

The Convergence Newsletter

-- From Newsplex at the University of South Carolina
Vol. 1 No. 2 (12 August 2003)

EXPLORING THE MEANING OF MEDIA CONVERGENCE

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide an editorially neutral forum for discussion of the theoretical and professional meaning of media convergence.

We welcome articles on any topic directly related to media convergence. We also welcome information about conferences, publications and related links.

Please contact us for submission guidelines and a deadline schedule.

James D. Christian, Editor
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***** FEATURE ARTICLES

NEW MEDIA/OLD VALUES

Some claim the intricacy and ubiquity of Web-based news and information call for new ethical standards -- the old models don't work. They say Kant's absolutism is too rigid and impractical for an entity that is evolving and morphing by the day, if not by the hour. And Mill's consequentialism, which is a difficult framework to apply even in traditional media settings, seems all but irrelevant because of the diffuse audience and the countless uses to which they put news and information delivered online. Such claims might be true, but I don't believe the old masters should be abandoned so readily when discussing new media and their uses and applications.

Reduced to their essence, new media as applied to news and information enterprises are to be employed for the three (principal) journalistic activities: news and information gathering, packaging and presentation, and distribution and dissemination. I would argue that traditional ethical standards relating to these processes are not rendered irrelevant when we shift to new media platforms.

For example, just as traditional newsroom reporters should not appropriate another's work or manipulate newsmakers to get information, new-media reporters should not pull harum-scarum from easily accessible Web sites (some of which, of course, are of dubious origin) or indiscriminately set up or pull from bulletin boards or user forums to lend greater relevance to their work.

And -- just as editors and news producers must decide how and where a story will be presented -- taking care not to artificially inflate the story's importance through 6-column headlines or startling anchor lead-ins -- journalists packaging news and information for new media platforms must take care not to take advantage of sound and video capabilities and other innovations to heighten the "importance" of a relatively unimportant event simply because they can. The user is not well served when bells and whistles are used without purpose. Traditional newsroom reporters and editors must decide day to day -- perhaps, hour by hour -- whether to go with a story or hold it. These deliberations are good and useful and are crucial if the newspaper or news station is to maintain credibility with readers and viewers. The temptation to instantly update news and information with the slightest shift in the wind, and before information can be fully verified or corroborated, should be avoided. The damage done by an inaccurate item -- even if it appears only briefly -- is, because of the ubiquity and accessibility of the Web, incalculable.

Kant would advocate embracing clear, inviolable and overarching standards to guide the actions of new-media journalists as they gather, package and

distribute their product. Such standards might include never claiming what isn't yours, never overselling a story and never turning a story loose before its time.

Mill urges us to consider the greater good and do that which will benefit the most parties. Running with bogus information, pumping up a piece to enhance reader interest, and publishing unsubstantiated information might offer short-term benefits to the media operation but, in the long-run these actions will injure the franchise and media consumers, who, despite recent events, still believe much of what they read and hear.

Ernest L. Wiggins
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School of Journalism and Mass Communications
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STUDENTS DISCOVER CONVERGENCE CHALLENGES

The challenge was to get beginning journalism students thinking about how multimedia and convergence might change their work as professionals.

The answer was at Newsplex, where students from the University of South Carolina's School of Journalism and Mass Communications this summer have explored new complexities of storytelling and editing on deadline.

While students learned journalism's basic skills, they also began thinking about skills needed in five or 10 years, when some of these students will likely be newsroom managers.

For two days in June, the beginning broadcast reporting class (taught by Tim Brown) and the copy-editing class (taught by Doug Fisher) tackled a story about plans by the university and Columbia to blanket the central city with wireless Internet access.

"I never realized the large amount of responsibility and pressure involved in the job of being an editor," one student wrote later.

Another wrote, "It taught me that you can't always write a story with words alone."

The radio students broke the idea into nine stories with some overlap (for instance, students flocked to the one restaurant they knew had wireless) and headed to the field the week before the joint sessions.

The editors, however, didn't see the material until they walked into

Newsplex on a Monday afternoon. As story builders on a deadline, one of the new roles being tested at Newsplex, they edited a print-oriented piece and then redid the story for the Web: tighter, with scanning points, bulleted items, links and other material.

On the second day - each daily session lasted 2 1/2 hours - came the radio material. During the first hour, our nascent editors, working in two-person teams, made quick decisions: How does a reporter's work fit into the story concept? Use the package or extract the audio? Are there unanswered questions to be pursued?

In the second hour, to acquaint students with nonlinear storytelling, especially when all the pieces don't arrive at once, video and audio from the owner of a computer store were introduced. The editors redid the main story and produced another, with links, audio-video and still photos, on what consumers should know about buying wireless gear.

"I feel it was a wakeup call to what the real world is like," one student wrote later. "I had to take data, pictures, audio and video that I had never seen and piece them together in a certain amount of time."

"For a while I had wondered if I had lost what it takes to be in a newsroom," the student wrote. "Tuesday I found that I still have it."

In addition to reporting, the broadcast students also built Web pages to get them working together in different ways.

In one group, each member focused on contributing to the site's main page. The other group produced several pages by delegating jobs. Without prompting, its members fell into the roles of story builder and "news resourcer" - a journalistically oriented information specialist that could be another key role in future newsrooms.

The broadcast students, who had worked with Netscape Composer, shifted easily to Microsoft FrontPage. The editing class, on the other hand, worked in Microsoft Word with text boxes, frames, links and pictures to produce a mock-up. Instead of spending time learning new software, the emphasis was on getting the editors to concentrate on the storytelling and how to do it iteratively as separate elements arrive.

We are now repeating the process, but this time with two reporting classes, one print and one broadcast, examining Columbia's park system.

Among the things we learned:

Everything probably will take twice as long as you think it will. Some

things may need to be done in advance so that beginning students can think ahead and be ready.

Your students may be more familiar with broadcast and the Web than with the concepts of print.

Working with another class increases the learning through handling copy from someone they aren't being graded against.

Some of this could have been done in the Coliseum's concrete-block-walled computer labs, but not with the richness of using Newsplex. And besides, as one student wrote, "It was nice to get away from the Coliseum where there are no windows."

Doug Fisher and Tim Brown
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School of Journalism and Mass Communications
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Editor's Note: We invite other educators to submit comments about their experiences teaching converged media classes.

OPERATIONALIZING CONVERGENCE

Newsroom convergence was a hot topic at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, 30 July - 2 August, in Kansas City. Although the topic was widely discussed and debated, fewer than half of the presentations dealing with convergence included a definition of the term.

A notable exception was a paper authored by Larry Dailey, Lori Demo, and Mary Spillman from Ball State University. The paper offered a conceptual continuum of five degrees of convergence, extending and applying diffusion of innovations and gatekeeping theory to conceptualize the Convergence Continuum.

The Convergence Continuum was presented as a series of five semi-overlapping circles on a line, designed to illustrate the concept that each of the five is characterized by a wide range of behaviors that can "overlap as interaction and cooperation increase among news organizations."

The five stages in the Convergence Continuum:

"Cross promotion is the process of using words and/or visual elements to promote content produced by the partner and appearing in the partner's

medium (e.g., when a newscaster urges the viewers to read a story appearing in the newspaper or the newspaper publishes the logo of the television partner)."

"Cloning is essentially unedited display of a partner's product (e.g., content from a newspaper or newscast is republished on the partner's Web site or jointly operated Web portal."

"Coopetition is the point at which partners cooperate by sharing information on selected stories, but still compete and produce original content (e.g., when a newspaper reporter appears on a newscast as an expert to discuss a story or a broadcaster allows a print photographer to ride on the station helicopter to cover breaking news)."

"Content sharing exists when the partners meet regularly to exchange ideas and jointly develop special projects (e.g., election coverage or investigative work)."

"Convergence is the level at which partners have a shared assignment/editor's desk and the story is developed by team members who use the strengths of each medium to best tell the story (e.g., a multimedia project that contains in-depth text for print and Web, still photos and video, audio, graphics, searchable databases and other interactive elements."

(Source: Daily, L, Demo, L., & Spillman, M. (2003). "The Convergence Continuum: A Model for Studying Collaboration Between Media Newsrooms.")

The complete paper is available in electronic format by emailing the first author: ldailey@bsu.edu.

The Convergence Newsletter is eager to present other models, conceptual definitions, and operationalizations of convergence. Please send your comments and papers to convergence-editor@gwm.sc.edu.

NEWSPLEX NEWS

The Newsplex staff celebrated a milestone in July with the arrival of the first Newsplex trainees from U.S. academic institutions. The first Summer Seminar on Teaching and Research for University Faculty was held in the Newsplex during the second week of July. Without giving too much away (the summer seminars will be profiled in the next issue of the Convergence Newsletter), I can report that the staff greatly enjoyed meeting faculty members Michael Abrams of Florida A & M University, Claire Badaracco of Marquette University, Sybril Bennett of Belmont University, Paul Bush of

Franklin Pierce College, Jerry Donnelly of Northwest Missouri State University, Holly Edgell of Florida A & M University, Barbara Iverson of Columbia College, Chicago, Cathy Roan of Penn State University, Erie, and Jennifer Woodard of Middle Tennessee State University. The seminar was so successful that the Newsplex faculty and staff have already met to begin planning next summer's seminar, tentatively scheduled for the far-less-hot-and-humid month of May.

Who would have thought that the participants in the Newsplex Summer Workshop on Convergent Media for College Students would suffer from the cold and damp the very next week? Afternoon thunderstorms kept the advanced undergraduate and graduate student participants from sunbathing by the hotel pool, and an air conditioning malfunction dropped temperatures in the Newsplex to uncomfortable levels for a day or two. But the students - Nathan Geddie from the University of Mississippi, Carah Herring from Bennett College (Greensboro, North Carolina), Jennifer Van DeVyvere from Northwest Missouri State University and the University of South Carolina's own Crystal Boyles and Brant Guillory - took it all in stride, producing some fantastic multiple-media final projects.

The next training opportunity for members of the academic community will be a two-day convergence boot camp Nov. 9 and 10, immediately following the academic conference Expanding Convergence: Media Use in a Changing Information Environment scheduled for Nov. 6, 7 and 8. For a copy of the flier listing all upcoming Newsplex academic offerings, please e-mail Newsplex Academic Coordinator Augie Grant at augie@sc.edu.

The full slate of seminars and training sessions for members of the professional community are scheduled for this fall as well. The Ifra seminar Newsplex Roles Training for Multiple-Media Staff will be held Aug. 25-29. More information on this training session and other upcoming seminars can be found at www.newsplex.org.

Curriculum and Classes

Faculty from South Carolina's School of Journalism and Mass Communications integrated Newsplex instruction into their summer course offerings this year. As their article indicates, Tim Brown and Doug Fisher introduced convergent media skills in several team-taught sessions of their television reporting, print reporting, radio production and copy editing classes. Cecile Holmes taught a week of her intensive Maymester class, Narrative Journalism, in the facility as well. The print journalism sequence's capstone course, Senior Semester, rotated through the Newsplex last Spring, with Cecile, Doug and Scott Farrand team-teaching. Six weeks in the upcoming fall term are reserved for undergraduate instruction in the Newsplex as well.

Visitors

Betsy Hutton, Series Producer of What's In The News, an educational current events series for K through 12 students broadcast nationally on PBS, and Feng Jun, executive director of the Beijing Emay Software Technology company, toured in late June and early July. Also visiting and receiving a hands on demonstration of the Visual Communicator software program were Jo Anne Hoffman of Newsplex Directorate member Morris Communications and staff members from The Augusta Chronicle, a Morris Communications newspaper. Visual Communicator, a desktop software program that "automates and simplifies creation of sophisticated video/audio news content suitable for distribution over a wide array of media including broadcast, the Web, CDs, mobile phones and e-mail" has quickly become a favorite teaching and production tool in the Newsplex.

Other groups welcomed by Newsplex staff in July and early August included the librarians and staff of the University of South Carolina's Thomas Cooper Library, the Board of the South Carolina Insurance Writers Association, and members of the South Carolina Arts Commission.

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***** CONFERENCE INFORMATION

NEW RESEARCH FOR NEW MEDIA: INNOVATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota, U.S.A.
4-6 Sept. 2003

New media offer both new research techniques and new communication arenas to be studied. This symposium will bring together researchers who have been applying new media technologies to traditional research areas and those applying traditional research methods to new media studies. Invited speakers will discuss their application of new research methods. Symposium participants will serve as discussants, elevating the examination of these techniques and their implications for research.

For additional information, visit:

<http://www.inms.umn.edu/convenings/newresearch/main.htm>

HIGHWAY AFRICA CONFERENCE

Department of Journalism
Rhodes University
Grahamstown, South Africa
8-10 Sept. 2003

Highway Africa will examine the intersection of journalism, technology and the "Information Society". Within this, a strong theme will be on understanding the policy and regulatory issues around convergence issues - and the role that journalists play in developing national policies.

For additional information, visit:

<http://www.highwayafrica.org.za/>

DIGITAL RESOURCES FOR THE HUMANITIES CONFERENCE

University of Gloucestershire
Cheltenham United Kingdom
31 Aug. - 3 Sept. 2003

Registration is now open for the annual Digital Resources for the Humanities conference. DRH is the major forum for all those involved in, and affected by, the digitization of our cultural heritage. It is a unique forum bringing together scholars, teachers, publishers and broadcasters, librarians, curators and archivists, and computer and information specialists. It provides an opportunity to consider the latest ideas in the creation and use of digital resources in all aspects of work in the humanities, in an informal and enjoyable atmosphere.

Conference themes include:

The impact of access to digital resources on teaching and learning

Digital libraries, archives and museums

Time-based media and multimedia studies in performing arts

Network technologies used to support international community programmes

The anticipated convergence between televisual, communication and computing media and its effect on the humanities

Knowledge representation, including visualization and simulation

THE PROGRAMME

The academic programme for the conference includes over 50 refereed papers, and a range of panel discussions, as well as poster presentations. This year's plenary speakers are Meg Bellinger, formerly of OCLC and now of Yale University Library, a key figure in the world of digital preservation; and Kim Veltman, Scientific Director of the Maastricht McLuhan Institute and co-ordinator of a European Network of Centres of Excellence in Digital Cultural Heritage. The conference will also feature an exhibition of leading-edge products and services of relevance to the DRH communities, and a range of social activities -- including dinner at the celebrated Cheltenham Gold Cup Race Course.

For additional information, visit:

<http://www.glos.ac.uk/humanities/content.asp?sid=6>

4th INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT ON NEWSROOMS

IFRA PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE

"Expanding Convergence"

Ifra Newsplex at the University of South Carolina
Columbia, South Carolina, U.S.A.

5-6 Nov. 2003

News organizations are beginning to take notice of the kind of news content and functionality that today's news consumers require, and are implementing strategies to deliver on consumer demands. By analyzing users' news consumption behavior and explicit responses, news companies have learned that their readers, viewers, listeners and surfers want more interactivity, more multimedia content, more choices in news and time-shifting, and more opportunities to multitask.

Summit4 will focus on how news companies are responding to what users want, and about strategies to shift from a media-focused organization to a user-focused company. Case studies and academic research will explain the opportunities and challenges associated with the shift in focus.

For additional information, visit:

http://www.newsplex.org/program/training_summit4.shtml

ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH CONFERENCE

"Expanding Convergence: Media Use in a Changing Information Environment"

College of Mass Communications and Information Studies
University of South Carolina

Columbia, South Carolina, U.S.A.

6-8 Nov. 2003

The rapidly evolving media landscape is producing new patterns of media use that are having profound implications on the competitive media landscape, the daily operation of media organizations, and our understanding of the theoretical forces that underlie media use. The purpose of this conference is to provide a scholarly forum for understanding these evolving patterns of media use from a variety of perspectives ranging from the theoretical to the practical.

For additional information, visit:

<http://newsplex.sc.edu/fall2003con.html>

ONLINE NEWS ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

Chicago and Evanston, Illinois, U.S.A.
14-15 Nov. 2003

This conference will bring together hundreds of online journalists for two days of professional networking and focused discussion of issues critical to the digital news industry

A banquet and presentation of the 4th Annual Online Journalism Awards will culminate the ONA conference. The awards will be presented to reporters, editors, photographers, designers, producers and news outlets that have demonstrated excellence in online journalism in the past year. Attendees will have the opportunity to question award honorees during the annual "Best of the Best" program.

For additional information, visit:

<http://www.journalists.org/Programs/Conferences.htm>

BROADCAST EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

49th Annual Convention & Exhibition
2nd Annual Festival of Media Arts
Las Vegas, Nevada, U.S.A.
16-18 April 2004

The BEA2004 Convention theme is Bold Vision, Fresh Thinking: Untangling Media's Gordian Knot. The theme lends itself well to examining new approaches to the vexing issues of media's intricate societal entanglements. Each panel should strive to seriously think about, challenge, and/or discuss the issues that arise from emerging technologies, changing regulatory policies and increasing media consolidation-and to do so in daring and

innovative ways. The theme is intended as a focus for the convention, but does not imply that convention sessions must conform.

For additional information, visit:

<http://www.beaweb.org/bea2004/callprop.html>

THE MICHIGAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE, ARTS, & LETTERS

Grand Valley State University
Pew Campus
Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.
5-6 March 2004

The Academy is pleased next year to meet at Grand Valley State University, an institutional member of the organization since the Academy's incorporation in 1969. GVSU last hosted the Academy in 1999.

Dennis L. Wignall, Ph.D., Saginaw Valley State University, chairs the Communication section.

For additional information, visit:

<http://www.umich.edu/~michacad/>

***** ANNOUNCEMENTS

RELATED LINKS

For information about our Academic Affiliates, visit:

<http://www.newsplex.org/affiliates.shtml>

Newsplex at the University of South Carolina Web Site:

<http://newsplex.sc.edu/>

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