

## **The journalism we need**

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It is too often said that the news is dying; print will collapse and with it journalism too will fall. Full-time newsroom employment fell 6.4 percent in 2012, the Gannett Company cut over 400 positions in 2013, and the Tribune Company is estimated to have cut 700, according to a [Pew Research Journalist Project report](#). Obviously, to an outsider, trends such as this appear to show journalism's decline. While it may be true that newspapers have shrunk in circulation and advertising dollars are not as abundant as they once were, this does not mean that the news is a dying industry. In fact, more people are reading the news – just not in print. Throughout history, the role of the journalist has remained the same: to inform the public. What has not remained the same, however, is the medium through which this mission is accomplished. As can be seen throughout history, different ways of obtaining and disseminating information continually shift as they now and will continue to do. Journalists must now just embrace to changing trends in media.

Journalism has been through time shaped technologically, culturally, and socially. When Guttenberg's printing press was modified to be steam powered, and later include the rotary press, journalism as an industry was given new life. Birthing the penny press, improvements in technology proved to be the lifeblood of the American news. More papers could be printed for cheaper selling prices. Increased rail transportation took news farther, and more news came back to print. With the invention of Morse's electromagnetic telegraph, news was carried through the wires and onto the papers of nearly 300,000 daily readers by 1850, according to Christopher Daly's *Covering America*.

So, why the debate? Technology continues to change and improve the ease with which information can be disseminated. Hardships in publishing have effectively been ended as a result of the Internet, according to Clay Shirky in his piece, [Newspapers and Thinking the Unthinkable](#).

Today's debate over the future of news stems from the fact that newspapers are no longer the dominant medium through which America – the world, even – gets its news.

Simply, newspapers are adornments on front steps, paperweights made out of paper. Why flip from the front to page five, section A1 to finish reading a story when the same story can be found on one page, online? Part of the beauty of the journalism industry is the relationship between journalist, content, and the public. This echoes back to how journalism is shaped socially and culturally. The media companies do not dictate today's news. It is the readers who dictate today's news, and it is not a new concept. According to Daly, the success of the penny press was a result of sensationalism, used to gain the attention of the readers who wanted new, exciting information every day. So again, why flip through pages and pages of newspaper when the stories of the moment are posted by the second on Twitter?

Millions of people asked this question. Millions answered it themselves. [According to Pew](#), in 2012, 57 percent of people got their news via television programming. 33 percent got their news from the radio and only 29 percent read the newspapers, while 39 percent got their news either online or on-the-go. Surely, it is more now. Social networking now carries the brunt of the online news market. As of March 2014, 52 percent of Twitter's [271 million active users](#) get their news through the site, and 47 percent of Facebook's [1.23 billion active](#) users do the same.

Therefore, the time is now that journalism stops clinging to its nostalgic roots. The industry has always had to "give the people what they want," and it is simple enough to say that people do not want newspapers; they just want news. Right now, the online stream of information has worked the best in terms of providing people with their basic wants: information and timeliness.

Critics of the stream argue that it is too confusing for people to discern the important information from click-bait. Alexis Madrigal of *The Atlantic* [criticizes the stream's effectiveness](#), saying that its permanence and unending territory are ineffective at generating meaning. "I am not joking when I say: it is easier to read *Ulysses* than it is to read the Internet. Because at least *Ulysses* has an end, an edge. *Ulysses* can be finished. The Internet is never finished."

In his critique, Madrigal negatively describes journalism's best opportunity to bounce back as an industry: the Internet's incompleteness. There is opportunity for exploration, the chance to create new things and let them fail if they need to. Shirky alludes to this notion. He writes, "If the old model is broken, what will work in its place? The answer

is: Nothing will work, but everything might. Now is the time for experiments, lots and lots of experiments.” In 1833, Benjamin Day created the first reporter position for his newspaper, *The Sun*. This experimental position led to what now a \$60 million industry. So why would it not make sense for the *New York Times* in 2008 to hire David Carr as its first Media Reporter, as seen in *Page One: Inside the New York Times*.

The point is that new positions are created all the time to fit this changing media landscape. There were no social media reporters prior to ten years ago. There were no trend analysts; there was no BuzzFeed. There were papers being delivered, there was the early morning report at 6 a.m. and the nightly news at 6 p.m., and all that worked then. But this is now. Newspapers no longer work because they are not what people want. “Society doesn’t need newspapers. What we need is journalism,” Shirky says. People want their content to come to them. People want their news to arrive in their own, personalized streams. People want to generate their own content and immerse themselves in convergence. It is time to move past the nostalgia for the past and embrace the digital age.

Therefore it is imperative that we as a society invest in today’s journalists. Maybe I’m biased, but as a news consumer, I also agree. Journalists must be well versed in the fields of photo, video, audio, and social media. It is crucial that they must understand media convergence and utilize it in every aspect of their reporting. As a multimedia journalist in training, I constantly check news websites to see what the major outlets are doing in their reporting. I compare news outlets to each other to see what is better, what works, and what does not. These are the things that make journalists who they are. We are not just reporters. We are experts in our fields, the outlets to the public. It is our civic duty to keep on top of our work, or face an angered, uninformed public’s backlash. The video below sums up a journalist’s evolving role in and out of the newsroom as we move toward a digital generation.

It is time that journalists continue to preserve the public interest, and right now, the digital realm is the public’s interest. The masses want it fast, fresh, and user friendly. David Carr sums up the journalism industry’s solution in one simple sentence in *Page One*. “The medium’s not the message,” he states, subverting the core principal of mass communication laid out by the great Stuart Hall, “The messages are the media.” This is the journalism we need.

