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# Opportunities for journalism education in an online entrepreneurial world



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The global financial crisis of 2008 and 2009 accelerated change in media houses around the world. As the value of media companies plummeted, some newspapers have closed entirely or reduced staff numbers, while other publications have stopped printing and produce online-only editions. Others have chosen to outsource content. At the same time, new and evolving digital technologies are changing the way journalists operate. Some journalists are embracing multiple-media forms of reporting, and managers are coming to understand the need for a changed mindset. This paper argues that educators need to appreciate the issue of mindset, and prepare students for a range of opportunities associated with the internet, the blogosphere and new entrepreneurial forms of media. These will become available more often than jobs with mainstream media. Journalism educators must change their curricula to prepare students for a different, and perhaps more difficult world. The paper ends with suggestions for updating the journalism curriculum.

Instead of seeing the global financial crisis as a disaster, journalism educators have the opportunity to transform their curricula to accommodate the changes that have cascaded through the media industry these past few years. The main drivers of change, along with the upheavals created by altered media economics, include the widespread availability of cheap digital technology, changing work patterns brought about by online and multi-media work practices, and the surge in influence of social media on media houses around the globe.

The global financial crisis that started in 2007 showed its virulence in 2008 and by the end of that year had crippled the mainstream media's main source of income – advertising. This accelerated many changes that would have taken longer to occur, such as the closure of some newspapers and magazines, and decisions to produce online-only editions or outsource content. In the United States, spending on advertising plummeted in 2007 and 2008 (*Ad Age* 2008).

In January 2009 *The Australian* published a story about a Goldman Sachs JB Were report that showed a 38 per cent fall in the average number of pages of classified advertising per week at Fairfax Media's metropolitan newspapers in December 2008 (Tabakoff 2009: 29). The drop in advertising also hit the value of media companies around the world, reducing their potential to expand by borrowing money. Rupert Murdoch paid \$US 6 billion for *The Wall Street Journal* in 2007. Within a year almost 10 times that amount had been stripped from the market capitalisation of News Corporation.

Journalism in the Western liberal tradition is a unique business in the sense that its product (news) provides a public good or service. Unlike other public-good activities such as education or scientific research, it is not protected from market forces by government support. This is especially the case in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia. (Many nations in Europe subsidise daily newspapers). When a huge drop in advertising threatens the financial viability of the news business, the media's public good role is also threatened. We encounter a paradox: To be able to function as citizens (for example choosing which party to vote for), people need news even if they are not willing to pay for it.

But newsgathering is expensive, and becoming even more costly. Investigative and socially responsible reporting costs more than popular or "churnalism" forms of journalism (Davies 2008) such as gossip or entertainment news. Another paradox emerges at the same time: In periods of great uncertainty, the public's appetite for information becomes even more ravenous. Traffic to the free web sites of financial newspapers such as the *Financial Times* in the UK, and *Eureka* and *Business Spectator* in Australia, soared during the financial crisis of 2008.

Industry analysts predict that printed newspapers will experience a long-term decline once online revenues are sufficient to pay for content. Academic and blogger Jeff Jarvis said newspapers were "on the cusp of the moment when online revenue could sustain a substantial digital journalistic enterprise without the onerous cost of printing and distribution" (Jarvis 2009).

In January 2009 the editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, Russ Stanton, said the paper's online advertising revenue had become sufficient to cover the paper's entire editorial payroll for both print and online. "Given where we were five years ago, I don't think

anyone thought that would ever happen,” he said. “But that day is here” (quoted in Jarvis 2009). Meanwhile, print forms of magazines are more likely to flourish if they provide content that people cannot get online.

Media analyst Merrill Brown, the first editor in chief of MSNBC.com, believes well-packaged long-form content, and the skills and products associated with magazines, have a much brighter future than newspapers or free-to-air television. “Old ‘news’ delivered on doorsteps in one-dimensional paper form without audio and video, community, personalisation, depth and data is television delivered via rabbit ears.” He argues that WSJ.com and NYTimes.com are “vastly superior products” to their print counterparts. “The printed newspaper needs to become a high-end, high-cost supplement to the full service comprehensive web site” (comments posted to the Buzz Machine blog 2008). Brown is arguing that an increasing number of people will pay for analysis that they cannot get elsewhere.

Other changes are happening at the micro level of the newsroom as journalists learn to cope with new digital technologies and their managers try to cut costs. In January 2009 the Telegraph Media Group in the United Kingdom signed a deal with Pagemasters for journalists in Sydney to edit pages for the *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* published in London. It was yet another example of outsourcing of content, with jobs going to lower-cost nations.

Fairfax Media had outsourced sub-editing of softer news pages to New Zealand in 2008, and announced further outsourcing of the daily supplements of its major broadsheet dailies in Australia. “In an attempt to cut costs in the dramatic advertising downturn that is hurting media companies worldwide, the Telegraph Media Group decided to outsource sections of its flagship newspaper such as the travel, motoring and money pages and parts of the *Sunday Telegraph*. It chose Pagemasters, a company owned by the news agency Australian Associated Press, to do the job” (Steffens 2009).

Also in Sydney, Fairfax Media has moved from being a print to a multi-platform company to try to reach as large an audience as possible. “We have a total readership in print of over 4 million per day and online of over 5 million per month,” CEO David Kirk said at the time of the 2007 merger with Rural Press: “Our brand of quality, independent, balanced journalism will serve and support more communities than ever” (Kirk 2007). A few months earlier chairman Ron Walker had written in the company’s annual report: “Fairfax is evolving into a truly digital media company” (*Annual report* 2006: 2). Within five years Fairfax would be a significantly bigger Internet company that distributed its content “over more media,” Kirk wrote in the same report (*Annual report* 2006: 5).

Fairfax’s increased scale and diversity meant it relied less on classified lineage advertising in major metropolitan newspapers, Kirk said, so it could “rapidly develop the best online response to changing media advertising patterns”. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Australian Financial Review* and the *Sun-Herald* moved into a new building dubbed the “newsroom of the future” in Sydney’s Darling Harbour precinct.

Phil McLean, at the time Fairfax Media’s group executive editor and the man in charge of the move, said three quarters of the entire process involved getting people to “think differently” – that is, to modify their mindset so they could work with multi-

media and online. Multi-media content delivered via online was a likely future for journalism (personal communication 14 November 2007).

Online advertising revenue was a significant driver. In the three years to 2007, online's contribution to Fairfax's profits grew from 1 per cent to 14 per cent with "much more to come," said Kirk. Online's share of the total national advertising pie jumped from 2 per cent in 2002 to 14 per cent in 2007. At the same time, the contribution of Fairfax's metropolitan newspapers to company profits had dropped from three quarters to 24 per cent between 2000 and 2007 (Beverley 2007: 6; Foley 2007: 7).

Australia's next biggest media company, News Ltd, has also embraced a multi-media future, though at the time of writing the embrace had been less well publicised. In his Andrew Olle memorial lecture on 19 October 2007 News Ltd CEO and chairman John Hartigan said it had never been a better time to be a journalist. "If you really care about journalism you have to be passionate about re-inventing it in the digital age," he said. "As journalists we've never had more inducements to open our minds, stretch our imaginations or reach more people. We can write, blog, broadcast audio and video, all from the one work-station" (Hartigan 2007).

Hartigan said that for much of his 43-year career most journalists were generalists, "sweeping over any subject with a light dusting of curiosity and a nice turn of phrase". But he warned that those days were numbered. Journalism needed more specialists, he argued – "more people who can provide compelling insights to what's going on" because quality was "taking on greater meaning, not less".

Hartigan said competition for talent was intensifying. "We will need to pay more and offer better opportunities to attract – and retain – the best people". In other words, quality content was the key. In a world of information overload, audiences return to brands they can trust. The role of those brands was to synthesize information and make it easy to absorb. That deep skill requires highly skilled and educated journalists (Hartigan 2007).

For the "newsroom of the future", Fairfax CEO Kirk appointed a committee from within editorial (reporters and photographers), information technology and human resources. The committee initiated a study tour by editorial executives of leading integrated and converged newsrooms in the UK and the US in April 2007. This became known as the "Tier 1" course and involved the editor and deputy editor of *The Age*, and the news editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. The *Herald's* editor went to the annual conference of the World Association of Newspapers in Cape Town, South Africa in June 2007 because that event featured convergence as one of its main themes (PANPA *Bulletin* June 2007: 6). The committee designed a two-day awareness course for senior editorial managers, known as "Tier 2," that was run in Sydney in July 2007. The "Tier 3" program for all editorial staff started in August 2007 and this "multi-media awareness program" continued until the end of the year.

A "Tier 4" course for about 10 per cent of editorial staff (about 40 journalists) was scheduled to start after the Beijing Olympics in 2008 but was postponed because of changed priorities brought about by the global financial crisis. Tier 4 courses were designed to provide a range of multi-media skills. Tier 3 and 4 courses have profound implications for journalism education in Australia because they, and similar changes at

News Ltd, represent the start of major changes to how journalists work in Australia: the future is multiple-media forms of reportage.

Indeed, major change in newsroom practices can be seen around the world. In India, for example, print newspapers are flourishing yet many are considering multiple-media options. Pankaj Paul, former managing editor of the *Hindustan Times*, said a media company's role was to provide information to audiences "whenever they want it, wherever they are". This meant a change of mindset for journalists and the people who trained them. Paul returned to the US in 2008 to take charge of online content development for the digital division of America's biggest newspaper group, Gannett. He divided journalism into two distinct groups: those who gathered content and those who delivered it. "The content could be text, video, images, audio, anything. It goes into a giant bucket, and the delivery person [editor] sifts through that content and chooses where to send it." Paul urged journalists and journalism educators to "let go of the platform and go for content".

The aim should be to find the most appropriate medium for storytelling, Paul said, suggesting fresh graduates should teach themselves multi-media tools if their teachers would not because that was the direction journalism was heading. "We are all now sliver-casters." (Slivercasting is an industry term for providing a wide range of thin, niche products for a wide variety of audiences).

Paul said journalists needed to accept that they were the bridge between audiences and information. "It is no longer good enough to be a good writer. You have to also be a good photographer and a good videographer, and a half way decent editor. There will always be jobs for people who create and deliver content" (personal interview 2007).

Even in media-prosperous India, most of the major media companies are setting up their own journalism schools because they believe universities have become irrelevant. Raju Narisetti launched *Mint*, a business daily, for the Hindustan Times Group in India in February 2007. He became managing editor of *The Washington Post* in January 2009. Narisetti said most Indian universities that offered journalism degrees were terrible. "The professors have not set foot in a newsroom for a decade" (personal interview 2007). Narisetti spent 18 years with the *Wall Street Journal*, much of that time as an assistant managing editor, before returning to India in 2006.

The Statesman Group, the oldest newspaper company in India, launched its own journalism school in Kolkata in October 2008. India's two other major newspaper groups, the Hindustan Times Group and the Times of India Group, also started their own journalism schools. The Nation Group in Bangkok in Thailand was considering a similar scheme at the time of writing, as were a range of media houses in Asia. All cited the same reasons as Pankaj Paul – concern about the relevance of university journalism programs (personal communications in 2008 and 2009).

Reuters in London established its own Journalism Academy in 2005 because it also considered university courses irrelevant. Rich Taylor, who set up the school, said most university journalism programs were "entirely too theoretical," accusing them of focusing too much "on the history of media rather than actually skilling them [students] to write, at speed, on current markets and world events". He was scathing of universities and their inability to adapt: "For my part, I doubt university programs are

going to change, significantly enough and fast enough, to meet industry needs. Hence, industry is helping itself.”

Taylor said Reuters believed it could do a better and less expensive education job than “pretty much any academic outfit” because it had staff with recent experience, compared with academics who had not been in a newsroom for years. “We offer a real-world environment rather than a theoretical study” (Taylor 2005).

In Europe, progressive universities have grasped the nettle and modified their curricula, forced by change in industry practices. Professor Peter Verwey directs the New Media Lab at the School of Journalism at Utrecht in the Netherlands. Changes in his curriculum over the past few years had been designed, he said, to help students develop a multi-media mindset: “We work along two lines. First the internet is an important source, and we train journalists to do advanced searches, plus we focus on methodology and statistics related to database searches. Knowledge of maps and GIS [geographic information systems] is added to these searches. In our first and second years we have courses for all journalism students related to these issues.”

Secondly, Dr Verwey said his school treated the internet as a new publishing medium. Most student work was published on the web. “It makes students aware of production in the digital environment. Our print, radio and TV departments use this system to publish their stories.” For multi-platform publishing and convergence the school used blogs. “Cross media publishing or multi-platform publishing is taught at two levels on the blog.”

In 2007 Dr Verwey had students working in multiple-media teams of writer, photographer, and video reporter. They gathered content and produced a story for various platforms: TV, radio, the blog and print (the website). “We think we come close to teaching convergence in practice. After the course our third and fourth year students are aware of the fact that journalism is teamwork, and that content (news) is leading, not the medium. The question we constantly ask the students is: which content to use for which platforms and for which audience?” (Verwey 2007).

These developments should be a warning to journalism educators in the Asia-Pacific region. We need to change.

## Updating Australia’s journalism curricula

This paper argues that the global financial crisis should be seen as an opportunity for journalism educators. A chance to update old curricula to help students survive in challenging times. Journalism educators need to accept that Australia’s newsrooms are changing their practices and structures. Rather than waiting for the change, and being perceived as backward looking, here is a chance to modify journalism curricula to take journalism education forward.

Before we discuss change, we should acknowledge that the basics are even more important than ever. Students need to know how to collect good-quality information in ethical and legal ways. In a multi-media world, good writing skills are even more vital than ever because all forms of media start with a script or text. Clarity and precision of language thus becomes a fundamental skill. Students also need to learn about collecting good information, writing well and for a specific audience, and

acknowledging the importance of accuracy, all within a context of an awareness of legal constraints and ethical issues. These should be givens in any curriculum.

But students also need to know how to cope in a fast-changing environment, and how to work collaboratively, under minimal supervision. And they need a global perspective. City University's Professor Roy Greenslade said educators must ensure students have a complete knowledge of law, ethics, and know "how to use and interact with their sources". And students must also learn how to select their sources among bloggers. "There's a lot more fact-guessing, fact-checking and collating than there was before, due to the unlimited number of sources." Educators must uphold standards: "We must show that journalism is still useful at a time when everybody can publish their 'news' [online]" said Greenslade (Editors Weblog 2007).

Hartigan touched on the importance of fact checking and accuracy in his 2007 Andrew Olle lecture. He emphasised the need to walk the streets and meet people: "As someone in a position to hire the next generation, what I want to see is the passionate curiosity and the instincts needed for our craft. They might love their mobile [phone], email and googling the world. But what they need is to get out of the office and build bloody good contacts. The best stories are still only available this way" (Hartigan 2007).

The next major change is the willingness to embrace multiple-media forms of journalism. As of late 2009 only three of Australia's 24 university journalism programs offered a subject or unit with the word "multi-media" in the title, though some operated integrated newsrooms for their students. Educators need to ensure their programs become more relevant. Industrial-age curricula devised in the 1970s are no longer good enough.

Mike Van Niekerk, CEO of Fairfax Media's online editorial staff, said newsroom integration depended on changing a newsroom's culture and mindsets. McLean agreed: Much of Fairfax's training, instead of teaching journalists specific tricks, aimed "to recalibrate the way people think about journalism". Training all journalists in multi-media did not mean an end to specialisation. "We don't expect everybody to practise it [multi-media], but everybody must think" in those terms, they said (Editors Weblog 2007).

Part of the "newsroom of the future" project at Fairfax in Sydney involved introducing journalists to a portable data assistant (PDA) called a JasJam. Contrary to what *The Australian's* Media section reported on 23 August 2007, not all Fairfax journalists have been equipped with JasJams. Reporters and photographers involved with breaking news would use the devices, McLean said. "That's somewhere between a dozen and 20 reporters at *The Sydney Morning Herald* and another 15-20 at *The Age*."

As of late 2009 the Sydney daily had about 350 editorial staff and the Melbourne paper about 320. A pool of about 70 JasJams were available for general news assignments. The issue was not the technology, McLean and Van Niekerk emphasised, but preparing journalists for new ways of providing information to audiences. "It's the JasJam today, but it could well be a different piece of equipment tomorrow," Van Niekerk said. McLean said it was likely be "superseded within the next 12 months" (personal communications in 2007 and 2008).

Jeff Jarvis, author of the Buzzmachine blog, maintains that mobility and access to the Internet are vital for all reporters. Jarvis is director of the interactive journalism

program at the City University of New York's Graduate School of Journalism. Every student at his school was required to have a Macintosh laptop to foster multi-media capacity and mobility "so they can work from anywhere". The school also provided high-end mobile phones so students could learn to shoot video and stream that video to the web. The Macintosh was the most appropriate tool for multi-media, Jarvis said.

All students were required to take the Fundamentals of Interactive Journalism course in their first semester. "This course has two main goals: firstly, they learn the basics of multi-media and how to produce all the forms out there, including audio, video, wikis, blogs, new methods of storytelling, and more. Every student must feel comfortable in every medium, although that doesn't mean they'll become experts." Secondly, students must learn how the changes in the digital realm have influenced the journalism industry, to learn about "changes and opportunities" for journalism (email communication 2008).

Technology has got cheaper and simpler to use. As digital natives, many students have grown up with computers and mobile phones with cameras. It is more likely that educators will need to embrace and better understand technology, rather than their students. It is imperative that educators understand the potential of digital media, even if they cannot use it effectively. Educators need to partner with junior colleagues or students who have technology skills. This implies a need for humility. We can also expect the evolution of new forms of journalism brought about by changing technology and changing consumer needs. For example, the *mojo* (mobile journalist) who streams live video to the web via a mobile phone is a likely future for journalism in Australia and around the world (Quinn 2008: 24).

Australia's journalism curricula also need to accept the split in functions between content gatherers and assemblers that Pankaj Paul of the Hindustan Times Group identified. We need to focus on multiple audiences: That is, journalists and journalism students must know for whom they are reporting. And students must appreciate the need for providing quality content for that audience, connecting with Hartigan's call for better quality journalists to provide higher-quality content. The concept of quality remains vague, but it must sit in the context of what is relevant for the desired audience.

One could argue that the content a media company provides for the A-B demographic in *The Australian* is different from the content intended for a western-suburbs blue collar demographic like Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*. Regardless of the media platform, the audience must perceive the content as being relevant: That is, quality is what the audience both wants and needs. Journalism needs to provide the spinach along with the fairy floss: That is, give audiences information with which they can make decisions as citizens, as well an entertainment.

Because audiences consist of busy people, the content must be made available in ways that people find easy to absorb and understand. Clarity and convenience become key issues, within the context of quality. Raju Narisetti had this idea when he launched *Mint* in India: "We wanted to make the paper as easy as possible to navigate and read. The main premise of *Mint* is clarity. That is what I promise. Whatever people read in the paper they will understand; they will know what it is about. That is what differentiates us in the market" (Narisetti personal communication 2007). The new newspaper has been a huge success with this formula. Only eight months after its

launch in February 2007 *Mint* was the second-highest circulating business daily out of seven in the country.

In an information-soaked world, busy people struggle to distinguish what is worthwhile and what is rubbish. Audiences have too much information. This means good journalism is even more important than ever, helping people separate the wheat from the chaff. Journalism educators need to introduce courses in time and information management, to help prospective journalists determine what is good quality information (and therefore worthy of being reported) and what is irrelevant.

Author and journalist David Shenk has argued that when people have a glut of information, journalists become even more necessary: “As a sceptical analytical buffer and – now more than ever – as an arbiter of statistical claims, the news media is an indispensable public utility, every bit as vital as our electricity and gas lines. In a world with vastly more information than it can process, journalists are the most important processors we have. They help us filter information without spinning it in the direction of one company or another. Further, as society becomes splintered, it is journalists who provide the vital social glue to keep us at least partly intact as a common unit. For democracy as we know it, a bypassed media would be a disaster (Shenk 1998: 167). These were prescient words more than a decade ago.

With print media, we will see newspapers change from a focus on yesterday, as papers of record, to a focus on today, tomorrow and later in the week. This will require better-educated reporters with specialist skills in specific areas. As News Ltd CEO John Hartigan noted in his 2007 Andrew Olle lecture, journalism needs more specialists – “more people who can provide compelling insights to what’s going on” because quality was “taking on greater meaning”. Newspapers will become more like daily news magazines (think a daily form of *The Economist*). This means we will see the evolution of the journ-analyst rather than the journalist – with a focus on depth and breadth rather than the generalist approach of many current reporters (Quinn 2009: 74). This has profound implications in the way we teach journalism, and the kind of person who enters a journalism program. Perhaps we need to focus journalism education solely as a post-graduate form of study?

Given the decline in the number of jobs in mainstream media in 2008 and 2009, we cannot expect students will get jobs at the usual places: at daily newspapers or metropolitan television newsrooms. Those places are not hiring in the numbers they did during economic good times. But opportunities will arise online, specifically in the blogosphere. Students will need to think of journalism as a small business, which will necessitate acquiring a new set of skills. This means we need to teach students things like how to run a business: students will need to understand spreadsheets for keeping accounts, as well as for conducting investigative forms of journalism.

Students also need to learn how to market themselves, and how to demonstrate what they are especially good at. In marketing terms they will need to demonstrate their unique selling points, or USP. We need to teach journalism students to be entrepreneurial – a combination of what American journalism educators call “enterprise reporting” and the fostering of the notion of journalism as a small business operation. This requires a different mindset both among the students, and the people who teach them.

## Conclusion

The global financial crisis has demonstrated that in many parts of the world media are businesses that must make profits to survive. Educators need to explain this equation to students, and the latter need to appreciate that much of their work in the next decade may be as a freelancer rather than in mainstream media, as markets tighten and mainstream jobs shrink. We will need to see the emergence of the recent graduate journalist as entrepreneur, willing to work in a range of media and able to sell their content to a range of employers.

Students will need to take courses in being an entrepreneur and running a small business. They will also need to appreciate their various audiences to be able to supply appropriate content. That is, they need to understand what it means when a company focuses on the A-B or the C1-C2 demographic. Universities must offer courses in understanding audiences and audience research.

In a multi-media world, it is no longer enough to be a good journalist in one medium, and educators must emphasise this to their students. Students need to make themselves employable in a range of media.

Fairfax Media's Phil McLean summarised this new world of journalism: "Eventually reporters will file their story in a variety of media. Editors sitting at the central hub will instantly receive it in the queue, and then dispatch it to the medium they deem appropriate. A few minutes later, the story will be online, complete with still pictures. Later, the text will be updated with new information and a briefly edited video will complement coverage" (Editors Weblog 2007).

Most innovations take longer than expected to become part of an ecosystem. So it will likely take half a decade for McLean's multi-media world to arrive. Given the glacial speed at which curricula change proceeds, we need to start now to update journalism education to prepare for a future that is rapidly becoming the present.

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