too much. With the advent of blogging and interactivity on Web sites, the tendency is to get caught up in teaching those skills over valuing the purpose and important outcomes of community participation. Focusing on the bells and whistles without focusing on the essence of public journalism could be problematic. The technology is only part of the picture. It’s also about the skills and awareness of process.

This stuff is complex. We need to understand (and teach) how community networks work. Outcomes may be hard to show immediately.

Action steps
Given these challenges, the roundtable discussants determined steps that might be taken to help teachers connect with others engaged in civic journalism.

- Give teachers the tools for learning to blog.
- Provide central clearinghouse for “best practices.”
- Create a mini-conference, teleconference, or I-chat for teachers to discuss classroom issues.
- Establish a journalism educators committee and blog to discuss issues and establish research agenda.

Messages for support system providers
Finally, the discussants determined several messages that we need to communicate with system providers and/or administrators.

- Offer teachers flexibility (release time, respite from new preps, resources—technical, financial) to change existing courses and/or introduce new courses with civic components.

- Understand that civic engagement is all about where most universities want and need to go. Given the trend toward service learning, communication/media courses seem tailor-made for such efforts.

- Awareness of global and local issues is the benefit of such efforts. Students and teachers will deepen their understanding of community issues and solutions. In addition, students’ understandings of the complexities of audiences should lead to greater appreciation of diversity and expose them to ways of thinking outside their ken.
The five-member panel that met to explore a research agenda for the fusion potential of participatory and public journalism began by describing their own research interests in the area, which included blogging, wikis, and the linkages of democratic theory and sociological theories with both public and participatory journalism.

The panel started with a discussion of the importance of carefully defining research constructs. In some people’s minds terms such as public journalism and participatory journalism are equivalent, but others would say they are distinct concepts; similarly, other terms such as “interactivity” have received different definitions in the literature. The panelists did not seek to answer these questions, which are far-reaching, wide-ranging and can be thorny ones as well. The burden lies on the researcher to carefully define the focus and terms of the research, and the panelists sought to emphasize that as a precursor to further discussions.

**Key areas of focus**

Moving into the breakout agenda provided by the conference, a discussion of the messages or research questions researchers should consider developed the following as key threads for potential research:

- What theoretical perspectives can help us understand the differences between public and participatory journalism, if a distinction does exist? (This, rather naturally, was an extension of the definitional questions raised in the introductory discussion.)
- Are classical theoretical approaches (uses and gratifications, agenda setting, etc.) sufficient to explain online communication behaviors?
- Are there biases in these traditional research paradigms? Or should we be engaging in building new theory?
- How do technologies contribute to creating communities (or can they)?
- How are the changes in power relationships (who controls the information flow) between gatekeepers and audiences evolving?

**Opportunities and pitfalls**

The ability to engage in theory building was seen as an important new opportunity for researchers, although a potential pitfall was seen in research that tends toward theory reification.

Interdisciplinary approaches that combine communication theories with those of cognitive development (education), sociology and political science, to name just a few areas, were seen as an especially rich opportunity for such theory building.

Excessive focus on the “gee whiz” aspects of new technology was seen as a serious potential pitfall.

The rapid expansion of the field and huge amount of material available through the Internet presents a wealth of research opportunities. But that comes with an associated pitfall because the sheer volume of information available for analysis challenges researchers in their efforts to find an effective research focus, operationalize variables and collect and analyze data in ways that are replicable and have good internal and external validity. The ever-changing, rapidly evolving nature of the online world adds to these problems by giving researchers a “moving target” that they’re trying to hit.

**Action steps/messages to research community**

A few concrete steps that the research panel suggested to help researchers take advantage of the opportunities and avoid the pitfalls included:

- Development of an online community for researchers.
- Boosting the identity of this research community within AEJMC.
- Establish interdisciplinary research projects both within researchers’ home institutions and with collaborators from other institutions.
- Promote the concept of media “agnosticism” with respect to research in public and participatory journalism so that these don’t become pigeonholed or associated with just one or a few types of media channels.
- Promote a culture that emphasizes the value of both qualitative and quantitative methods in research, and seeks to integrate both approaches in individual research projects.