

Time to sharpen your online skills

The bad news for print continues to pour in. New research from Pew indicates that many Americans do not consider having a local newspaper important. It is as if management knows this. McClatchy, the owner of the *Miami Herald* and other newspapers, just announced personnel cuts this week. The bottom line is that newspapers are hurting and many people don't care. Why? Because many people get their news online or from TV.

Recently, I read how a PR guy was lamenting the downfall of trade publications. I read this on his BLOG. He, like many PR folk, schooled in the "old" days, learned that to do media relations you reached out to print journalists. A nice, print piece in a trade magazine was truly a prize for the client. I also learned to do PR this way. And nothing was more exciting than seeing your client's name in the newspaper, especially on the front page. But the reality has shifted. More and more, the news is being reported on and broken online. Many people do not read the newspaper, and during the day, certainly do not watch TV. What these people do however, is access the Internet. Many offices allow unlimited Internet access, and certain folk, do their work ON the Internet. In any case, it is time for PR people, and advertising people, and in fact, all communications people, to accept this reality.

Instead of lamenting that blogs now are main sources of information, and that no one is reading trade publications, you must ADAPT to the new realities. Of course, newspapers are not quite dead yet, but teach yourself how to use the online world. Here are a few suggestions:

- 1) Are there **influential blogs** in your area of expertise? Find out and follow. Not every blog is created equal. The PR guy I mentioned before made the blanket statement that blogs are

unreliable. How wrong he is. Very few people would call The Huffington Post or Politico or the Daily Beast unreliable. Yes, they contain opinion, but it is LEADING opinion.

2) **Learn where your potential clients/customers/target audience goes to get their news AND entertainment.** After all, the Web is not just about information. Lots of people play games on the Internet, listen to music and find out about their hobbies.

3) Enhance your **web writing skills**. Writing for the web is not the same as writing for print. You have to be more concise. You have to be more choppy. People read differently online than in print.

4) **Explore multimedia.** People are more visual on the web. And the web allows for video/audio in addition to text.

In sum, stay ahead of the game. Nothing is to be gained from wringing our hands and lamenting the end of print. Instead, find new opportunities. I am sure in the late 1940s, PR people everywhere were concerned about the box in everyone's livingroom. By now, most PR agencies are experts at B-roll and media training. Right?



Going online and staying on message

Two separate items caught my attention this morning on Yahoo! News.

First, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer may become an online-

only newspaper. Its owner, Hearst, has been unable to find a buyer and had threatened to close down the paper completely. Read the story [here](#).

The second item has to do with President Obama. Apparently, he NEVER gives any speech, to large or small audiences, without using a teleprompter. According to the article (found on Yahoo! but originally from Politico.com), he wanted to wean himself off this habit during the campaign, but when he has given a speech without the help of visual aids, he has stumbled. His aides say it is especially important during this time to not mess up. I find it interesting that everyone compliments Obama's oratory, but the truth is he only gives good speeches when he can read them (they are canned). He has shown what happens when he ad-libs: he screws up. A few weeks ago I wrote about him speaking off the cuff, and now I know he truly has a problem being casual.

So, the moral of these stories is simple. The future of print is online and it is important to stay on message.

The death of newspapers

We've spoken about it before on this blog, and the bad news for newspapers continues to come in. As you probably know, the *Rocky Mountain News*, Colorado's oldest newspaper, ceased publication as of Friday (Feb. 27). Add to that, the continual bad news concerning all print media, and you know that the outlook for newspapers in particular, and print media in general, is not good. The reasons boil down to: 1) fewer advertisers/less ad dollars; 2) the Internet and 3) the environment (and perhaps not in that order). We've seen the print news industry has been battered by reductions in

advertising, and also, in reductions in people buying the print edition since they can get most content for free online. And some people are not buying paper because of the environmental consequences. So there you have it— we know the reasons why print media is going to be gone sooner rather than later. But how will we get our news if there are no newspapers?

In today's *Washington Post* there are two articles I'd like to bring to your attention. In one, Howard Kurtz, the Post's media commentator, discusses this phenomenon in detail. And another, by Marc Fisher, has to do with the lack of reporters covering Washington news. Indeed, this is the problem. If there are no newspapers, there are no reporters. With no reporters, there is no news.

Of course, part of the answer is adaptation. Newspapers will have to figure out a revenue stream from the online versions of their products and they will have to adapt what was essential reporting for print to reporting for the Internet age. However, the issue of advertising and paying for content will be just as relevant for the online versions of newspapers. If advertisers are cutting back, they are cutting back across the board. And if people are watching their pennies, they will also not pay for content.

Well, time will tell. In the meantime, I will continue to read my print newspaper as long as it continues to exist. And I will also read it and other newspapers online (after all, I am a news junkie). What will you do?

[polldaddy poll=1413884]



Those changes in print—UPDATED

Fitness Magazine's latest issue contains an insert...of coupons, just like you would find in newspapers. *Newsweek* is revamping its content/look and will try to up its price to subscribers (story from the *New York Times*). Last week, I looked up *Pink* magazine in the store, and found a thin magazine that resembled a supermarket tabloid or newsmagazine instead of a more solid (thick) magazine a la *Real Simple*. Why? Very little advertising. I can predict now that *Pink* will be folding within a year or going to a completely online iteration. The changes in the print world continue as magazines and newspapers try to grapple with a new economic panorama. Basically, magazines are looking for any source of additional revenue or cutting back to save costs.

The reality is advertisers are cutting back, but why? Why are advertisers circumventing print advertising? Print used to be attractive because it was targeted and print media have two things going for them: shelf life (especially for special editions) and something called readership, which is the total amount of readers per issue (not to be confused with circulation, which is the number of issues that are distributed). Has print advertising become too expensive? We know for certain magazine subscriptions were unchanged, so it is not the drop in circulation.

And in a related change, there is a new company in Germany producing a light plastic reader that can serve as a place to read newspapers or magazines electronically. The company is claiming that this way fewer trees will suffer the fate of the paper pulp machines. That might be the end of print altogether...

UPDATE: Reuters is reporting here that magazine sales in

supermarkets and at newsstands fell 11% during the last quarter of 2008. Apparently consumers are saving money and not buying magazines. This is truly bad news for the print industry. This does impact circulation AND readership numbers and makes it even a harder sell to advertisers. Brace for more closings....