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## Media trends

The five trends I want to touch on today are well-documented and most interesting. They also can be frightening and challenging while, at the same time, opportunistic.

How's THAT for a disclaimer!

And, I should mention that there are more than just five trends. But I have limited time so I'm sticking that number.

The first trend is this:

There is more money being put into disseminating the news than in gathering it.

The accountants at newspapers and other media have won the battle between themselves and the idealists.

Advocates for public interest are being overrun by the accountants.

One lamenting journalist said: "I wish there were an identifiable and strong correlation between quality journalism and newspaper sales."

Well, there isn't. So the monies available to the media producers are going into circulation and outlets. They're using clever marketing techniques for newspapers and adding multiple channels of dissemination such as Web sites and blogs.

Locally, the *Arizona Republic* and Channel 12 have "converged," and occasionally we'll see a newspaper reporter broadcasting live on the scene of tonight's breaking story that we'll read about tomorrow in the paper. Or we'll have the weather forecast on KYOT being given by the meteorologist at Channel 15.

Bottom line: the media are finding multiple ways to disseminate a single product. The same news story can be found in the paper, in a neighborhood section of the paper, on television, on the web site and cited in a blog. And all of those

individual pieces may have been prepared by one person.

This leads to a second trend or question:

Who will monitor the monitors?

As more money is being put into disseminating information instead of creating it, finding it, verifying it and checking it, who will verify the news that you get?

Who will verify the bloggers who are feeding the news media?

Who will verify the aggregators for the material they issue? Aggregators are Google and Yahoo who now routinely lift stories from virtually any source they find and simply re-issue it on their “news” sites. They aren’t spending any money on verification...they’re simply repeating what others have already issued. They have no assurance that what they are lifting is accurate nor will they waste any time or money to get that assurance.

This lack of monitoring or verification is partly a direct result from a third trend:

Citizen journalism must be taken seriously.

Citizens are assuming a more active role as assemblers, editors and even creators of their own news. And, they each create an individualized news cycle that blows the top of any theories you may currently have about news cycles.

Look at the list of media you compiled. You are a citizen journalist. You select what type of news you want, when you want it, how you want to receive it and what you will do with it.

You also create news through your job or even your personal blog or web site.

Think about your news cycle. You cut off the television at night. Maybe you listen to CDs on the way to work, not the morning radio talk shows. Perhaps you read only selected sections of the newspaper or *Business Journal*. You check web news sites...or not.

Last week there was a blog-athon raging about a General Motors’ attempt to get a letter to the editor published in the *New York Times* as a rebuttal to a *Times* column written by Tom Friedman in which he seriously insulted and assault the auto

manufacturer.

I can give you the gory details later but want to share with you a few comments by the writer of The TrueTalk Blog; Tom Guarriello who wrote in depth about the brouhaha caused when the Times rebuffed, limited and severely edited the rebuttal letter from General Motors.

Tom posited that the *Times* is in a big dilemma, a dilemma of “voice.” “The *Times*,” he says, is used to **having** voice, not **giving** voice.”

He goes on to say: “We don’t ‘inhabit’ the media world today. We’ve invaded it. We’re like a bunch of rowdy revelers, rank amateurs at that, shooting our mouths off whenever we feel like it. But not in [the *Times*] pages.”

At the end of his blog, Tom reminds us that “Back in the good old days of traditional media, when newspapers ruled the world and editors were a law unto themselves, the Letters section of the paper was what passed for interactivity with readers.”

We cannot ignore citizen journalism. We may not like it. It may not always be right. But...it’s THERE.

In this story, the General Motors communication group put the whole ugly scenario on their blog, including all the e-mail exchanges with the Times letter editor, the original Friedman column, the original letter submitted by General Motors and the final, edited version printed by the *Times*.

Did the *Times* editor really believe that no one would find out?!

A word of caution.

The same technology that allows you to speak to anyone anywhere in the world also allows special interest organizations – perhaps posing as something else – to influence or overwhelm what the rest of us know.

If we’re going to be citizen journalists, then we will have to take on the responsibilities of verifying information and passing along accurate, documented news.

And now for a fourth trend:

Print media still has power!

While some major daily newspapers are in peril, others are finding ways to segment coverage, become more local and shift coverage focus to adapt to individualized reading audiences.

At the same time, weekly and monthly community newspapers are filling gaps.

Tara Blanc, whom many of know from IABC, owns two local newspapers, one in Tempe and one serving the North Phoenix area. They are mailed to my home and cost me nothing. I read the North Phoenix one cover to cover because it has information that is very, very local to me.

There are thousands of these local-only newspapers across the country helping bridge that great divide between the serve-everybody and charge for it large newspaper and the serve-local readers for free paper.

Free newspapers are available in those ugly news racks at virtually every public building in the country. In larger cities, free papers are handed out to commuters at train, subway and bus stations.

Newspapers are still the most comprehensive, across the board news medium that meets the public needs. They carry national, state and local news, national and local sports, public affairs, business, editorial, lifestyles, employment listings. In short, they are still one-stop reading if you want an overview of what's happening.

Also, the number of magazines continues to increase. Stop by a Borders or Barnes & Noble and take a look at the magazine section. It's HUGE! You'll find half a dozen magazines for brides, two dozen on automotive topics, lots of gardening/designing/remodeling magazines, specialty magazines on arts, crafts and other interests.

And that's not all of the available magazines. Television programs such as "Lost" and channels such as HGTV have had to start magazines to keep their viewer/readers supplied with more and more information.

Don't assume that print is dead. It's alive and kicking and deserves some respect.

And the last trend I want to put forth is:

There are more media reporting on and covering fewer stories than ever before.

Look again at the list you created of all your sources of news and information. That's at least twice as long as it would have been five years ago. Maybe even three years ago.

As media outlets and their audiences become even more fragmented you will find fewer audience members per medium and fewer journalists per medium.

Think about how big stories are covered. Usually they are covered by general assignment writers who must work in a tight time frame and with limited resources for checking facts or researching an element of the story. And they've all been directed to be the first one to air or break the story!

Walter Cronkite's advice to journalists was "Get it first. But first get it right." Now, it's just "Get it first."

Local television journalism here in Phoenix certainly has its challenges. Reporters and readers seem to be in a constantly revolving door and rarely do we see a major story covered in depth and for more than a day. We also see many raw reporters trying to cover stories for which they are ill-prepared.

You may recall some months ago a man held several people hostage on a floor of a public building. The story was carried with news updates throughout the night. At one point, the SWAT team leaders asked the media, including the helicopter journalists, to cease coverage for about 15 minutes. One very young and, like, you know, really sweet, uh, reporter actually asked, on the air, why they were being asked to stop coverage and filming. To which the studio announcer had to explain it was because they didn't want the bad-guy hostage-taker, who had a television in the room, to see where and how the SWAT team was setting up.

That's a novice, juvenile and sad mistake made by a nice-looking but non-trained reporter.

Local television media cover what viewers need: traffic, weather and sports; and they cover what we want: crime and accidents. Out of a 30-minute news program, only about 18 minutes is actually spent on conveying information. And

even if a channel has three, four or five news shows, it's essentially the same news on each one, with perhaps a slight update or change here and there.

Having more media and more coverage does NOT always mean a greater diversity of stories or coverage. The notion of news 24/7 is something of an exaggeration.

What are the implications of all this?

One, measuring the effectiveness of your media program has become exponentially more complex and difficult. Just looking at your own media profile should demonstrate to you how difficult it would be for any company trying to reach you through the media to determine whether or not they succeeded. The ONLY way to measure success will be through the final outcome.

Two, defining a target audience just got tougher. The general use of demographics, psychographics, purchasing habits, etc., will not be enough to define your target audience and the media to use to reach them. You need to know THEIR media profile. A quick example.

I took my personal media profile and looked up the reader and viewer profiles for several of my favorite media. For the Discovery Channel, out of 50 Network Viewer Product Usage/Lifestyle Profile elements, I matched three. I'm a big sports fan and watch ESPN and Fox Sports a LOT! I went to ESPN where I found that "ESPN is Man's Best Friend." There were plenty of indices for men but none for women viewers. I did the best with HGTV where I matched 9 out of 23.

Finding and defining your target audience will be very, very tough.

And the third implication, while it's great to see so much activity in citizen journalism, we have to lament the decline of full-time professional monitoring of powerful institutions such as government and business.

While it was not my intent to frighten you today, I hope I caused the hair on the back of your neck to stand up. So I'll close with my favorite Bette Davis quote: "Fasten your seatbelts. It's going to be a bumpy ride."