The Internet as a delivery system for news

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THE INTERNET AS A DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR NEWS

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

PhD

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

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Graduate School of Journalism

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Certification

I, Kenneth Morris Jones, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Graduate School of Journalism, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Kenneth Morris Jones

March 2, 2001
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Abstract

This thesis documents the application of the Internet as a delivery system for news and journalism.

Its principal focus is the use of the World Wide Web as a publishing medium by Australian media sources.

The use of the World Wide Web as a delivery system for news was found to be commonplace, but conservative in its style. There was little innovation. Attempts to take advantage of the unique features that the Internet offers as a delivery system were uncommon.

Content was mostly "legacy" content recycled from non-Internet sources of news. These were mostly newspapers.

There was essentially no regular amateur journalism on any Web site.

Readers of news on the Web were found to be more interested in the convenience of reading news on the Web than any of its special features such as interactivity or multimedia.

The Internet can also be applied as a tool in the area of agenda-setting research. The monitoring of structured online polls for the variable influence of news stories on agendas was found to be the most successful research methodology conducted.

In general, it was found that the basic paradigm of news delivery that existed prior to the arrival of the Internet has not been changed.
Preface

We stand at a critical point in the development of the Internet. This globe-spanning system has built up a track record of several years of operation as a mass medium, yet it is still treated as experimental. A large quantity of actual data can be collected on its performance and applications, making a study of the Internet at the present more than just speculation. However, it is apparent from inspecting the present state of the Internet that many significant projects are still at an early stage in their development. Academic studies frequently deal with events that have happened in the past, or evolve very slowly. The debut of the Internet as a mass medium was relatively recent, and its rate of evolution is extremely rapid, as measured by user numbers and the activities instigated on the Internet. Hence, a study of the Internet in the timeframe addressed by this thesis is critical. Academics who previously studied the Internet were often confronted with a lack of actual data, owing to the novelty of the medium. Future academic studies of the Internet will not be able to document some of the events, projects and attitudes uncovered by this thesis, as conditions are likely to change in the future.

This thesis is hence a snapshot of the Internet at a significant time. It is based on actual data, but it also contains speculation on future trends that are based on assessments of this data. It will be interesting, and appropriate, for both the data and the speculation contained in this thesis to be subjected to comparisons with the actual state of the Internet in the future.

**Emphasis on Journalism**

The Internet has been applied to so many aspects of communication that it would be impossible for a single academic to study them all effectively. Hence, detailed studies of the Internet are most likely to succeed if they focus on specific areas. The Internet has been successfully
applied as a means of delivering news and journalism to a mass audience. It also has the potential to alter current trends in style and modes of delivery for journalism, due to its unique technological features. Hence, the use of the Internet as a delivery system for journalism is an appropriate aspect for study.

This is also an appropriate topic for me to address. I have been an Internet user since 1991, and have the distinction of being one of the first journalists in this country to report on the Internet from its earliest days as a mass medium. My experiences as the assistant editor and principal contributor to *Internet Australasia* magazine (the first Internet-dedicated publication to appear in this country) provided me with an understanding of the Internet itself and its influence on many different areas of human activity. Hence, my background as a journalist, an Internet user and an academic have all intermeshed in my selection of this thesis topic.

**Goals of the Thesis**

The Internet is a medium with a potentially wide range of applications, but actual documentation of these applications being applied is sometimes minimal. Thus, studies of the Internet are often grounded in considerations of its theoretical potential versus its performance. This approach informs the development of goals for this thesis.

The thesis will document the theorised advantages of the Internet as a delivery system for journalism. It will draw upon theories from published literature, and will assess the merits of these theories. Certain expectations held for the Internet as a delivery system for journalism could be unrealistic if they fail to properly address the mechanics of journalistic production and delivery. Hence, the merits of certain theories will be addressed even before they are evaluated against actual data. From a consideration of the various theories expressed for the potential influence of the Internet on journalistic delivery, a set of specific research questions will be developed.
The specific goals of the thesis involve investigating the potential influence of the Internet's ability to deliver information in formats that cannot be matched by other delivery systems. These include instant updates, asynchronous delivery, world-wide publishing, multimedia, the ability to link related news stories through hyperlinks, the ability to deliver more content than can be delivered in a traditional method of delivery and the ability of users to communicate in an interactive format.

The impact of the Internet on the existing research field of agenda-setting will also be explored. This is appropriate, as agenda-setting research is primarily focused on the influence of news and the media on audiences. The interactive nature of the Internet provides an opportunity for forms of agenda-setting research that are difficult to conduct without the use of the Internet.

The thesis will collect data using methodologies that are designed to be compatible with the research questions of the thesis. This data will then be processed to uncover trends and quanta that are relevant to the research questions.

The comparisons of original predictions and expectations with actual research data will provide insight into the current state of the Internet as a delivery system for journalism. It will allow the relevance of previously published theories and models to be assessed. In areas where research data is shown to be incompatible with previous models, new models will be developed to account for this.

**Structure of the Thesis**

The goals of the thesis are essentially to pursue a formalised course of academic inquiry into the subject matter. Hence, the structure of this thesis is governed by, and reflects, the conduct of this inquiry. It begins with a consideration of the theoretical potential of the Internet as a delivery system for journalism, evaluating previously published writings on the subject and
adding new theories that are derived from considerations of the mechanics of the Internet itself. These theories, in turn, influence the development of specific research questions.

Having established these questions and the theoretical framework behind them, it is necessary to collect data that will lead to the development of answers, and possibly new theories. Methodologies for collecting this data will be presented, taking into account the research goals and the logistics of conducting such research.

The data thus obtained will then be presented. This data will be a mixture of qualitative and quantitative results. In some cases, a presentation of raw data will be confusing and pointless. Hence, some processing and aggregation will take place with certain data sets.

As the data is presented, its relationship to the research questions will be explored. This will allow answers to the research questions to be accumulated as more data is presented. Specific answers to each research question will thus be obtained, along with assessments of the previously published theoretical models that informed them. Where discrepancies appear, new models will be presented to account for the data.

Hence, the structure of the thesis reveals the temporal flow of activities conducted in support of the thesis. It also reveals the rational flow of developments in the process. It outlines the development of theories, followed by comparisons to data, and the development of conclusions.

Having presented all the research data and supplied answers to all the research questions, the thesis will present a synergistic view of the overall state of the Internet as a delivery system for journalism. This synergistic view will be obtained by aggregating the conclusions of all the research questions, together with the data collected.

The rapid evolution of the Internet suggests that it is appropriate to speculate on the near-term future. Predictions for the future of the Internet as a delivery system for journalism will be
made with respect to the previously presented data and conclusions, together with other data collected to inform the development of future predictions.

Chapter Outlines

In addition to this preface, this thesis contains sixteen chapters. Appendices are also included.

Chapter 1 outlines the principal elements of the Internet as a system, and reveals its potential to influence the delivery of journalism. Within the context of appropriate definitions and constraints, the chapter then presents the principal research questions.

Chapter 2 documents previously published literature dealing with journalism in a general context, agenda-setting research, and material specifically relating to the Internet.

Chapter 3 evaluates the literature presented in Chapter 2 for its relevance, and will present modifications to these theoretical models where appropriate. This, in turn, will lead to the development of a specific set of theoretical models that will be used in the investigation of the research questions.

Chapter 4 presents a set of methodologies that will be used to collect data. The relevance of each methodology to the research questions and the theoretical model will be explored.

Chapter 5 begins the supply of data with an overview of Web sites operated by Australian news organisations. This will reveal certain trends influencing the overall state of news on the Internet.
Chapter 6 investigates the four principal Australian news Web sites in greater detail through the use of interviews and passive monitoring. It also reviews the operations of two news wholesalers.

Chapter 7 supplies more detail on other Web sites operated by organisations with non-Internet media products. Interviews and passive monitoring of Web sites will be used.

Chapter 8 examines the use of the Internet by news organisations with no ties to non-Internet news products. The same methodology of interviews and passive monitoring is again used.

Chapter 9 investigates perceptions of specific potential innovations in news delivery by the operators of Web sites. It will hence explore the reasons why certain predictions have or have not been fulfilled in practice.

Chapter 10 presents motivational factors for both Web site creators and consumers of Web-based news. The relationship between the motivations of both parties, and the influence of these factors on the delivery of news, will be explored.

Chapter 11 studies the use of the Internet for amateur reporting on newsworthy events. It will present a series of examples of amateur reporting of specifically chosen incidents, chosen for their potential accessibility to amateur reporters.

Chapter 12 documents legal and regulatory issues affecting the publication of news on the Internet. The commonly held perception of the Internet as a liberal, anarchic medium will thus be explored. The influence of these issues on the actual supply of news on the Internet will be presented.

Chapter 13 begins the agenda-setting component of this thesis with a study of a Web-based poll and its relevance to the influence of specific news stories on public agendas.
Chapter 14 documents a study of Usenet newsgroups for the purpose of agenda-setting research. The relationship between media agendas and agendas uncovered on newsgroups will be examined.

Chapter 15 presents the principal conclusions of the thesis.

Chapter 16 provides speculation on how news delivery on the Internet could change in the near future, and areas for future research.

Appendices of this thesis will present some of the raw data collected in the course of researching this thesis.
Chapter One

The Internet As A Mass Medium for News

The closing years of the twentieth century saw the appearance of one of the most interesting developments in mass communication. After years of lingering in obscurity as an academic tool, the Internet made its debut as a mass medium. Millions of people all over the world have become users of this technology. Information of all manner of topics has been made available. This is clearly a major phenomenon, even when compared to the impact of earlier mass communication technologies on the delivery of and accessibility to information. The goal of this thesis is to explore the way that the Internet has been used as a delivery system for journalism and the resultant effects on style, frequency, diversity and interactivity of news.

1.1 Development Of The Internet

The Internet that the world uses today traces its origins to the 1960s when some of the world’s earliest experiments in connecting computers with telecommunications began. These projects were motivated partially by the need to share large computing tasks across machines in different locations, but also had their origins in defence. ARPANet, a US computer network that most users regard as the first element of the true Internet, was created from an experiment to produce a communications system that would survive the onslaught of a full-scale nuclear war. Its name is derived from the Advanced Research Projects Agency, ARPA, a US military research body. The idea behind this communications system was to produce a decentralised collection of transmission and reception points connected by a web of multiple communications links. In the event that a number of communications pathways or points in this network were destroyed, the remaining infrastructure could still relay a message from any existing point to another. Both of these applications are good uses for the Internet. But it is worth noting that at this stage in its development, none of the applications that the Internet is best known for today were even considered. It was also not expected to become a household utility.
Although this thesis is not the product of an engineering faculty, it is worth exploring some of the overall technical details that make the Internet so revolutionary. Information carried across the network is done through electronic means, in the form of digital pulses of information. Some long-distance links are actually based on radio or microwave signals or laser pulses in optical fibres, but all information is eventually converted into digital information stored in an electronic format when it arrives at a user’s terminal. Digital information is merely a string of ones and zeroes, which in computers is physically represented by the presence of electrical current or pulses. Sequences of digital pulses, or “bits”, are reconstructed to form information such as words or images.

The Internet is also based around a communications concept known as packet-switching. This means that information carried across the Internet is first broken down into relatively short sequences, or packets, of digital information. Each packet is sent out onto the Internet with data that labels its destination, rather like mailing a letter through the conventional postal system. The packets will pass through several different communication links as they travel. Computers, communication hubs, and other infrastructure on the Internet examines this information and uses it to decide the best pathway for forwarding the packet to its destination. This is known as routing. Developing more efficient technologies for routing is the subject of intensive research. Even though they may be components of the same message, different data packets may travel across entirely different pathways on the Internet, as conditions and Internet “traffic patterns” can fluctuate wildly across the space of a fraction of a second. Packets arriving at their destination are re-assembled to create the original information that was transmitted.

As computers became more sophisticated, and communication technology became more reliable, ARPANet was expanded to include access points across the USA. No longer a military experiment, it became a useful method of sharing information among America’s scientists and engineers. Other computer networks, often created in parallel to the expansion of ARPANet, were themselves connected to form a “network of networks”. At this point, the concept of
“internetworking” had demonstrated its value for computer-based communications. It became appropriate and acceptable to refer to the result as the Internet (Rheingold 1994: 65).

Internet activity spread across the USA and also to other nations, most of which followed the format of developing localised computer networks, then connecting them to the Internet using international links. Having established itself as a mature technology that was accepted by government, technical and academic communities, the Internet grew steadily throughout the 1970s. By the 1980s, some connections had been formed between Australia and the rest of the world, but these were not heavily used or well-known.

Seeking to keep pace with the rapid growth of networking that was taking place in North America and other developed parts of the world, the Australian Vice Chancellors’ Committee, an academic body representing Australia’s universities, decided to introduce the Internet to this nation’s tertiary institutions. The result was the formation of AARnet, the Australian Academic Research Network, which essentially served as the first true Australian Internet backbone. AARnet, in turn, connected to the rest of the Internet via a telecommunication link to the USA.

By the early 1990s, the Internet was well-established in Australia, but it was still not a mass medium in any part of the world. I first accessed the Internet in 1991, and remember nostalgically how its usage contrasts with the present situation. Internet usage in Australia was almost totally the domain of tertiary academics working in scientific and technical fields, along with personnel from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and other government bodies.

To access the Internet, one would log into an account on a large Unix-based computer in a campus, using a remote terminal that was little more than a screen and keyboard. Having activated a login session to the computer, a user would invoke the strange commands of the Unix operating system to call up programs that would run Internet applications. The most commonly used Internet application then was email, which has probably changed less in the meantime than any form of activity on the Internet. Usenet newsgroups were also popular, and
IRC, or Internet Relay Chat, was a real-time interactive chat application that I generally shunned. Campuses were already introducing policies to curtail its use on University campuses due to the computer resources it consumed, along with the time people could waste by using it for extended periods. Other applications were relatively obscure database-style functions such as Gopher and WAIS (Wide Area Information Service) which are essentially unknown today.

Users would generally swap email on research matters between other scientists working in similar areas, and read Usenet newsgroups dealing with scientific and technical topics. For entertainment, there were also newsgroups dealing with jokes and humour, but even these were heavily focused on technical jokes and "nerd tests". Newsgroups focused on various academic disciplines, recreational pursuits, forms of art and culture, as well as catering to the interests of countries, ethnic communities and special-interest groups. Despite their name, newsgroups were not really used for the delivery of news as the general public define it.

These applications were mostly run in text-only environments using commands that were as user-unfriendly as the Unix operating system itself. User entry barriers were high. One would need access to an Internet-connected machine, and these machines were essentially restricted to scientists and academics.

The beauty of Graphical User Interfaces, found in most Internet applications today, simply did not exist in most applications used at the time. One could view the latest image from the Hubble Space Telescope using a program specifically designed for handling graphics files, but the World Wide Web hadn’t arrived in Australia, or almost anywhere else. This was originally little more than a distributed form of hypertext that was used for referencing scientific papers and technical information. It grew from the way that scientific papers are filled with citations for other papers in related areas, a form of low-tech hyperlinking that pre-dates the computing revolution. Its usage was essentially localised among staff at the Switzerland-based research
institution CERN (French acronym for the European Council for Nuclear Research), where its founder, Tim Berners-Lee, worked. Again, it is doubtful that its earliest users had any idea of what its future would really be.

1.2 The Personal Computing Revolution

While the Internet grew among the scientific community throughout the 1980s, a parallel revolution was underway in the field of computing. The concept of the personal computer, frequently abbreviated to PC, was introduced. By the mid-1980s, they were commonplace in Australia, in both offices and homes. The size and cost of a PC made them accessible to millions of people. Rapid developments in microprocessor technology quickly boosted their capabilities, and well before the end of the decade, a PC was more powerful than a large computer of only twenty years earlier. It was possible to network personal computers across telephone lines using devices such as modems (modulator/demodulator) that would translate digital pulses into signals that could be carried across a communications network.

Many early amateur computer users flocked to Bulletin Board Systems (BBS), which gave the general public an early taste of some of the applications that would later be introduced on the Internet. A BBS was a computer connected to a telephone line that allowed others to connect to it. Users could download files (such as software or information), exchange electronic mail, participate in chat forums, and play games with each other. Eventually, some BBS systems were themselves joined in crude networking arrangements. One of the most legendary is Fidonet, a low-cost system that involved bulletin boards periodically exchanging information via telephone links when call costs were at their lowest. Despite the attractions of BBS systems, their popularity with PC users in general was low.
1.3 Videotex: A Technological Dead-End

During the 1970s, technology and media companies around the world began a series of experiments with systems that are broadly described as videotex. Videotex is a vague term that refers to a series of independent technologies designed to supply digital information by electronic means to video display terminals. The simplest form of videotex is a coded signal carried as a part of a television broadcast that can be decoded by a receiver. This service was used, and is still used, to carry simple pages of text that is displayed on a television screen. Services thus carried include television directories, news and community information. More sophisticated forms of videotex involved the use of specialised electronic terminals that communicate with databases across telephone connections.

Videotex in its various forms anticipated many of the applications that are now popular on the Internet, yet overall, videotex has been one of the most dismal failures in the recent history of telecommunications (Weaver 1983:entire text). Speaking generally, it seems that videotex was an idea that was introduced before its time. The technology required to deliver a satisfactory user experience did not exist, and the cost of decoders and service access was high. Consumers simply did not adopt the technology. Videotex in its dial-up form is essentially extinct today. However, television broadcast videotex still exists in many parts of the world, including Australia. Its user base is extremely low, and the future of the remaining systems could be limited.

1.4 The Internet as a Mass Medium

By the 1990s, the world had witnessed astonishing progress in the development and the deployment of computing and communication technologies. The spread of personal computers, the accessibility of communications infrastructure and the continuing growth of the Internet
itself were all the preconditions that were required for the introduction of the Internet to the general public.

Public access providers began to appear in the USA in 1990, and in Australia from 1992. By 1993, it was possible for a member of the general public with a computer, a modem, and the willpower to connect to the Internet using an Internet Service Provider, or ISP. In the same year, Graphical User Interfaces for the World Wide Web, now out of its research cage, also appeared. The World Wide Web was no longer a stuffy academic referencing system. It was a user-friendly multimedia tool that was attracting content on as many topics as the rest of the Internet.

By 1994, media coverage and continued rises in user levels has turned the Internet into a medium that was well-known, if not well-used. More ISPs appeared in Australia. Home computer users flocked to enjoy this new medium. By 1996, user levels in Australia had passed the one million mark (Jones 1996:24).

By this stage, the mode of access and applications used on the Internet had stabilised into its modern form. Users were most likely to be operating personal computers running GUI-based operating systems such as Windows. They would access the Internet by modem connections to commercial ISPs instead of academic bodies, or through a local area network in their office. Email and the World Wide Web essentially dominated Internet traffic, and new applications such as ICQ and networked video games become popular among younger users.

By 1999, the Internet in Australia was widespread. Twenty-two percent of all homes in Australia had Internet connections (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000a). The penetration level of the Internet into homes, coupled with its overall high user base in Australia, are sufficient reasons to label the Internet as a mass medium. As documented in Chapters 6 and 7, newspapers with circulation figures that are considerably lower than the Internet user base in Australia are considered to be mass media. A medium with a greater or comparable number of users should also be considered to be a mass medium. The Internet does require a certain level
of skill and infrastructure to use, but these factors are also true of other mass media. One cannot access radio or television without receivers, and print media require a reasonably high standard of literacy to be used. Access to the Internet is not restricted to any group or class of people, and access points can be found across the nation. Hence, a relative lack of restrictions to access is presented as another argument in support of the case that the Internet is a mass medium in Australia.

1.5 The Internet as a Field of Study

The Internet would be worthy of detailed study due to the size of its user base alone. Interest in the Internet from academics and the community in general is prompted by more than this. The Internet offers unique features that have never appeared in any previous medium, such as instant delivery of updates combined with asynchronous reading and interactivity. These features will be explored in subsequent chapters.

In retrospect, the decades immediately prior to the arrival of the Internet as a mass medium were relatively quiet from a technological perspective. Radio and television had both become mass media by the end of the 1950s. The quality of equipment in both media would improve in the decades that followed, and the costs of receivers would fall, but the fundamentals of the media remained the same. News and journalism were quickly adapted to both electronic media.

Meanwhile, the academic community managed to generate a substantial body of theories relating to mass communications, which itself only became a widespread area of academic interest across the world during the second half of the twentieth century. Issues such as agenda-setting, the organisational structure of news production and evaluation of newsworthiness became elements of theoretical frameworks that attempted to explain the creation of news and its subsequent utilisation by mass audiences. The academic community has been strongly motivated to apply these theories to understanding mass media such as television, radio and
print. Much research has been generated in the process, resulting in the creation of media studies and journalism as respected academic disciplines in their own right. The application of existing theories of journalism and news to the Internet is a logical extrapolation of this trend.

1.6 Mechanics of the Internet

It is worthwhile examining the mechanics of using the Internet for a modern user in greater detail. As mentioned previously, a typical Internet user accesses the network using a personal computer. Most of these run the Microsoft Windows graphical user interface (GUI) in synchrony with a Microsoft operating system (a version of MS-DOS, or Microsoft Disk Operating System), although a significant proportion of personal computers are Apple Macintosh machines running Apple’s own GUI-based operating system. If a user does not have a permanent connection to the Internet, some time and effort will need to be spent connecting this machine to the Internet. This will involve using connectivity software to “dial up” an Internet Service Provider across a telephone connection, with a modem connecting the computer to the telephone connection. The ISP is a commercial operation that will check that a user has an account with them, and is authorised to use the service.

Alternatively, the PC being used may already be connected to the Internet across a permanent or semi-permanent connection to an ISP. Such connections are typical of reasonably large work places and tertiary institutions. In these cases, many computers throughout the organisation will be connected simultaneously. These forms of connection are more expensive, and require more sophisticated hardware, than a simple dial-up mode of access that is typical of home users. However, the costs incurred for Internet access are normally borne by the employers, meaning that employees are normally able to access the Internet for free, within the bounds of company use policies.
Home users will pay a fee for connectivity to the Internet through their ISP. Pricing schemes vary widely, but prices of around $A2.00 per hour were typical of the commercial environment in the first half of 2000. Users are typically invoiced monthly for these services.

Another form of access that is commonplace is in public access points, such as cybercafes. Users will pay a fee that is normally comparable to the ISP fees described above. They will be escorted to one of several personal computers attached to permanent connections to the Internet, and will be able to use the Internet for a time-based user fee.

Once a connection to the ISP, and to the Internet beyond, has been established, the user can begin to use services running across the Internet. At this point, a clear distinction should be made between the Internet and its applications. The Internet itself is a physical infrastructure of cables, routers and terminals that allow communications to take place. Internet applications of various forms use this infrastructure to operate. People speak of using the Internet when they are communicating with another person by sending email, or downloading stock prices on the World Wide Web. In both cases, the Internet infrastructure is certainly used, but different applications are running across it.

A user can access different Internet applications by activating software that runs them. There are applications software packages that allow only email or access to newsgroups. Increasingly, there has been a tendency by major software companies to produce multipurpose software that incorporates email, newsgroups, the World Wide Web and other applications. Most of these resemble browser software for the World Wide Web.

Depending on the application selected, data will be exchanged between other computers connected to the Internet. A user may elect to use one or several applications during a “session” of using the Internet. After a period of time that is usually up to the user, they will end their use of the Internet for that session. A dial-up user will disconnect from their ISP, while most users with permanent connections will simply shut down the Internet applications they are using.
1.7 The Client-Server Model

Another element of technical jargon must be introduced to enable a proper understanding of the Internet. The Internet operates on a system known as a client-server model. During a data transfer, information stored on an Internet-connected computer known as the “server” is transferred to the machine that requested it. This is known as the “client”. The home PC with a user requesting a Web page is an example of a client, while the a computer holding Web pages with course timetables at a university would be a server.

The client-server model sometimes refers to physical infrastructure (hardware), such as the computers that carry out each role in this data transaction, but it can also refer to software that operates in support of these functions. In this case, the user’s PC could be spoken of as a client, but his or her Web browser software could also be called this.

1.8 The World Wide Web and Newsgroups

The Internet, and the applications it carries, bring a number of features that are unmatched by any other form of communications. The potential for these to transform the structure of mass communications is enormous. In practice, the most popular application for communications to mass audiences that has been deployed on the Internet is the World Wide Web. This thesis will primarily focus its attention on the Web, as it is generally known, for reasons that will be made clear.

The World Wide Web is a system for retrieving “pages” of information from servers connected to the Internet, which are displayed on a user’s screen. Web pages are mostly composed of text, although they usually incorporate graphics and photography. It is also possible to attach multimedia files such as animation, sound, movies and interactive graphics to a Web page, but a user’s Web client software must be equipped to support these additions.
The Web "page" is displayed on a user's screen as a window inside the Web client software. Examples of popular Web clients are Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer, which between them almost totally dominate the market. These are also known as Web browsers.

A Web page is identified on the Internet by a Uniform Resource Locator, or URL. The URL is also known as the address of a Web page. Varying in length, a URL begins with a description of the host site (server) holding the page. This could be as simple as www.uow.edu.au. Directory trees from the host site will lead users to other pages hosted at the same site, such as www.uow.edu.au/crearts/. Each page on the Web has its own URL. Typing the URL into a browser will cause the page to be called up from the server that hosts it, and displayed on the user's browser. Hyperlinks are words or icons on a page that, when clicked with a mouse pointer (part of the Graphical User Interface), cause another URL to be automatically accessed. Designers of Web pages will usually include links to pages on related topics that may or may not be under the control of the same organisation. Hyperlinks are an essential part of navigating between different Web pages that have been assembled as part of the same overall presentation, or Web site, like different pages in the same book.

Servers holding Web pages are usually connected to the Internet permanently, enabling them to be accessed at any time by a user connected to the Internet in any part of the world. The retrieval is as convenient as simply pulling a book off a shelf when it is needed. The Web page may contain anything its author desires, including multimedia applications. The size of the Web page is also relatively unlimited. The only constraint on the volume of a Web page or a Web site is the storage capacity of the server that hosts it.

The author or operators of a Web site are free to alter the contents of the site spontaneously, and add or delete as much as they wish. This can be done frequently or never at all. Web sites are composed using a format known as HTML, or Hyper Text Markup Language. This is the most basic system for designing a page, and consists of a series of simple commands that are typed into a document that format the contents for display on a Web browser. Software for designing
Web pages is readily available, and some is free. The design of a Web page does not require excessively complicated skills, and does not require a great deal of time. It can be done on a PC.

The distributed nature of the Internet means that Web pages are hosted on servers all over the world. Finding a place for hosting a Web site is easy. Many ISPs offer the service to their subscribers. Certain services will even offer to host a Web site for free.

Hence, the technical and economic barriers for publishing information on the World Wide Web are extremely low when compared to other communications systems. This makes it feasible for many people to create Web pages that are potentially visible to tens of millions of Internet users around the world.

Legal and social conditions in most parts of the industrialised world make the publishing and retrieval of most forms of information on the World Wide Web both permissible and acceptable.

Usenet, or newsgroups, are a series of discussion forums that have no centralised point of control, and are carried across the Internet by any service provider that agrees to do so. Any user with client software for accessing these newsgroups can read them and post messages for others to read. Messages posted to a newsgroup remain active for roughly two weeks, and discussions on these groups generally take place over periods of several days among dozens of people. Many more readers will simply “lurk”, reading the messages without posting any of their own.

As with the Web, newsgroups are an Internet application that also allows people in general to express opinions and communicate with large numbers of people without the constraints of geography or time. However, it is far more interactive than a Web page, which is mostly a read-only device.
In recent years, a fusion between the Web and newsgroups has been achieved with the creation of Web-based chat sites. These sites are interactive chat forums hosted on servers that hold Web sites, and they are accessed through Web browsers. These chat forums could be real-time, or as slow in their turnover as newsgroups.

In short, the major advantages of the Internet applications outlined above are their independence from normal space/time constraints, their accessibility and their potential for feedback and interactivity.

1.9 Applying the Advantages

The discussion so far has been fairly generic in terms of the operations of Internet applications. It is appropriate to consider how these factors produce specific advantages for applying the Internet to actual communication tasks.

Most emphasis on mass communications across the Internet is focused on the Web, the application that has primarily been embraced for that purpose. The first and most obvious advantage that could be stated of the Web for this purpose is that it is a mass medium. Millions of people are reading content on the Web. During 1999, 5.6 million Australian adults accessed the Internet (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000a). It is clearly feasible to reach a large audience.

The advantages of the Internet as a delivery system are a result of three factors: advanced technology, unusual economics and a relatively liberal social structure. Certain advantages are only possible because of the combined effects of more than one of these three factors.

The technological advantages allow media products that simply could not be delivered by any other medium. In theory, it should be possible to publish almost endless quantities of material,
more than would be allowed by temporal or spatial constraints in other media. This material can employ multimedia and interactive content. It can be updated with frequency patterns unlike any other medium. This can also be done so cheaply that individuals with access to a PC and a telephone connection can place news and journalism on the Internet. This material could, in theory, reach a larger audience than most conventional newspapers or broadcast stations. News reporting that is supplied on the Internet by either a conventionally structured news organisation or a lone individual could break free from the institutional constraints that affect the production of news for conventional media. They could elect to telescope their content levels in accordance with the amount of newsworthy events, or publish haphazardly with no respect for conventional deadlines.

The ease of access to the Internet as a delivery system could produce an explosion in the amount of journalistic content that appears on the medium, as factors that could have prevented the publication of material in the past are removed. These factors could include editorial policies in conventional publications that could censor some stories, or economic factors: material that does not seem to appeal to a mass audience could be economically unsustainable from a publishing viewpoint in traditional media. People who may have never considered the possibility of being journalists in the past, or being journalists in any other medium, could feel inspired to practice journalism on the Internet as a hobby. The boundary between a traditional publisher and a traditional consumer in conventional media could become difficult to define on the Internet.

A precise theoretical framework for addressing these advantages, and the form of their application, will be supplied in Chapters 2 and 3.
1.10 Research Questions

With so many potential new developments arising from the Internet, from changes in timing constraints to the rise of amateur publishing, a researcher could generate an almost endless number of research topics. For the purpose of this thesis, it has been decided to focus on the following research questions.

R1: To what extent has the Internet transformed the established model of news delivery?

This question will explore the potential impact of new forms of delivering traditional journalism, amateur publishing, the potential development of new forms of journalism that have been influenced by the technology of the Internet, and an assessment of interactive chat forums such as Usenet as new forums for news delivery.

This question will also explore the potential of what is, according to the theory previously discussed, a relatively liberal economic and liberal legal environment on the delivery of journalism. The relative ease of Internet publishing, coupled with the relative lack of government regulation on Internet content, could influence the development of content.

The interaction between traditional producers of journalism and the Internet will be explored in this research question. The institutional nature of news production is a well-entrenched phenomenon, as outlined in the writings of Gaye Tuchman (Tuchman 1978).

Conversely, the delivery of journalism of the Internet presents a challenge to existing operational structures within conventional news organisations. These institutional and production constraints are likely to influence the development of models of news delivery on the Internet. Certain models of news delivery, such as publishing new material continuously, are enabled by the technological aspects of the Internet. However, these models of delivery may not be achieved in practice due to institutional constraints. The influence of traditional modes of
delivery, and the institutional constrains that support them, could affect the way traditional news producers deliver news on the Internet, and the way that the production of news for the Internet is organised by these institutions.

R2: Is the style of Internet journalism any different from the established model?

The style of journalism presented on Web sites will be explored for potential differences from content in non-Internet media. The removal of time and volume constraints or geographical boundaries could be major influences in altering the style of Internet journalism. This question will focus primarily on the potential influence of changes in temporal constraints or geographical scope on newsworthiness.

Again, the structures of institutions that produce news for the Internet could influence the style of journalism produced for the Internet in ways that have no relationship to the unique features of the medium.

R3: How do publisher and audience perceptions compare on the Internet?

This question will directly examine the factors and that have prompted content providers to undertake news publishing on the Internet, along with their perceptions of the advantages of the Internet over other media. This data, in turn, will be compared with similar studies of the perceptions of consumers of Internet news and journalism and their reasons for selecting the Internet as a medium. A synthesis of the two data sets will reveal aspects of the overall success of both groups in using the Internet.

Despite the existence of several distinct advantages of the Internet as a delivery system for journalism, these factors may not have a strong influence on the advantages that are understood by either publishers or the audience.
The operational and technological advantages of the Internet provide some potential motivations for the creation of content, but these advantages do not account for broader sociological factors such as lifestyles or the personal views of specific individuals involved in the creation of content for the Internet. Hence, motivational factors are potentially much broader than a simple desire to implement the operational advantages of the Internet.

R4: To what extent will the Internet contribute to general research into the area of agenda-setting?

Agenda-setting is a subset of journalism research that explores the relationship between issues emphasised in news, and the issues considered to be generally important by audiences. The general proposition that informs agenda-setting research is that news reports influence the perception and ranking in importance of specific issues, according to the amount of coverage they receive. Agenda-setting research is highly controversial, owing to the fact that no universally accepted paradigms or conclusions have been generated.

Agenda-setting research has been constrained by the need for researchers to actively interview research participants, a somewhat intrusive experimental procedure that could influence the data thus obtained. The passive monitoring of activity on the Internet provides a unique opportunity to advance the overall state of agenda-setting research, and to potentially explore the evolution of new agenda-setting models in the online environment.

The absence of prompting from an experimenter, who could accidentally frame agendas within the context of a survey, and the empowerment that the Internet applies to these people in terms of their ability to communicate, suggests that the public may be capable of generating their own set of agendas either as individuals or through interpersonal communication. This arguably occurs among people who do not use the Internet, but this phenomenon would be more easily observed on the Internet. An observance of this phenomenon would suggest the need for new theories of agenda setting that not only emphasise the power of individuals to sustain agenda sets independently of the media, but explore the interaction of these agendas with those of the
media. This form of interaction between these two agenda sets could manifest itself on Internet forums.

The collection of large quantities of data from Internet-based surveys relating to news agendas could allow the influence of specific stories to be examined in more detail than a traditional survey, which is usually limited in the number of issues it can explore by logistical constraints. In turn, this could lead to a more detailed exploration of the concept that news stories vary in their ability to influence public agendas. This data could thus lead to the development of a model that explains this variability of influence.

The potential for the Internet to deliver greater quantities of news content could also have an influence on agenda-setting patterns. If the Internet is found to deliver more news, and hence more agendas, than traditional media, it could be appropriate to investigate the influence of agendas derived from Internet-based news.

1.11 Overview of Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this thesis draws upon general media theory and theories relating specifically to the Internet. Theories relating to the established model of journalism include the following. The overall nature of established news production is examined within the framework of Gaye Tuchman (Tuchman 1978). Issues of newsworthiness are analysed with respect to the model of Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge (Galtung and Ruge 1965). Agenda-setting research in this thesis will draw on the work of Warwick Blood (Blood 1982:3-7) and his evaluations of the overall state of research in this broad area of study, as well as Harold Zucker (Zucker 1978: 225-239) and his concept of variable influence.

The theories of Stuart Cunningham and Terry Flew (in Cunningham and Turner 1997: 430) will be used to construct a framework for potential new advantages and changes to the established
model of journalism on the Internet. The framework for evaluating interactivity created by Carrie Heeter (Heeter in Salvaggio and Bryant 1989: 217-235) will guide evaluations of interactivity in this thesis, with some modifications. Susan Mings and Peter White (Mings and White 2000) provide a suitable framework for evaluating economic models.

In some cases, new models will be proposed where no previously published theoretical frameworks exist. A full explanation of the theoretical framework will be provided in Chapters 2 and 3.

1.12 Geographic Constraints: Focus on Australia

A complete investigation of the aforementioned issues would necessitate a worldwide study of Internet-based journalism, a feat that would be logistically impossible for the time and resources available to me. For this reason, it has been decided that the study will focus primarily on Australia.

Specifying a geographic constraint for a medium that so easily transcends geography could seem difficult, but this can be achieved by breaking down the mechanics of the operation of the Internet. The thesis will focus on Web sites and online forums that are produced in Australia, or are designed primarily for Australian audiences. It will also focus on the experiences of Internet users who are based in Australia, or are Australian citizens overseas.

The selection of Australia as a geographical target for the thesis is convenient, as I live in the country. However, Australia is arguably one of the best geographical regions that could be selected for this research. The nation is a liberal, democratic society with an entrenched cultural tradition of free speech. Australia also enjoys a highly developed telecommunication infrastructure and a high penetration level of PCs. By 1999, 48% of homes in Australia had a
PC (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000a). The Internet user base in Australia is also high, as previously mentioned (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000a).

As an English-speaking nation, Australia is also able to comprehend news and journalism produced in other Anglophone nations, especially the USA. This, in turn, suggests a high potential for Australian Internet users to seek out news content from overseas sources on the Internet.

1.13 Temporal Constraints

The temporal constraints on this thesis are somewhat less precise, given the relatively short history of Internet-based news publishing. For practical purposes, most empirical data that will be obtained and presented will concentrate on the time period from 1995 to mid-2000. The year 1995 is a significant starting point, as no serious efforts in providing online news appeared in Australia prior to this date. The constraint of mid-2000 for ending the time period under study has been imposed in order to allow the thesis to be completed soon after this interval.

1.14 Defining Journalism

The thesis is concerned with the delivery of news and journalism on the Internet. However, as this chapter has already explained, the Internet can support all manner of content and forms of communication. It is appropriate to explain and define the forms of content that are considered to fall within the scope of this thesis.

Generally, journalism could be described as the documentation of events, opinions and trends in the world at large, usually in a timeframe that occurs concurrently with the events being covered. The close temporal link between the occurrence of an event and its documentation is precisely identified by Galtung and Ruge (1965).
Sources of journalism also present this material regularly over an extended period. An example would be a newspaper that publishes every week for a period of several years. The latter time interval is usually considered to be the lifespan of the publication. Hence, journalism is produced regularly from a given source, such as a newspaper or broadcast program.

Journalism must also deal with events that hold some sort of public character, and be prepared for a public audience. The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary (1976) defines a journal as a “record of daily transactions of a public body or association” while also defining the word as “newspaper, or other periodical”. It is not unreasonable to draw connections between the two definitions, as newspapers and other delivery systems for journalism seem to be largely concerned with supplying collections of the former definition. The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary thus provides yet another temporal reference, as well as alluding to the public character of news and its institutional focus.

The emphasis on the activities or statements of institutions has been a frequently cited phenomenon of media scholars. Gaye Tuchman, in particular, documents in her research that news production is essentially one institution (the media) documenting and interacting with other institutions (Tuchman 1978). The institutional focus of news is a source of controversy among journalistic practitioners, some of whom suggest that the scope of journalism should be expanded to non-institutional events. For the purposes of this thesis, non-institutional events will certainly be considered worthy of classification as journalism.

Raw information of a predictable format generally does not fall within this definition of journalism. A report on the cause and effects of a fire circulated for mass consumption is journalism. A train timetable is not. The distinction between journalism and information becomes somewhat hazy in many media sources, where programs and publications that are concerned with news become filled with all manner of informational sources, such as weather reports, that could be classified as either. Recent decades have also seen narrative structures documenting real events that would not have formerly been classified as journalism falling
within this definition, such as the so-called “new journalism” practised by writers such as Tom Wolfe, which resembles literature.

An examination of modern media sources in Australia suggests a general wave of change has also occurred during the 1990s. Much of the primary content of newspapers and magazines is now taken up with information that is closer to raw data than reportage. Lists of statistics on matters such as best-selling books, crime levels or food prices are published with little or no interpretation. The brightly designed table or graph replaces continuous text. While this material may be of interest to the reader, it is questionable if it is truly journalism in a classical sense. These changes in the style and possibly the scope of journalism have all occurred independently of technological change.

The advent of online services as a delivery system has the potential to alter the structure of journalism to an even greater degree. New methods of presenting and organising information are possible, along with the removal of temporal and spatial constraints that influence the way some journalism is composed. The potential for feedback from consumers, sometimes in real-time, also opens the way for forms of discourse that have been difficult or impossible with previous communications technologies. Exactly how these will influence the form of journalism is unclear.

For the purpose of this thesis, content on the Internet will be considered journalism if it falls within the definitions outlined above. It must be reportage, or interpretation, of factual events of a public nature. Raw information of public interest such as weather reports, and the so-called “new journalism” does not fall within this definition. General information on certain topics, of a form that would normally be found in reference books, will not be considered journalism. Personal diaries or biographical data are also not considered to be journalism.

The aforementioned focus on Australia adds another dimension to the definition of journalism for this thesis. Journalism in Australia is primarily grounded in what is known as a “Western” definition of journalism, common to other nations such as the United States of America. Under
this definition, journalism is viewed as an independent element of society that is ostensibly free of the control of governments, industries and other bodies. Journalism is often tasked with monitoring and exposing problems with governments and other organs of society. It sees its role as providing an objective view of events. This objectivity is seen as beneficial to the overall structure of society, even when its reportage is critical of certain groups. Thus, “Western” journalism is seen by its supporters as a significant element of a liberal, democratic society.

The “Western” theory of journalism is not the only model that has been used for practising journalism, as Fred Siebert documents (1956). Other journalistic models (such as the Authoritarian model in Siebert) emphasise a less neutral structure, suggesting that journalism should be used to encourage consensus with government policies instead of encouraging criticism.

1.15 New Forms of Journalism?

The definition of traditional journalism that has been presented in this chapter places heavy constraints on the types of communications that could be classified as journalism.

The thesis will also explore the potential of certain forms of Internet-based communication, that are unmatched in other media, to be classified as journalism. This includes interactive discussions on events and issues of public interest that appear in public discussion forums such as Usenet newsgroups. In this case, Usenet postings could be considered as a new form of journalism if they contain material of a newsworthy character, or are made in reaction to newsworthy events. The traditional constraints of regularity of publication from a specific source would not apply in such a case.
Another form of communication that will be explored is one-off reporting of newsworthy events. This would involve the publication of a story that resembles an individual piece of journalistic content by a source that does not produce this form of content on a regular or continuous basis. Although this sort of activity is not considered journalism in a traditional sense, it could be appropriate to classify this form of content under an extended definition of new forms of online journalism.

Please note that this consideration of new forms of online journalism is Internet-specific, and does not include the exploration of narrative structures explored under “new” journalism as practiced by writers such as Tom Wolfe, or the irreverent style of “Gonzo” journalism as practiced by writers such as Hunter S. Thompson.

**1.16 Relationships with non-Internet Content**

Publishers of news and journalism in non-Internet media can also produce Web sites. A Web site with an ownership or management connection to a non-Internet publication, such as a newspaper or a television network, can be described as having “legacy” ties. The term “legacy” will be used in this thesis as a reference to a connection between a Web site and a non-Internet production. The use of news stories that are produced primarily for a non-Internet source on a Web site is described as “legacy content”.

Some Internet ventures will have no ownership or managerial connection to any non-Internet source. These projects will be referred to as “purely online”. This term implies the lack of legacy ties.

As an example of these definitions, a Web site operated by a certain newspaper that reproduces content from that newspaper would be classified as a site with legacy ties, and legacy content. A Web site created by a company that owns no other media products, and creates original content for its site, would be classified as purely online.
A Web site could lack legacy ownership or management connections, but such a site could still use legacy content sourced from other organisations. In such a case, the ownership structure would be used as the principal factor for classifying the site, and it would be classified as purely online if it did not present itself as the exclusive or primary online equivalent of a legacy publication.

1.17 Defining Professional and Amateur Journalism

Tuchman (1978) outlines the activities of journalists as professionals. The term "professional" has several implications that can be explored. It suggests that people who produce journalism do so as an occupation, receiving payment for their work. This also implies that these people are working as journalists on a regular basis. Tuchman's observations of journalism also reveal that material created by journalists is published or distributed through recognised publications or programs, such as a newspaper that appears regularly. Hence, the source of distribution is also tied to the concept of professionalism. Professionalism also implies an adherence to certain methodologies of preparation and presentation of journalism, such as the identification of news stories, methods of research, and styles of writing. These values and "norms" are inculcated by traditional journalistic institutions. Hence, professional journalists can be subjected to definitional constraints.

The ease of publishing material on the Internet means that anyone can potentially publish journalism, or material that could be classified as journalism under the extended definition. This could include people who would not be classified as professional journalists under Tuchman's original definitional structure.

The term "amateur" will be used to describe anyone producing journalism who cannot be classified as a professional journalist in all of the criteria listed above. This includes people who do not produce journalism as a regular occupation, or who receive no payment at all for
producing this content. It may also include people who do not publish content in online publications that adopt a regular routine in their supply of content. It could also include people who produce content that falls within the extended definition of journalism, but would not be classified as journalism under the traditional definition.

1.18: Propositions of the Thesis

Despite the exciting potential for all manner of revolutionary new developments in the delivery of news and journalism on the Internet, it is proposed that many of these potential advantages will not be fulfilled in practice. Although the Internet will be applied for some interesting purposes, its overall influence on the conduct of journalism and the sociological structures behind the supply of journalism will be minimal.

My somewhat pessimistic view is premised on mechanical and cultural factors that are largely independent of the technology of the Internet itself. The following factors could seriously limit the adoption of personal journalism or alternative systems of news delivery.

1.18.1 Mechanical Factors

These factors are caused by technical and logistical constraints on the journalistic process.

1.18.1.1 Difficulties in Creating Content

The most significant issue informing this viewpoint is that while the Internet is an excellent means of delivering news and journalism, its use as a delivery system does little to influence the creation of this content in the first place.

The creation of news and journalism is not easy. It requires skills and effort by practitioners, and also requires resources and capital. It is indeed ironic that many organisations charged with
the supply of news and journalism find themselves unable to produce much of it themselves, and must depend heavily on material imported from other sources such as AAP. Another major source of material tapped by journalists is public relations releases, which are regularly dispatched to media outlets by public relations agencies (Renton 1997; Turk 1986). Journalism as we currently know it is almost exclusively produced by professional journalists who use journalism as a source of income. There is comparatively little content in existing media channels that is produced through other means.

A person without skills, resources or paid inducements for producing news or journalism is generally unlikely to do so. Furthermore, even if a person wished to do so, it is doubtful that a person would be able to witness newsworthy events in a normal day. In theory, a self-styled citizen reporter could visit media conferences, but this would produce content that was no different from existing media outlets. It would also require time, effort and resources to attend these events.

1.18.1.2 Lack of Impact of Previous Technologies

Although the Internet certainly empowers its users to publish, it is not the first technology that has ever enabled public communication by normal citizens in an accessible format. Crude mimeograph machines have existed for decades. Photocopiers are commonplace devices. The personal computer revolution brought about the “desktop publishing” phenomenon in the late 1980s, enabling users to produce high-quality documents and reports quickly, and at minimal cost. Desktop publishing has proven to be popular with the general community for relatively pedestrian applications such as club newsletters, but in more than a decade of wide-scale deployment in Australia, it has never made a major impact in independent news publishing. The lack of impact produced by desktop publishing does not generate confidence in the ability of the Internet to influence social trends much further.
1.18.2 Cultural Factors

These factors are caused by attitudes held by individuals and organisations. They are independent of the technical factors previously outlined.

1.18.2.1 Apathy

Despite the sociological and mechanical factors that mitigate against new trends in journalistic production, some people will avoid publishing online news or participating in new endeavours simply through apathy or laziness. News consumption requires effort and concentration. Production requires even more. Some people will not care, or will prefer to expend their time and efforts in other areas.

1.18.2.2 Perceptions of the Role of the Journalist

After decades of mass media in various forms, it is fair to say that the role of the journalist in society is clearly defined. A person’s role as a journalist is mostly delineated with precision, usually through regular employment in this role. Furthermore, journalism is increasingly bound by training routines and education that cause it to be as specialised as most other forms of skilled work. A person who does not work as a journalist, or has not been trained as a journalist, may feel bound by sociological conventions. He or she could simply think that there is no point in trying to practice journalism if this person is already ensconced in another occupation. The concept of news production as a job-related task is probably too entrenched for many people to break.

1.18.2.3 Corporate and Journalistic Culture

Although companies may be interested in the potential of the Internet, they could be reluctant to expend significant resources on Internet-related projects. The value of such projects has simply not been demonstrated with reliability. Companies would justifiably regard such projects as
high-risk ventures. Projects that are implemented are likely to be somewhat conservative in their outlay of resources, or highly experimental in their format, or both.

It is proposed that cultures within news organisations may view the adoption of work routines to specifically serve the more unique modes of communication on the Internet with suspicion. There are no demonstrated work practices or routines within the journalistic community that deal with the challenges of real-time interactive multimedia.

The lack of expenditure, coupled with conservative work practices, suggests that much of the news content that will be published on the Internet will either be indistinguishable in its style from conventional media, or will simply be repackaged from existing media products. In either case, the product that is delivered will not be significantly different from existing journalistic production.

1.18.2.3 Internet Culture

The Internet can certainly be applied to the supply of journalism, but most communication on the Internet has traditionally had no connection to news or journalism at all. It is proposed that many people perceive and participate in an Internet user culture that emphasises recreation and entertainment above other forms of communication.

Despite the overwhelming proliferation of personal home pages, years of Internet use have provided evidence that a series of social norms on the appropriate content for a home page has also arisen. Home pages contain personal data, photographs, notes on personal hobbies or interests, links to the home pages of friends, and generally little else. It is possible that this social norm may have discouraged personal publishing on the Internet of anything related to journalism.
1.18.3 Overall Propositions

It is proposed that there will be a substantial translation of content onto the Internet from existing media companies and publications. There will be some minor experimentation with the more radical possibilities of the Net, particularly interactivity and multimedia, but these will not dominate the delivery of Internet-based news. The overall format of news on the Internet will probably strongly resemble formats that have been established for other media. There will be little in the way of new styles or new content.

1.19 Summary

The principal elements of this study have now been outlined. The Internet is a medium with features unmatched by other media, and it is appropriate to consider how these features will be utilised in practice. However, it is probable that factors unrelated to the technical aspects of the Internet will influence the way that it is used as a delivery system for journalism and new forms of interactive communication on newsworthy topics.
Chapter Two

Researching the Theory

Assembling a theoretical framework for this thesis from the existing pool of written material on the Internet is challenging, owing to the novelty of the subject.

Academic studies of the impact of the Internet appeared from 1995 onwards. However, much of this material has little relevance to this thesis. Most of the earliest academic studies of the Internet were focused on the general sociology of computer-mediated communications and interactive chat. The writings of the American sociologist Sherry Turkle (1995) are arguably the most prominent in this area. She focused on areas such as the adoption of new personalities and anonymity in real-time chat forums such as Internet Relay Chat. However, her work does not delve into Internet-based journalism or agenda-setting.

Much of the academic writing that has contributed to this theoretical framework is, by necessity, highly speculative. It was informed by an awareness of the possibilities for new methodologies of communications that the Internet offered, but hampered by the lack of available evidence.

It is interesting to observe that much of the well-informed academic writings that relate to news delivery on the Internet were only published during the course of the preparation of this thesis, meaning that this material is very recent.

This chapter presents an overview of previously published theory that served as a basis for developing methodologies and models for this thesis. The next chapter will examine the way that application of this previously published material to the area of study leads to the development of new theories and models. Following on, Chapter 4 will present a series of methodologies that have been informed by these theories and models.
2.1 Conventional News Production and Delivery

A generic model of the production and distribution of news in a conventional media environment is needed for the purposes of evaluating some of the potential changes that could appear when the Internet is used as a delivery system. Two principal aspects of conventional production are explored: the industrial production model of Tuchman, and newsworthiness criteria described by Galtung and Ruge.

2.1.1 Industrial Production

The model used in this theoretical framework is primarily based on the writings of Gaye Tuchman (1978) who effectively documented this process. Tuchman generated her conclusions from passive observations of media products, active interviews with news producers, and participation in the newsmaking process as a reporter. These methodologies are sound, as they interlock and complement each other.

Tuchman has documented several aspects of news production, including her perceptions of discrimination and her belief that the media legitimise the authority of dominant public institutions. These arguments do not relate to Tuchman’s work on the generic mechanics of news production, and hence, the adaptation of Tuchman’s very broad theoretical writings is, by definition, highly selective.

This overview of Tuchman’s model is a synthesis of points made throughout the entire book Making News (1978). Tuchman generates a model of news that is akin to an industrial process. News is not so much a reflection of the world as a construct, produced in accordance with routines and principles that have been generated by the newsmaking community. Tuchman points out that news is produced by professionals working inside organisations formed specifically for this task, much like any other occupation.
News is produced in regular quantities at regular times, according to the frequency of the resultant news publication. Even on days when nothing significant occurs, pages or broadcast time must be filled. The industrial character of news production, and its classification as a constructed commodity, make this possible. Tuchman identifies these self-imposed production rhythms as somewhat artificial.

Research for news is collected through the deployment of a “news net” that is formed by dispatching reporters to various locations. The size and scope of the “net” affects the amount of news that can be collected, and the type of news. Reporters are mostly deployed to public institutions such as government agencies, police stations and courts. This reliance on a “net” of reporters introduces spatial limitations to the collection of news.

Tuchman also identifies four categories of news: hard, soft, developing, and continuing. Hard news consists of precise facts and occurrences, grounded in space and time considerations. Soft news consists of features and human-interest stories that are not as temporally sensitive. Developing news is a news story where facts relating to the story emerge slowly over an extended period. Continuing news is stories on a similar theme or subject that occur over a period of time.

These classifications are influenced by temporal factors, including the temporal limitations of the medium covering the story. Tuchman supports her model with case studies. A prime example cited in her work was coverage of the assassination of US civil rights leader Martin Luther King. Newspapers, with a low temporal frequency, published just one final story in a “hard news” format, while television supplied many updates as “developing news”.

Tuchman demonstrates institutional reporting and the associated “professionalism” of reporting with a construct known as the “Web of Facticity”. Statements can be verified by circular arguments between sources, which makes concepts that could be nothing more than statements appear to be verified facts to news consumers. This is done by “relocating facticity” from the empirical requirements of verified truth to attribution to ostensibly reliable people or
institutions. Instead of a reporter saying that the United States of America was suffering from a “missile gap” with the Soviet Union, a reporter could say that “Senator X says there is a missile gap”. The Web of Facticity model is noteworthy, because it reflects the deployment of news nets in places where people are likely to make quotable statements, and also uncovers the limitations of this method of data collection. A more flexible “news net”, possibly consisting of self-styled citizen reporters posting their own reports to the Internet, could overcome some of these problems. Tuchman’s model thus treats news delivery as a mechanical process filled with spatial and temporal constraints, as well as organisational constraints, that affect the nature of the content that is produced.

Another significant aspect of the model is that the process is linear and one-way, beginning with the collection of stories, the production of news products, and their eventual delivery to consumers. This is easily perceived within Tuchman’s model, although Tuchman’s writings do not ostensibly deal with the potential for creating alternative models through the use of new technologies. An important consequence of this “industrial” model of news production is that individuals who are not employed in news production as an occupation are usually denied the opportunity to report on news or supply it to a mass audience. Tuchman’s overview of touring production facilities and observing the infrastructure involved in news delivery reveal a process that is not only industrialised, but one which requires vast investments.

2.1.1.1 Support for Tuchman’s Model

Tuchman’s writings serve as the primary statement of the industrial model of traditional news production in this thesis, owing to their clarity and the prominence that Tuchman has achieved within academia. However, similar perspectives on news production has been generated by other academics. These are compatible with, and supportive of, Tuchman’s own model. Rock (1982) identifies the concept of “eternal recurrence” as a means of describing the repetitive and systematic approach to news production, which artificially segments a continuous series of events in the world into the discrete production routine of a news organisation. Rock also states
that the physical volume of a publication influences coverage. Some items may be deleted due
to a lack of space, but on other occasions, the lack of stories with high levels of newsworthiness
may force journalists to include items of low newsworthiness, purely to ensure that space on a
fixed number of pages is filled. McQuail (198: 164) notes that the spatial deployment of
reporters (characterised as “news nets” by Tuchman) is made to areas where newsworthy events
are expected to appear, and results in a disproportionate coverage of events where reporters are
stationed. McQuail notes the identification of Southern Africa as a region of high
newsworthiness as a factor influencing the deployment of reporters to the region and the
subsequent high flow of stories from the region.

2.1.2 Newsworthiness

Tuchman’s contribution to a theoretical framework for conventional news is supplemented by
another line of research. The perception of events or stories as worthy of publication as news,
or “newsworthiness”, is an integral part of the news production process. The work of Galtung
and Ruge (1965) provides a model for explaining the evaluation of newsworthiness. The
methodology used for the development of their theoretical framework was based on monitoring
news over an extended period as consumers.

Galtung and Ruge formulated the following rules for newsworthiness:-

1) Frequency
A story is more likely to be reported if it matches the frequency of the news medium.

2) Amplitude
The greater the scale of an event (especially when comparable to events of a similar type), the
more likely it is to be reported.

3) Clarity
An event which contains one clear meaning or interpretation is more likely to be reported.

4) Cultural Proximity
The more familiar an event is to a news source's/audience's culture, the more likely it will be reported.

5) Consonance
A newsworthy event should fit in with what is predicted or expected.

6) Unexpectedness
An event or outcome that was not predicted is newsworthy.

7) Continuity
Events that have become newsworthy continue to be newsworthy.

8) Composition
An event may become more newsworthy than normal if it is needed to "balance" the overall tone of a news report. This could be a trivial event of local news to balance international news, or a "feel good" story.

Galtung and Ruge consider the aforementioned eight factors to be independent of cultural factors. The following additional terms are considered to be cultural factors specific to Western (especially American) culture.

9) Elite Nations
Events concerning "elite" nations (powerful nations such as the USA) tend to be covered more.

10) Elite People
Events concerning elite people are covered more.

11) Personal
The more an event can be seen in personal terms (such as a specific victim) the more newsworthy it becomes.

12) Negativity
The more negative an event is, the more it becomes newsworthy.

Galtung and Ruge propose that the overall “newsworthiness” of a given story is essentially a summation of its fulfilment of all the above criteria. Stories that score highly on several categories are most likely to be newsworthy. Conversely, a story that is deficient in some areas (such as events in a distant, non-elite, culturally distant nation) can become newsworthy if it satisfies other criteria.

Hence, Galtung and Ruge have provided a framework for assessing the newsworthiness of stories according to specific criteria. Some of these criteria are specific to stories themselves, while others are influenced by the medium of publication. This proposed influence of the medium of publication is interesting, as it suggests that a change in medium could potentially generate a change in news values.

2.1.2.1 Other Considerations of Newsworthiness

As with Tuchman’s model of news production, the model of newsworthiness outlined by Galtung and Ruge has been selected as a prime theoretical basis for its prominence in academia and its clarity.

One additional factor that could be considered is a perception of audience interest, or the influence of audience interest, on the determination of news values. DeWerth-Pallmeyer (1997) surveyed journalists in the United States, and found that the determination of news values was not determined by regular interaction, or any sort of precise survey, of audience interests. DeWerth-Pallmeyer thus presents a model of news judgement that is primarily determined by journalists and editors inside a given organisation. This further clarifies the traditional model of news production generated by Tuchman as a linear, one-way process where audiences are essentially passive consumers. It also removes another factor that could influence academic modelling of news values away from the considerations of Galtung and Ruge.
Shoemaker (1991: 111) notes that “news values have become fairly predictable”, and observes that “they are included with little variation” in textbooks. Citing some examples, Shoemaker nominates the following values: Prominence/importance, human interest, conflict/controversy, the unusual, timeliness and proximity. The parallels between these criteria and those of Galtung and Ruge are striking. Both emphasise factors such as negativity, magnitude, empathy (human interest and relations to a specific person), novelty and space/time factors.

McQuail (1987: 204) also documents his own interpretations of the writings of the sociologist Robert Park, noting that news is “timely” and must be reported soon after its appearance.

The critical factor in the Galtung and Ruge’s delineation, and other analyses of news values, is an emphasis on the variables of space and time, in terms of the geographical reach of a publication and its frequency of publication. These factors are both highly susceptible to flexibility, owing to the technical factors of the Internet.

### 2.2 Potential Innovations in Internet-Based Communications

#### 2.2.1 Generic Innovations

It is expected that the model of news delivery outlined for conventional media could be changed by the special properties of the Internet as a delivery system. A model proposed for these changes has been outlined by Cunningham and Flew (in Cunningham/Turner 1997:430). The model is derived from a consideration of the technological and economic principles of the operation of the Internet. It specifically addresses many of the limitations outlined in the aforementioned theoretical framework for conventional news delivery, and is thus consistent with this model. This model does not specifically address the potential of the Internet to influence journalism. Instead, it documents general influences. The influence of this model on journalism will be addressed in the next chapter.
Cunningham and Flew cite the following points as being the fundamental differences between the Internet and other mass media.

- Conventional media are hierarchical or point to multipoint in operation. The Internet is similar in that it can also be used in this format, but offers the simultaneous possibilities of multiple modes of communication, including point to point.

- Conventional media have multiple levels of regulation. The Internet is unregulated and anarchic in its regulation. Cunningham and Flew cite copyright concerns in their writings, although their arguments could also be extrapolated to deal with censorship issues.

- Conventional media have complex, bureaucratic organisational forms. The Internet has a mosaic form. Cunningham and Flew thus further explore the anarchic structure of the Internet, not only from a regulatory perspective, but from an organisational one.

- Conventional media have high barriers to entry. The Internet has no legal barriers, and technical and skill barriers are low. Cunningham and Flew thus cite the fact that conventional media are governed by laws that limit their ownership, operations and scope. No such regulation exists for publishing content online. The operation of conventional media production sources requires massive investments in capital, such as owning a publishing firm, or a broadcast network. Production and distribution costs for online content are comparatively low. Furthermore, the skill levels required to produce Internet-based content are low and are easily acquired.

- Conventional media and the Internet are similar in that they are both forms of delivering information and entertainment. Cunningham and Flew thus acknowledge that the Internet is a mature medium that can be used for similar functions to conventional media, and can thus be used in comparisons.
• Conventional media features a stable public identity of producers. The Internet, by contrast, features multiple identities of producers and consumers. This statement is a reference to the way that Internet users can be audiences and publishers simultaneously, or adopt either role in different situations.

• Conventional media delivers linear forms of content. The Internet delivers hypertextual forms of content. This is a clear reference to the hyperlinked nature of content on the World Wide Web, where clickable links to different Web pages allow related content on different pages to be accessed quickly by users.

• Conventional media have audiences, more than they have users. The Internet has users, not audiences. This is a reference not only to the aforementioned issue of any user being able to publish as well as receive, but the multiplicity of uses and applications that can be carried out on the Internet.

The points documented so far are well-constructed. However, one argument raised by Cunningham and Flew was relevant at the time of their research, but is no longer of relevance. This argument, and the reasons why it will not be incorporated into the theoretical framework, are now presented.

• Operations tensions between conventional media is mostly focused on commercial versus state ownership. Tensions within the Internet are mostly focused on commercial versus what Cunningham and Flew describe as a “strongly anti-commercial base”. This refers to a period of tension in Australia when operation of the Internet, which was instigated and mostly confined to academic (non-commercial) operations, gave way to the debut of commercial access providers.
A critical issue in Cunningham and Flew’s argument was the transfer of AARnet, Australia’s original non-commercial Internet backbone, to a commercial telecommunications operator in 1995. This was a source of suspicion at the time, as it was feared by some users that it would fundamentally affect the content and user dynamics of the Internet in Australia. However, these fears were quickly found to be unjustified. No content or usage restrictions were enacted, and both the amount of content available and the user base in Australia have exploded. Today, there is essentially no access to the Internet in Australia that does not involve the use at some point of a commercial access provider. Hence, debate on this issue is essentially over, both in the Internet user community and in the academic sphere.

2.2.2 Examining Interactivity

Interactivity, previously mentioned by Cunningham and Flew in section 2.2.1, has been deconstructed into discrete sub-categories by Carrie Heeter (1989). It should be noted that Heeter’s work pre-dates the arrival of the Internet as a mass medium. Her theoretical framework of interactivity is a generic one, designed to apply to various forms of computer-based communications. The Internet is consistent with this framework. The following dimensions of interactivity were proposed by Heeter as propositions, with no reference to actual case studies.

Dimension 1: Complexity of Choice Available

This argument suggests that interactivity is generated in the use of a medium when the audience or user base has a variety of content available simultaneously. The user must interact with the medium in order to select a particular choice of content or activity.

Dimension 2: Effort Users Must Exert
This argument suggests that interactivity can be measured in a medium by the effort a user must exert in using the medium. This includes the aforementioned selection of content, but this broad dimension also includes other forms of user interactivity such as sending content back.

**Dimension 3: Responsiveness of the User**

This argument suggests that interactivity can be measured by the sophistication of responses and content delivery supplied by the medium as it responds to its user. By this definition, a mere selection of a content channel is not very responsive, but a system that tailors its response to preconceived preferences of an individual user is quite sophisticated.

**Dimension 4: Monitoring Information Use**

This suggests that interactivity can be measured in a system by the ability to monitor the usage of that system and the information it contains. By this definition, a conventional radio broadcast is not interactive, as it is virtually impossible for the broadcaster to know who is listening. However, a media system that can register usage patterns and user profiles exactly would be very interactive.

**Dimension 5: Ease of Adding Information**

This defines interactivity as the degree to which users can also become publishers and contribute information to the medium itself. Conventional broadcast is not interactive under this definition. The Internet is clearly interactive under this definition.

**Dimension 6: Facilitation of Interpersonal Communication**

This refers to the ability of the medium to enable small-scale communication between two or a relatively small number of individual users.
2.2.3 Economic Factors

Cunningham and Flew refer to the Internet as a medium with low entry costs for publishers. However, as the propositions in Chapter 1 observed, the arrival of a cheap delivery system does not necessarily reduce the costs in generating content. Web site operators may wish to generate revenue from a Web site, or may require revenue in order to keep a site functioning. For this reason, it is appropriate to explore the economics of the Internet in greater detail.

A framework for addressing the economic aspects of Internet publishing has been outlined by Mings and White (2000) who propose a set of distinct models for revenue generation from a Web site. Their methodology is based on discussions with personnel involved in the development of Web sites.

Mings and White identify four models for revenue raising that have been proposed for Web-based news delivery. These models are:-

- The Subscription Model
- The Advertising Model
- The Transactional Model
- The Bundled Model

The Subscription Model

The simplest form of the Subscription Model would levy charges on readers of Web-based news for access to content, a similar system to the way that most newspapers gain some of their revenue.

More sophisticated variations of the Subscription Model are also proposed.
The "New Subscriber" model assumes that online versions of traditional print publications have the potential to attract new readers who would not read the conventional print product. The concept of the Internet as a youth-oriented medium, versus newspapers, which traditionally appeal to older readers, is cited.

This, in turn, leads to the "Maturation Model", whereby youthful readers attracted under the aforementioned "New Subscriber" model become paid subscribers to the conventional print version of a news publication as they grow older. In this case, the revenue gained from subscribers is actually not generated from the Web site. It is rationalised, though, that the costs of running the Web site can be justified by its potential for attracting print subscribers.

The final variation on the Subscription Model is the "Multiple Subscriber Model". This suggests that some information could be offered on a Web site for free, which charges could be introduced for specialised services that would enhance the content available to a reader, and would not be found in a print equivalent. The free content could serve as a "teaser" to persuade people to pay for further content.

The Advertising Model

Citing the heavy reliance on advertising revenue in conventional print-based journalism, Mings and White explore the potential for a similar revenue model for Web-based news.

Advertising could be as generic as it is in conventional print, with banner advertising and similar messages incorporated onto Web pages. However, the interactive potential of the Web could allow advertising to be targeted at specific demographic groups with user profiling, an advantage that is matched by no other medium.

Mings and White draw particular attention to classified advertising. Traditionally a critical source of revenue for newspapers, classified advertising revenue from Web sites could be
siphoned by new companies that have no connection to news publishers. Traditional publishers can place their classified advertisements on their Web sites, but their previous domination of the classified advertising market could be diminished.

The Transactional Model

This model is more of a radical departure from traditional revenue models than the aforementioned models. It suggests the creation of an environment inside a Web site where consumers and vendors can interact for the purposes of promoting products and transacting actual sales through the site.

The paper cites consumer concerns over the security of such transactions, taxation and commercial technicalities, and the division of revenue between the vendor and the Web site mediating the transaction.

The Bundled Model

A very generic model, the Bundled Model refers to any form of revenue raising that involves supplying Web-based content as part of a bundled package with other services, such as other forms of information or an actual online service. Examples of Bundled Models include the supply of online content to subscribers to a particular online service provider (with revenue supplied to the content provider from the service provider), or in an almost direct inversion of this concept, the supply of Internet access by companies producing a particular form of online content. The research paper also notes that other revenue models can be combined as bundles. Advertising, content, or revenue could be shared between partners in a venture.
2.3 Interpersonal Communications and Agenda-Setting

It is interesting to note that no theory of agenda-setting that relates specifically to Internet-based news discussions has ever been formulated. The theoretical framework for research relating to these topics must draw upon writings published before the arrival of the Internet as a mass medium.

2.3.1 Interpersonal Communications

A theory of interpersonal communications developed with no reference to the Internet will be used to inform research in this thesis.

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1994) explored the tensions between the creation of personal opinions on public topics and the inclination to express opinions that may be perceived as unpopular within a public environment. Social pressures and the desire to integrate with the rest of society could prompt a person holding opinions that he or she may consider unpopular to avoid communicating these personal opinions to other people.

Continued reluctance to suppress the discussion of views that are perceived as potentially unpopular, coupled with the identification of views that are acceptable in general society, gradually leads to a dominance of a particular set of opinions and values in public discussions. The mechanism of trial and feedback that results in a mapping of responses to certain views and a reaction in the form of the views that are circulated is characterised as a "spiral", which in this case is a metaphor for a traditional feedback system that gradually moves to a stable equilibrium.

Noelle-Neumann claims that due to this "spiral of silence" feedback mechanism, "public opinion is the opinion which can be voiced in public without fear of sanctions and upon which action in public can be based". She suggests that people expressing opinions that are not consistent with the prevailing norms risk isolation.
Noelle-Neumann justifies her theory with the use of experimental data. She implemented a survey of more than 1000 people to test 12 themes which are consistent with news agendas, such as attitudes to abortion and political activities. The survey revealed that the willingness of people to discuss controversial topics in public forums was related to demographic variables. Males, young people, and middle and upper income earners were found to be more willing to speak out.

A second study of willingness to discuss a specific controversial issue showed that although the majority of people felt opposed to the subject (socialism in Germany), they were less willing to express this view than people who supported the rise of socialism. Noelle-Neumann rationalises this result by claiming that public evidence suggested that socialism in Germany was likely to increase, based on historical trends, which may have prompted those who opposed it to remain silent.

The result of this experiment is informative, as it shows that public discussions did not necessarily reflect public opinion. It also revealed a strong tendency by people to suppress discussion of their views.

The "Spiral of Silence" model is relevant to considerations of agenda-setting, because it proposes that public agendas can be influenced by factors that are outside of media influence (social pressures and interactions) and also suggests that even when personal agendas are formulated, they may not be expressed openly. This could make these agendas difficult to detect in some circumstances.
2.3.2 Agenda-Setting

The writings of Warwick Blood and Harold Zucker serve as the principal source of theory and methodology for agenda-setting studies in this thesis. David Sless also raises concerns about agenda-setting theory that are worthy of consideration.

Owing to its prominence within media research, it is appropriate to document the evolution of the paradigm of agenda-setting.

Agenda-setting is a relatively recent area of academic research, tracing its origins to the early nineteen seventies. A research paper by McCombs and Shaw (1972) is regarded as the instigator of the paradigm, as it actually proposed the term "agenda-setting" to describe the process of media influence on issue salience with the general public. McCombs and Shaw studied 100 voters during the 1968 US Presidential election who had not decided on their electoral preferences prior to the election campaign. The study found a high correlation between issues raised by the US media and the perceptions of the most important issues affecting society raised by the voters. In one case, a correlation of 0.96 was found for major items raised by the voters and the content of the New York Times.

McCombs and Shaw’s paper made a number of valuable contributions to the development of agenda-setting. It introduced the term for the phenomenon, outlined the framework of the paradigm and introduced a methodology for agenda-setting research. But their research seems to suffer from methodological flaws. The discovery of a correlation of 0.96 for a sociological issue is suspiciously high, and more closely resembles data from an experiment in the physical sciences. Later agenda-setting research would fail to discover such high degrees of correlation. It is theorised that respondents were simply repeating what was being mentioned on news reports of the election campaign, which the researchers falsely assumed were agendas that had been personally inculcated by the subjects.
At approximately the same time that McCombs and Shaw presented their own research, Funkhouser (1973) presented a similar study of issues raised by the media and public perceptions of important issues. His data on public perceptions was derived from a Gallup poll of the American public. Funkhouser's research did not generate the suspiciously high correlation of the McCombs and Shaw study, but its methodology seems less prone to obvious flaws.

Agenda-setting research gained popularity with the academic community because of the significance of the subject it addressed, and because it offered an alternative to a previously discredited paradigm. A simplistic media effects model, which simply treated the public as powerless in the face of media issues, was losing popularity as memories of the totalitarian regimes of Stalin and Hitler faded. People could not be filled with propaganda like bullets from a machine gun. Agenda-setting qualified this approach by claiming that the media could not directly control the opinion of people about specific issues, but could merely cause people to regard specific issues as important.

Much of agenda-setting research in the meantime has focused on variations of the methodologies first introduced by McCombs and Shaw in their original study. Funkhouser's methodology is very similar. Dearing and Rogers (1996:10) note that between 1972 and 1994, around 357 publications on agenda-setting appeared in academic journals. For logistical reasons, it is judged unnecessary to cite them.

2.3.2.1 Blood's Criteria

Research in agenda-setting is carried out using a variety of theoretical frameworks and methodologies. Blood (1982) observes that agenda-setting research is mostly conducted using variations of four principal methodologies. He classifies these as follows.

Type 1: Using content analysis, issues are ranked in order of prominence and matched with aggregate survey data ranking the importance of the same issues.
Type 2: Attempts to roughly match individual agendas with a set of issues emphasised by the media. The average of these comparisons determines the degree of agenda-setting.

Type 3: Media emphasis of a single issue, measured over time, is matched with aggregate audience data for that issue.

Type 4: A refinement of Type 3 research, this examines differences among individuals, such as their exposure to media sources and personal experiences with a given issue, at the same time exploring the coverage of an issue in the media.

2.3.2.2 Variable Influence

Agenda-setting research varies in the number of variables it addresses within its experiments and the construction of theoretical models. One critical variable that is not differentiated in some studies is the specific characteristics of individual news stories. Zucker (1978) attempted to document the relationship between the media coverage of certain issues and its influence on public opinion by comparing media coverage (television news) to polling (Gallup polls). The Gallup poll asked people to nominate the most important issue facing the USA.

Zucker claims that media coverage does influence public opinion, and that studies that suggest otherwise suffer from faulty methodologies. The distinction in Zucker’s conclusions lies in the claim that such influence is highly variable, and is based on the specific characteristics of the story or issue.

Zucker assigns two variables for differentiating individual news stories.

1) Obtrusiveness: The less direct experience people have with a given issue, the more they will rely on the media for information and interpretation on that issue. (This is stated as a proposition, not a proven statement.)
2) Duration: After an issue has been covered in the media for a few years, most people have made up their minds about the issue and are no longer susceptible to media influence. (This is another proposition.) Also, Zucker claims that people have limited attention spans to non-obtrusive issues. Zucker proposes that after 3 to 4 years, an issue such as pollution loses its appeal, even though the issue existed before and after a given period of coverage.

In a method similar to Type 3 agenda-setting research as outlined previously in this chapter by Blood (1982), a number of single issues were examined in Zucker's poll-driven research.

Six issues were chosen. The following were considered non-obtrusive: pollution, drug abuse, energy crisis. The cost of living, unemployment and crime were considered to be obtrusive.

For pollution and drug abuse, it was expected that a high level of media reporting would initially yield a high public opinion response, but that this level of response would fall as the issue became overexposed. This was found to be true in the experimental data.

The energy crisis was an obtrusive issue for a short period during petrol shortages, and data from the survey reflected this pattern. There was little correlation between media coverage and public opinion, as people could see the problem for themselves. The data settled into a non-obtrusive pattern when the issue no longer became obtrusive. Hence, Zucker concludes that media coverage influenced opinion. Data for the three obtrusive issues mentioned was inconclusive, owing to differing patterns in local media coverage for these issues.

2.3.2.3 Limitations

A significant limitation on the broad theoretical model that informs most agenda-setting research has been identified by David Sless (1986:22). Sless postulates that the model is too asymmetric and one-way in its assumptions about the balance of power and the application of power between the media and audiences. Quoting from Sless directly, "...the relationship
between media and the public is treated as if it were the relation between a committee and its members; i.e., the media have an executive function of constructing the agenda, and the public, as members of the committee, abide by the executive decision and proceed to debate the issues on the given agenda. If the agenda is changed by the executive (media) then the members (public) debate the new agenda". Sless believes that this model is inappropriate.

Sless's objections will serve as the principal source of criticism of the agenda-setting paradigm from previously published literature in this thesis. However, Sless is not the only critic of the paradigm. Burd (1991) remarks that research in agenda setting traditionally relies on "a linear, one-dimensional assembly-line model for the production and manufacture of public opinion and policy".

The assumptions criticised by Sless and Burd can be found, both explicitly and implicitly, in the original research of McCombs and Shaw and Funkhouser. It is likely that this has had a significant influence on subsequent research. However, it is also possible that this linear model of agenda-setting has been influenced by Lasswell (1948) and his early model for communication research. Lasswell deconstructed the communications process into a series of consecutive issues, beginning with the origins of a message by a specific sender, followed by the transmission of this message through certain channels, and ending with the reception of the message and its interpretation. This basic framework has informed much subsequent communications research, and it has parallels with the agenda-setting paradigm.

2.4 Next Steps

This previously published material serves as a basis for developing more precise theoretical models that will be used in research for this thesis. The next chapter will continue this process by evaluating the relevance of these theories to this thesis, and supplementing them with additional material.
The theoretical framework that will be used in this thesis is hence a combination of aspects of previously published theories that are considered to be sound, the mapping of these previously published theories onto the specific issues investigated in this thesis, and original theories that have been created to address deficiencies in the previously published literature.
Chapter Three
Applying the Theory

The previous chapter introduced several previously published theories relating to the topic of this thesis. These theories will now be applied to the development of models that will be used in my research. Some aspects of the original theories will be refined, or even rejected. In some cases, new theories will be constructed to deal with areas that have not been addressed by previously published literature.

3.1 Delivery Predictions for Internet-Based Journalism

Cunningham and Flew’s model is applicable to almost any form of content that could be placed on the Internet. Hence, it is appropriate to refine this model to present its specific implications for news and journalism. This is achieved by synthesising the model of Cunningham and Flew with the model of conventional journalism outlined by Tuchman. These predictions are also generated by considering previously documented advantages of the Internet (outlined in Chapter 1), and the general features and limitations of news and journalism as it is delivered in conventional media.

Real-Time Publishing

A Web site covering news can update its contents as instantly, and as frequently, as a live broadcast medium such as radio and television. The ability for news producers to reach consumers rapidly is thus highly significant.

This predicted effect is derived from inspection of the Internet itself, as documented in Chapter 1, and a comparison of the potential application of this application with usage patterns in conventional broadcast media.
Asynchronous Delivery

A Web site can be accessed at any time the user chooses to do so. This is highly different from broadcast delivery, where a consumer must be listening or viewing at the time of a specific broadcast. Thus, the Web offers both the potential immediacy of broadcast with the asychronicity of print.

Again, this predicted effect is derived from inspection of the Internet, and a comparison of the potential application of this application with usage patterns in conventional print media and conventional broadcast media.

Multimedia Content

No other news medium has allowed text, audio, video and graphics to be combined in the same product. The potential for an enriched experience for the consumer is significant.

This prediction is also derived from inspection of the generic properties of the Internet, and an awareness of the lack of a similar level of flexibility in the ability to combine different modes of communication in conventional media. The only other system that allows this form of communication is a multimedia program supplied on a digital medium (usually a laser disc such as a CD-ROM), but this is unsuitable for news as it is not easy to update.

Large Quantities of Content

Print media are constrained in the amount of material they can present by the physical size of the publication. David White's study of a newspaper editor as a "gatekeeper" (White 1950) revealed that, in addition to editorial judgements of news values, lack of space in the newspaper was a major reason why stories that were available for publication were not placed in the newspaper. Broadcast media are constrained by the amount of time they allocate to news or a specific news item. Content on a Web site is also constrained by server space and download times for the user, but these limitations are trivial when compared to non-Internet media. Web-
based news productions should, in theory, have the potential to supply more material than any other medium for news. This could be in the form of more stories or more detailed coverage. Again, this prediction is drawn from inspection of the Internet and an awareness of the content supply limitations of conventional media.

Archives

The lack of constraints of server space means that extensive archives of previous news stories could be stored on a Web site.

This prediction is drawn from the traditional use of archives for conventional media, such as libraries, and general inspection of the Internet.

Geographical Scope

Content on the World Wide Web is normally, as its name implies, accessible from any place in the world with appropriate connectivity. This allows Web-based news publications to reach an audience that is potentially unconstrained by geography. Publications that focus their non-Internet content on certain geographic regions, such as a city, could find their Web sites appeal to people in other regions or countries. Local media that formerly dominated a specific geographic region could lose this dominance online, where their audience can easily access news from other regions.

This prediction is drawn from the traditional use of archives for conventional media, such as libraries, and general inspection of the Internet.

Specialised News

The ease of publishing online content, coupled with the potential for a worldwide audience, make the Web ideal for niche publishing. This principle can also be applied to news delivery,
where content of limited appeal to people in general can still find enough readers to make its publication worthwhile.

**Self-publishing and Opinion Diversity**

The potential for self-publishing has several potential impacts on the news delivery process. It allows people to publish their own news and reporting without the need for vast amounts of infrastructure or capital. Certain media paradigms suggest that institutional or political pressures within mainstream news organisations prevent the flow of some news to the general public. Alternatively, operational constraints may mean that there is simply insufficient space for delivering as much news as an organisation could potentially supply through conventional media. Theories relating to this model are generally grouped under the collective title of "gatekeeper" theories.

Independent and alternative publishing on the Web could, in theory, offer a means of publishing news that is allegedly suppressed elsewhere. It could also lead some people who are not professional journalists to publish newsworthy information or personal impressions of news events. The consumer becomes a producer at the same time. A dedicated amateur journalist could, in theory, acquire a good reputation and a loyal following of readers on the Web.

**Interactivity**

The Web allows users to communicate with content providers and each other in a way that is not possible with other media used for news delivery. This can be used to enhance the experience of evaluating news stories, or lead to new forms of journalism where interactivity is a central part of content generation. This could lead to the evolution of a new form of decentralised journalism, where a story is best communicated through a reader amalgamating content from several independent, and potentially interacting, sources.

In the previous chapter, Heeter's six dimensions of interactivity were presented as a previously published model for outlining interactivity on the Internet. I consider the arguments raised by
Heeter's Dimensions 1 and 4 to be spurious. Interactivity, as I perceive it, must involve some form of ostensible feedback and input by a user.

Dimension 1 refers to a mere selection of content. Under this definition, any form of communication is interactive. A reader can choose to read most of a newspaper, choose to read only the headlines, or choose to read nothing at all. This pattern of usage is consistent with Dimension 1, yet conventional newspapers are not generally characterised as interactive.

Dimension 4 refers to the monitoring of usage patterns. To a certain degree, this is feasible with any medium, as the proliferation of audience ratings organisations has demonstrated. It does not imply any deliberate feedback by the user of opinions or content. In most cases, such monitoring does nothing to influence the supply of content to the user, or other users. Therefore, this is not a content-related issue and not a form of interactive content supply.

Nevertheless, Dimensions 2, 3, 5 and 6 proposed by Heeter provide a useful framework for evaluating and classifying interactivity on the Internet.

Journalism on the Internet will be evaluated for its compliance with the model outlined above. This will provide a framework for answering some aspects of research question R1.

3.2 Economic Factors

The model of different revenue streams outlined by Mings and White, presented in Chapter 2, represents a useful framework for evaluating economic models on Web sites. It will be used to interpret research in support of research question R1.
3.3 Implications for Newsworthiness

Galtung and Ruge identified spatial and temporal constraints as important criteria influencing newsworthiness, as presented in Chapter 2. The refined model of journalistic delivery on the Internet presented in section 3.1 identifies the fact that Web-based publishing can radically transform both of these variables. Content can be updated rapidly or slowly. It can be targeted at a local audience or the world. Hence, it is appropriate to consider how changes in these variables could influence news values on the Web. This factor will influence research conducted in this thesis for research question R2.

3.4 Integration of Web Sites with Traditional Media: Minimal Impact

The writings of Tuchman (1978) neatly document the internal mechanics of operating a traditional media publication, such as a newspaper. However, Tuchman was in no position to discuss any potential models for the internal operations of a Web site.

Conversely, the theoretical framework derived from modifications of the Cunningham and Flew model outlines the potential advantages of operating a Web site, but does not address the internal mechanics or operations of such a project.

In many cases, news-based Web sites are produced by news organisations that generate news in conventional media. This suggests that the development of these Web sites could be influenced by the existing operational characteristics of these conventional media companies.

In the absence of any previously published theory addressing the internal dynamics of operating a news-related Web site, a new “Minimal Impact” model is hereby proposed.
This model is derived from a consideration of the institutional structure of non-Internet news production outlined by Tuchman, with consideration of the features of Internet-based news derived from the Cunningham and Flew model.

The "Minimal Impact" model assumes that a conventional media company will experience effects on its internal dynamics through the introduction of a Web site. The work practices of some personnel and organisational structures will need to accommodate the production requirements that have been added.

Hence, change is inevitable, but to a certain degree, it can be undesirable. It can increase the workload placed on specific individuals, or upset organisational hierarchies which are precisely structured to cope and address situations within a conventional production routine.

Hence, it is proposed that, based on a consideration of the entrenched nature of institutional structures and regular production routines, any internal operations of a Web site by a conventional news producer will be done according to a "minimal impact" model.

The model assumes that Web sites are operated in such a way that production routines and organisational hierarchies for the conventional media product are subjected to minimal change and disruption.

This could involve the selection of content, and the adoption of production routines, that are similar to those of the conventional publication. The easiest way to do this would be to simply use selections of the same material prepared for a conventional publication on the Web site. The re-use of material prepared primarily for use in a conventional media product is known as "legacy" content.

If special content is added, it could be obtained from outside organisations, or staff hired specially to generate special content. In this way, existing production routines are not changed.
Documentation of the internal operations of Web sites will be evaluated for its compliance with the Minimal Impact model. This will appear in research for question R1.

3.5 Motivation of Publishers

Although the model of Cunningham and Flew has addressed the specific advantages of the Internet as a delivery system for media content, there have been no previous theoretical models that address the factors that would actually motivate individuals or groups to publish content on the Internet.

In some cases, motivational factors could be drawn from a wish to utilise the advantages outlined in section 3.1 in this chapter. A media organisation could publish content on the Internet because it believes that it is cheap to do so, or because it wishes to produce a more enriching experience for its audience. However, there is no reason to believe that motivational factors should be limited to considerations of these technical advantages. It is also possible that these advantages could actually be irrelevant to the motivations of some content producers.

Previous experience obtained in working as a journalist who studied the Internet exposed me to dozens of people who were creating projects that involved the use of the Internet. These rarely involved any form of journalism. Based on my aggregated experience in watching the Internet evolve in Australia, I have derived the following motivational factors that are independent of the previously outlined technical advantages of the Internet.

**Experimentation:** The legacy content provider may simply be experimenting with the Web as a new medium, in order to understand its operation and potential.

**Trend:** The legacy content provider may create a Web site simply because other content providers have done this. It may be a case of simply copying an industry trend.
**Fear:** Aggressive advertising campaigns for Internet services frequently suggest that a person, or a company, is missing out on opportunities if they fail to use it. Some legacy content providers may create Web sites due to the fear of negative consequences if they do not. These providers may or may not have a preconception of what those consequences could be, but it is reasonable to expect that such fears would include a potential loss of readers and revenue.

**Commercial:** The Web site may be perceived as a means of revenue generation, or the protection of existing revenue sources.

**New Product:** The Web site may be perceived as an entirely new media product that can deliver unique content, or deliver legacy content in a different way. It may also be targeted at people who do not consume the legacy product, or are not expected to be converted to the legacy product.

**Augmentation:** The Web site may be seen as an augmentation of the legacy product, with users expected to consume both. The legacy product will be augmented through the supply of legacy content, and a few additional services, on the site.

**Prestige:** The Web site may be perceived as a source of prestige for the legacy product and the organisation behind it.

**Self-Fulfilment:** The use of the Internet is frequently done for purely recreational purposes. It may be possible that some content providers actively enjoy and gain personal satisfaction from the creation and operation of their Web sites.

These observations will serve as a set of criteria for evaluating the motivations of Web-based news producers in question R3.
3.6 Motivation of Audiences: Fast Food Model

The reasons why audiences consume media products in general is the subject of academic research dealing with uses and gratification.

Denis McQuail observes that this rather broad area of research has proposed motivations for audiences such as “reducing personal insecurity”, “feeling connected with others”, “filling time” and “gaining entry into an imaginary world” (McQuail 1994: 320).

However, this research does not deal specifically with news, or news based on the Internet. Uses and gratification research is not relevant to this thesis, as my research is focused on identifying the specific motivations for consuming news on the Internet as opposed to other media. Hence, even theories addressing the question of why people consume news in any medium would not be relevant.

This lack of previously published theory means that it is necessary to develop a new theoretical model.

The potential motivations of the creators of Web sites are not directly applicable to the motivations of audiences. In the case of audiences, it could be argued that the technical advantages of the Internet could be more significant. Audiences would be motivated to read news on the Internet because it offered these specific advantages.

In practice, this concept depends on the actual supply of material that fulfils the potential advantages offered by the Internet. If these advantages are not adequately addressed by content producers, then online news readers could be motivated by other factors.

This thesis will explore the concept that Internet users could be motivated by factors that account for the broader context of Internet usage, namely the ease of accessing Internet-connected computers in colleges and offices. The ease of accessing the Internet in these
environments could lead to convenience of access becoming as important as the type of material that is presented. The potential emphasis on easy access is similar to purchasing fast food. This metaphor could be used as the basis for a new model of Internet usage.

3.7 Agenda-Setting Research

3.7.1 Categories of Research

Blood outlined a compact set of criteria that encompasses the types of agenda-setting studies carried out to date. His criteria, presented in Chapter 2, will serve as a useful basis for making comparisons between previous research and research in agenda-setting carried out for this thesis. If my research does not fit into any of the categories outlined by Blood, it could be accurate to say that a new methodology for agenda-setting research has been enabled by the Internet.

3.7.2 Passive Methodology: Removing the Spiral of Silence

One factor common to agenda-setting research is the heavy dependence on active polling and interviews with members of the general public. This common methodology has been used primarily because at the time most agenda-setting research was conducted, it was the only method of producing an acceptable profile of agendas held by the general public. I believe that this is no longer the case.

The agenda-setting research conducted in this thesis will employ passive monitoring of existing forms of communication on the Internet. This is a technique that has apparently not been employed in any previous research. There is no theoretical framework in the existing literature that specifically proposes any effects of this form of study. However, it is proposed that the fact that people posting to these forums are not ostensibly taking part in an academic exercise could lead to a greater sincerity of opinion. An anonymous polling system could remove people from
the influence of perceptions of societal norms documented by Noelle-Neumann’s “Spiral of Silence” theory, presented in Chapter 2. Noelle-Neumann made a solid case for suggesting that fear of discrimination influenced the opinions that people are prepared to express in public. This model was grounded on the assumption that people would be identifiable as they expressed their opinions. This would not apply in an anonymous context.

3.7.3 New Model of Variable Influence: Experience, Ethics and Locality

Zucker observed that news stories could vary in their influence on audiences according to their characteristics, as documented in Chapter 2. However, the specific mechanics of variable influence proposed by Zucker have not been extensively evaluated. There has been little study in this area, and the exact categories and models of influence proposed by Zucker lack a precise theoretical grounding in the first place.

This lack of justification for Zucker’s own criteria of variable influence has prompted me to derive my own set of criteria. This is known as the “Experience and Ethics” model. It assumes two basic criteria for evaluating the importance of a given story in personal agendas. An issue that scores in one of these criteria is likely to be higher in a person’s agenda than one that does not score under either criteria. Issues that score under both criteria are likely to be very prominent in personal agendas.

The experience and ethics model is derived from considerations of how an issue would affect a person in his or her life. In this model, an issue that people may directly experience is expected to rank highly in personal agendas. This is due to the fact that such issues could influence the lives of people, and hence people will feel motivated to learn about them. This contrasts with Zucker’s proposition that the more experience people have with an issue, the less they will rely on the media for information about that issue.

Issues that people may not experience directly could still be considered important if they relate to a person’s ethics and personal values. This may include perceptions of justice, morals, social
norms, political views or religious beliefs. In some ways, these beliefs constitute a set of personal agendas that can be mapped onto various newsworthy events. Views on such matters are often cherished strongly by individuals. In fact, our legal, educational and religious institutions are largely concerned with disseminating or enforcing such codes.

Research in agenda-setting conducted in this thesis will attempt to map the concept of variable influence of issues, and the "Experience and Ethics" model, with a study that will measure the appeal of certain topics in online opinion polls. As opinion polls that generate precise numerical data are involved, this study will be quantitative in its research, but qualitative in its conclusions.

3.7.3.1 Locality as an Influence

In addition to the aforementioned principles of Experience and Ethics as factors affecting the influence of news stories, I believe that locality is also a significant factor. Galtung and Ruge have identified geographic proximity as a factor in newsworthiness. It is proposed that locality will also motivate personal agendas for similar reasons. An event that happens in Australia is likely to be considered relevant to personal agendas because people living in this country generally feel that they are involved in its image and activities. This is a product of factors such as nationhood and identity arguments where people in any nation generally feel a sense of identity with that nation, which in turn relates to feelings of wishing to see the nation operate in a prosperous and fair manner. Thus, there is a personal connection to anything affecting the nation. This argument has parallels to the Experience and Ethics model.

3.7.4 Agenda Resonance Theory

Sless criticised the traditional agenda-setting model for ascribing too much power to the media, and too little power to audiences. He suggested that the public do not simply follow the agendas
set out by the media like inferior members of an organisational hierarchy. People are able to
generate their own views, according to Sless.

One of the most significant aspects of the Internet, as previously documented, is that users in
general are empowered to publish their own material and discuss issues on chat forums. It could
be suggested, as Sless argues, that the general public is more empowered than agenda-setting
research traditionally assumes without the Internet. Users of the Internet should, according to
the theoretical framework derived from Cunningham and Flew, achieve an even greater level of
empowerment.

This thesis hereby proposes an alternative "Agenda Resonance Theory" of agenda-setting that
addresses the potential for a greater level of empowerment of the general public in Internet-
based discussion forums. The model is as follows. It is proposed that Internet-based discussion
forums will generate their own agendas of issues that are worthy of discussion. The generation
of these agendas will be a result of the personal agendas of participants in the forum and the
actions of the "spiral of silence" model, which will cause some agendas, and possibly some
participants, to disappear from discussions.

The media, in parallel, will generate its own set of agendas through the coverage of certain
stories and issues. Agenda resonance between media issues and issues on an Internet discussion
forum will appear when an issue that is common to the agendas of both streams appears in the
media. This will result in an escalation of discussion of this particular issue in Internet
discussion forums.

Agenda resonance theory can also be used to describe the relationship between individuals,
who may develop their own set of personal agendas, and their interaction with the media.

Agenda resonance theory will inform the interpretation of data obtained from agenda-setting
research conducted for this thesis. It should also be noted that agenda resonance theory is
compatible, and integral, to the development of the "Experience and Ethics" model outlined
above. In the case of Ethics, a set of preconceived agendas is already held with regard to personal ethical views. A news story can become important to a person if it resonates with these agendas.

3.7.4.1 Agenda Resonance and Cultivation Theory

The development of Agenda Resonance theory in this thesis is presented as a new and independently derived idea. However, it is appropriate to outline distinctions between Agenda Resonance and certain aspects of Cultivation Theory, another area of academic research, which deals with the influence of the media on public perceptions. This distinction is made to establish the case for Agenda Resonance as a separate theory, and to clarify its scope.

Cultivation Theory is an area of media research commonly associated with a team of researchers headed by Gerbner (1980). This research explored the influence of television viewing on the development of attitudes to violence and crime among viewers. Gerbner claims that television, which promotes a frightening view of the world through its frequent depictions of violence in programming, "cultivates" fear of violence and crime among viewers. Gerbner presents research data that suggests a connection between the level of television viewing and fear of violence.

Two factors influence the overall state of "cultivation" of attitudes by television. One is "mainstreaming", which suggests that heavy viewers of television will gradually shift their perceptions of the world to a standard determined by the level of violence on television. This view is considered "mainstream" because it is "cultivated" by the view presented by television, and is common to other heavy viewers, all of whom are receiving essentially the same aggregated message through heavy exposure to television. Another factor is "resonance", whereby the influence of television in promoting a specific view of the world is considered to be stronger if the message conveyed by television is consonant with what a viewer experiences outside of television viewing. Depending on circumstances, the effects of "mainstreaming" or
"resonance" can cause a person’s views on their chance of being a victim of crime to be greater or less than it should be, in light of actual statistical data for their socioeconomic situation.

The definition of “resonance” in Gerbner’s theory is significantly different from “Agenda Resonance” in this thesis. It is appropriate to examine differences on specific angles. Agenda Resonance is focused on the interplay of news stories with public agendas. Cultivation Theory, incorporating the notion of resonance, is concerned with the effects of the media in general (including drama) on perceptions of violence. Agenda Resonance is an effects paradigm in its own right, not a factor within a paradigm (Cultivation Theory). Agenda Resonance assumes that the media do not influence public perceptions, and that the resonance observed in this theory is the interplay of two independent agenda sets, one held by the media, the other by the public. Resonance in Cultivation Theory is part of a paradigm that ascribes a strong level of influence by the media on personal perceptions and agendas, and resonance in this paradigm is a form of “amplified cultivation” (Gerbner 1980: 11).

A strong criticism of Cultivation Theory, including resonance and mainstreaming, has been provided by Hirsh (1981). Hirsh essentially brands Cultivation Theory and its associated elements as unscientific, failing on counts of “logical adequacy” and “empirical support” (Hirsch: 3). Hirsh argues that Gerbner’s “assertions about cultivation effects are so inclusive that any response to survey items can be argued to support one or another version of the hypothesis” (Hirsch: 3). This refers to the principles of mainstreaming and resonance, which are used to explain deviations in perceptions of crime from expected perceptions. The fact that either principle can be invoked to explain any observation makes the theory untestable.

By contrast, Agenda Resonance, when coupled with the principles of variable influence developed for this thesis (Experience, Ethics, Locality) leads to the development of methodologies that allow the theory to be tested and falsified.
3.8 Conclusion

A theoretical framework suitable for addressing the specific research questions investigated by this thesis has now been outlined. The creation of this framework informs the design of research methodologies, the processing of data and the conclusions that are drawn.

The next chapter will use this framework, together with the research questions, as a basis for developing methodologies for research.
Chapter Four

Methodologies for the Thesis

4.1 Addressing the Research Questions

The thesis employs a variety of methodologies to collect and evaluate data. Certain methodologies are used to answer a single research question. Others will supply data for more than one question. In turn, each of the research questions will draw upon data from more than one discrete methodology. The principal research questions for this thesis are re-stated below, with additional comments relating to theory that will be used to address them.

R1: To what extent has the Internet transformed the established model of news delivery?

This question draws on the investigative lines and theories outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, in sections relating to the mechanics of news production in conventional media and on the Internet. The theoretical framework thus seeks to identify new developments in news delivery on the Internet.

These developments include innovations in Internet news products created by traditional news organisations and personal reporting of an amateur format. It examines potential new developments such as the supply of new content, new production models and new dynamics between journalists and their readers. It also explores the potential of online news to be economically sustainable and legally permissible.

R2: Is the style of Internet journalism any different from the established model?
This question will explore differences between journalistic content presented on the Internet and journalism in traditional media. The principal issue contributing to this research question is newsworthiness. In Chapter 2, it was documented that existing theories of newsworthiness suggest that news values are partially related to the temporal and spatial constraints of the delivery system. It will be appropriate to see if the unusual temporal and spatial parameters of the Internet has an effect on news values.

R3: How do publisher and audience perceptions compare on the Internet?

The potential advantages of Internet-based publishing outlined in the mechanics of news delivery in Chapter 3 will serve as a source of theory for this question. The motivations of both publishers and audiences of Internet-based news will be explored for its relationship to this theory, and motivations that are not accounted for by this theory.

Audience motivations in accessing the media have been previously understood through studies of uses and gratification, but these investigations have generally been focused on the media in general, and not specifically at news. Even in the case of news-based investigations, there has been no real comparative study of why people would feel motivated to select one medium over another.

This question, and the thesis in general, do not seek to explore general issues of media uses and gratification, or even news gratification. Motivations for online users are focused on discovering any specific advantages of the Internet itself as a delivery system, or advantages in the content that it carries.

R4: To what extent will the Internet contribute to general research into the area of agenda-setting?

Agenda-setting research is such a broad area that one could easily draw on any number of theories or models. The investigation of question R4 will draw upon theories relating to agenda-
setting raised in Chapters 2 and 3. Investigations are influenced by the potential effects of the proposed “Spiral of Silence” model, the variability of influence of specific stories, the generation of independent agendas on these discussion forums, and the potential for agenda resonance effects with the general media. Results from all agenda-setting studies are examined to see if any overall trends emerge in the broader issue of measuring general media effects or the display of agendas. This is done to see if the dynamics of Internet communications offers a credible alternative to the somewhat artificial survey methodologies employed by most prior agenda-setting research.

4.2 Methodologies

A series of methodologies is used to investigate the questions raised above within the theoretical frameworks outlined. The influence of theoretical issues mostly appears during the processing and the assessment of the data obtained, although theoretical concerns have frequently informed the selection of certain questions that are posed in surveys and interviews.

Methodology 1: Web Site Inspection

This methodology informs research questions R1, R2 and R3, but does not supply all of the data for these questions. Put simply, this methodology seeks to discover Web sites concerned with news and journalism and examine their contents.

Web sites were selected and discovered through the use of search engines, the inspection of previously compiled indexes, and the inspection of non-Internet media for mention of Web sites relating to specific publications.

The use of multiple indexes and references is a highly redundant strategy that should ensure a high level of reliability in the discovery of appropriate Web sites.
The research generated a large number of sites that can be referenced. For this reason, a stylised method of compiling and presenting data on these sites must be used. Each site was downloaded and stored for examination. Next, each site was examined and then catalogued on a spreadsheet according to a set of pre-defined criteria. The criteria used are as follows:-

**Size of parent publication**: This is classified as small, medium or large, relative to other media.

**Ownership structure**: This is described as part of a large, medium or small conglomerate, or independent.

**Nature of Legacy Tie**: This is a reference to the medium used by the legacy owner, print, TV or otherwise.

**Style of Layout**: This is a judgement on the overall design and layout of the contents. Each site is ranked on a Likert scale for three criteria influencing its style. An overall aggregated score serves as a means of providing a semi-qualitative ranking of the quality of the layout and design of the site.

**Amount of Content**: This is described as small, medium or large, relating to the relative volume of content supplied on the site.

**Frequency of Updates**: This refers to the frequency of adding or revising content. Categories include hourly, daily, weekly and monthly.

**Images**: The use of imagery on the site is classified according to volume.

**Archives**: The inclusion of an archive of previously published material is mentioned if it exists.
Multimedia: This refers to the use of audio, video or interactive graphics delivered by multimedia applications or executable code such as Java applets.

Feedback: This refers to the inclusion of email addresses or Web-based forms to allow readers to send feedback to the site.

Chat: This refers to any form of online chat that allows readers to publish their own content and interact with special guests or each other.

Specialised Content: This refers to content that has been prepared specially for the Web site and appears nowhere else.

Revenue Model: This refers to any strategy designed to generate revenue from the site. Strategies could include advertising, subscriptions, and transactional services.

A spreadsheet allowed the analysis of this data for comparisons and serve as a basis for publishing and tabulating the results. Overall statistical preferences for certain options in each criterion are presented.

The Web site inspection also analysed personal home pages for examples of amateur reporting. It was necessary to examine some sites on several occasions, to study updating routines.

Methodology 2: Site Update Racing

This is an intensive form of research that informs research into question R1. It involved monitoring the addition of content to certain Web sites in real time. This was done for the purpose of measuring the speed of updates. This is performed by loading news sites onto Web browsers and constantly refreshing their content during periods when a major news story was breaking. The times when reports of a given story appear on specific sites, along with the nature
of these stories, was closely documented. Short, narrative timelines for the propagation of a given story across various sites on the Internet were then produced. This research was somewhat spontaneous, and relied on opportunities when I found myself online at a period when an appropriate story was breaking.

Methodology 3: Interviews With Web Site Operators

Based on the data from Methodology 1, interviews were conducted with representatives from various news-related Web sites on a variety of issues relating to these research questions. The questions posed in the interviews addressed issues such as motivations for creating Web sites (a basis for question R3), features of the Web sites (which supplements Methodology 1 for question R1) and the mechanics in operating the sites (questions R1, R2 and R3).

Questions were tailored according to the features of individual Web sites. However, the following list of generic questions was adapted for most interviews:-

*) When did you go online?
*) What was your original motivation for creating your online service?
*) How is your online service integrated into your overall organisation?
*) How do you handle updates, breaking news and news feed stories?
*) How does the format and style of online content differ from offline content?
*) User interactions: discuss online traffic patterns and demographics.
*) Some pundits predict that the Net could challenge traditional news structures, like citizen reporting. How do you feel about interactivity?
*) Have there been any interesting incidents or surprises in running your site?
*) How can publishers best generate revenue for their sites?
The questions above were designed to explore the usage of the principal features and advantages of the Internet as a medium. They also revealed attitudes to the Internet among the people and organisations that publish content on the Web.

Where it was possible, interviews were conducted in person, using a tape recorder for transcription purposes. However, it was necessary to use other means to interview people in geographically distant regions. This involved the use of questions and answers sent by email.

This is a qualitative study, because of the nature of the questions. Attempts were made to interview as many people as possible, but not every Web site agreed to this.

**Methodology 4: Online User Survey**

Dovetailing with the results of Methodology 3, this survey examined the use of Web sites from the perspective of the Internet user community in general. It evaluated their perceptions of online content, their choice of Web sites and their motivations for consuming news on the Web. This was an important source of data for question R3. It is interesting to compare the perceptions of publishers from the interviews with the perceptions of users gathered from this survey.

Conducting a mass survey is a logistically cumbersome process. Professional survey organisations employ dozens of people to carry them out, and the cost of a large survey can be several tens of thousands of dollars. Clearly, such resources are beyond my accessibility. Innovation in the design and implementation of user survey was necessary.

The survey of users of Web-based news was conducted on the Web itself. This is appropriate, considering the fact that users of Web-based news would be able to access the survey. The Web site was accessible to a wide geographical region, including other nations. It was also available at any time of the day.
A Web site was also easy to design and implement. Its creation was within the resources at my command.

Questions in the survey were presented as a combination of multiple-choice radio buttons and fields where users can type more substantial responses. The survey was hosted on a server at the University of Wollongong.

A user filled in the form on the Web site and submitted the data to a server by clicking a "submit" button on the site. CGI scripting at the University extracted data from the form and forward the results to the author in the form of an email message. This form of indirect submission allowed the research to be done in an ethical format, where data that could compromise the privacy of respondents was not passed on to me.

Publicity for the survey was done through several channels. I distributed media releases to several Australian media sources. I also posted messages promoting the survey to Australian newsgroups and mailing lists. In an unusual move, I printed hundreds of pamphlets promoting the survey, and handed these out on street corners in downtown Sydney, Australia. This multifaceted publicity strategy was designed to achieve as broad a sampling of people as possible.

As a courtesy gesture to participants, six copies of the Asia-Pacific Media Educator, an academic journal published by the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of Wollongong, were distributed randomly to respondents. Respondents were offered the choice of leaving an email address to enter this reward scheme.

The following is a reproduction of the questions asked in the survey, along with an explanation of my motivations for including them.

1) Please state your age in years. (Followed by form field entry space)
2) Please state your sex. (Followed by multiple-choice radio buttons for Male or Female)

These questions form the basis of a calibration exercise for the survey. If the results were exclusively slanted towards a particular age bracket or sex, the accuracy of some replies would be in doubt. This also provides two demographic variables for comparisons with other answers. I wished to know if age or sex had any relationship to the way news was read on the Internet.

3) Occupation. (Followed by multiple-choice radio buttons for: School Student, Tertiary Student, Working, Looking for work, Others)

4) Nationality (Followed by multiple-choice radio buttons for: Australian Citizen living in Australia, Australian Citizen overseas, Non-Australian Citizen living in Australia, Non-Australian Citizen living outside of Australia)

These are the final demographic variables obtained from respondents. It was decided not to pursue such traditional sociological survey questions as educational level or income, as such questions were considered to be potentially too invasive. Other demographic variables were not collected in the interests of keeping the survey short enough to attract respondents.

The choice of occupational status is tied to a line of inquiry concerning the usage context of Web-based news. It is designed to explore potential links between Web-based news consumption and the availability of Internet-connected computers at work or other semi-public places.

Nationality is an important question, as it is tied to the geographical scope of Web-based news. I wished to investigate how the geographic location of a reader, or a personal connection to a geographic location outside of the respondent's physical location, could influence the scope of publications read.

It could have been possible to obtain more precise geographical data from this survey, but the need to address many issues in a reasonably small set of questions ruled this out.
5) Which online news sources do you regularly visit? (For example: www.news.com.au, CNN)

(Followed by form field entry space)

The use of a form field entry meant that people were free to type anything they wished. A well-known Australian and a well-known international news Web site were provided as examples in the question. The purpose of this question was to generate broad qualitative trends of the sites, and types of sites, that seem to be the most popular with respondents. It was not intended to be as precise as a commercial survey of “hits” to Web sites. It was also intended to serve as a comparison for other trends in online behaviour.

6) From where do you often log on to the Internet when you want to read online news?
(Followed by multiple-choice radio buttons for: Home, Work, School/College, Other)

Together with Question 3 dealing with occupation, this question is designed to explore the circumstances in which online news was read, and how this influenced usage patterns and motivations.

7) How much attention do you pay to "Sidebar" news on portal sites? (A portal site is a cluster of information services under one domain, such as ninemsn and Yahoo) (Please rank from 1 to 7 with 1 being No attention) (radio buttons: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)

This question was a direct response to the rise in popularity of multipurpose “portal” Web sites that are designed to serve a variety of functions. News headlines are frequently included on portal sites, and many also feature news in depth. This question was designed to explore the possibility that portal sites could siphon attention away from dedicated news sites.

8) Why do you read news online? (Followed by form field entry)
This is arguably the most important question in the entire survey. Respondents were simply asked why they read news online, and had a space to type an answer. The question was designed to be as unstructured as possible. There was no prompting with examples and no multiple-choice options. I realised that the question could generate answers concerning why people consume news in general, a matter that is covered by research into uses and gratification. However, it was designed to see if people would nominate the Internet as offering any special advantages, without prompting them to reply this way specifically. If the question specifically prompted people to list advantages of the Internet, they could have listed a number of potential advantages, but these may not be significant to their own usage patterns.

This question can be compared to other questions concerning the context of usage and the publications being read online.

9) Apart from the Internet, where else do you usually get your news from? (Please rank from 1 to 4, with 1 being Very Often and 4 being Not Often)

Newspapers (radio buttons: 1, 2, 3, 4)
Magazines (radio buttons: 1, 2, 3, 4)
Radio (radio buttons: 1, 2, 3, 4)
Television (radio buttons: 1, 2, 3, 4)
None of the above (radio buttons: 1, 2, 3, 4)

This question was designed to explore the concept that the Internet could be replacing other media as a delivery system for journalism, or complementing it. The question measured the overall patterns of news consumption by respondents among all media, in search of patterns and trends.

This experiment was largely qualitative in its collection of data, although some questions would generate quantitative data when aggregated results were presented.
Answers from this survey were tabulated in a spreadsheet to enable a rapid comparison of qualitative relationships between variables. The layout of the spreadsheet essentially duplicated the questions and classification structure of the survey.

Thus, the survey attempted to chart a broad range of usage issues and some traditional demographic variables. Comparisons between this data and the attributes of Web sites documented in Experiment 1 would reveal if particular models of delivery or features of Web site hold specific appeal.

**Methodology 5: Case Studies of Personal Reporting**

This research supplied data for question R1, by examining ways in which amateur reporters could use the Internet as a means of publishing information and responding to reports of news events that they have personally experienced. It was expected that a reaction would only be possible with events such as disruptions to civil infrastructure, as most news events are either geographically or organisationally remote from most citizens.

This focused mainly on the examination of Usenet newsgroups, which have no ownership or editorial control. The data were evaluated according to criteria such as the supply of new material, the inclusion of personal viewpoints on events and evaluation of media coverage.

Theoretical writings on the subject of personal reporting have offered no framework on what to expect or even how it should be done. However, I have developed the following framework for evaluating the forms of content that could appear.

- supply of new information.
- new commentary on previously supplied material.
- collation or reorganisation of existing material.
meta-journalism/criticism of existing material.

personal interpretation of events.

These criteria are derived from examination of the material that is published by professional journalists in conventional media, such as a daily newspaper. The final criterion is simply derived from the concept of someone personally experiencing the event that is being discussed, or having a personal opinion on it.

Methodology 6: Tabulation of Online Polls

The first agenda-setting study for question R4, this examined the popularity of certain topics on an online poll conducted by a major news-based Web site. The site used for this study was Ninemsn as it supplies an appropriately large data set for the number of surveys, covers a broad scope of topics and has a high number of participants in each survey.

The site operates Yes/No polls on public issues, which are usually derived from current news headlines. The methodology does not consider the ratio of votes for and against each question. Instead, the number of votes for both options of each question were added together to form a total number of votes relating to that particular topic. This methodology is based on the fundamental assumption of agenda-setting research, that the media cannot influence a person's specific opinion on a topic, but can influence the importance of a topic itself.

The data from these polls allows comparisons between data sets from the two different Web sites, with potential implications about the agendas held by the readership of each publication. This is the most quantitative study in agenda-setting research for this thesis.
Methodology 7: Internet versus Media Survey

A study in agenda-setting for question R4, this is a comparative study of topics discussed in public, unregulated Usenet newsgroups versus the major topics covered in a major non-Internet media source for the same period. In keeping with established trends in agenda-setting research, a timeframe of several months is necessary to establish any significance for this study.

The experimental methodology is as follows. The newsgroups aus.politics and aus.general were examined for aggregated content on randomly selected months using the newsgroup archive and search engine Deja.com. Overall agendas on the groups were evaluated through a manual inspection of the frequency of postings on specific topics. Similar aggregate methodologies were used in examining content from the print newspaper The Australian in the same months. This newspaper was selected as the media reference, owing to its nation-wide geographic scope and the ease of obtaining archival references in the State Library of New South Wales.

Agenda-setting research sometimes explores time lags between the appearance of an agenda in the media and the discovery of similar agendas amongst the public. This methodology uses sampling blocks of one month to chart agendas. It is proposed that this should allow sufficient time for a media agenda to be perceived by the general public. In cases where a media agenda appears late in the month (within five days of the end of the month) this will be noted in the results. Subsequent time blocks could reveal the development of public agendas related to media issues that first appeared in previous months.

4.3 Limitations of the Research Methodologies

The limitations on both the scope and the reliability of the methodologies used in this thesis arise from various sources. The first limitation is the relatively small amount of academic research relating to the Internet that can serve as a reference for both the theory and research
methodology. This relative shortage of material is a natural result of the short history of the Internet as a mass medium.

It is fair to say that the academic community, Australian or otherwise, has yet to construct a widely accepted and tested set of principles that inform perceptions of the Internet or ways of conducting research into the Internet. Hence, there is little way of determining all of the potential limitations of the methodologies used in this thesis.

It is also not entirely clear that certain established theories of journalism will be applicable to the Internet.

Some of the limitations on my research are of a more practical form. The decentralised nature of the Internet means that a totally reliable index of its contents is elusive. Furthermore, content on the Internet has proven to be somewhat fickle in any form. Pages of general Web-based content are routinely deleted from servers after very short periods of availability, meaning that an online publication could have been created and destroyed without it being discovered during research.

The Deja.com search engine that has been used for analysis of Usenet newsgroups is regarded as a reliable tool for this purpose. However, Deja.com and Usenet itself suffer from their own inherent limitations. No two sites on the Internet receive exactly the same Usenet feed at the same time. Again, this is a result of a lack of centralised control. The Deja.com system could miss some postings that could be available at other sites. For this reason, analyses of Usenet must, by definition, be qualitative in their scope.

Any study of the popularity of Web sites or traffic patterns is limited by two factors. Firstly, there is no universally accepted standard or methodology for rating site traffic. Secondly, much of this information, when it is gathered, is jealously guarded. This normally prevents the nomination of precise numerical figures for the readership of any online news site. Discussions of traffic patterns in users reading Web sites must also be relatively broad and qualitative,
although traffic patterns at different times for the same site that are measured using the same system do have a strong level of credibility.

The thesis attempts to analyse overall design and feature patterns in Web sites with reference to a specific set of criteria. Some of these criteria, such as the inclusion of an email contact address, are straightforward to judge and report. However, others do introduce a certain level of subjectivity. No two Web sites are alike, yet the sheer volume of the task requires me to evaluate their overall design with respect to a small number of classifications. As there is no totally accepted consensus on what a well-made Web site should look like, this process is limited by personal and industry-wide subjectivity.

The methodology of interviewing personnel behind news-related Web sites has several limitations. The interview subjects are expected to be honest in their replies, but there is no absolute guarantee of this. Much of the data that relates to this thesis is sensitive, and subjects may be unwilling to disclose it, or may misrepresent it. The scope of the interviews is also limited by the number of subjects who are actually willing to be interviewed. There is no guarantee that the subjects who agree to interviews constitute a representative sample of the Internet news community, and at the present, no way of calibrating such a survey, owing to the shortage of other data.

The conduct of an online user survey is complicated by several factors. The most significant limitation on this methodology is gaining an appropriate representative sample of the online news reader community. There is also a potential problem with the honesty of respondents. The survey cannot be used for gross numerical extrapolations of user bases for any site or behavioural pattern, but broad qualitative trends could be perceived. Such trends would need to be quite pronounced in the data before they could be judged to be significant, and not a statistical artefact. Despite the proliferation of online surveys for academic and non-academic purposes, no reliable methodological or theoretical framework relating to their design could be found in the literature.
A final significant limitation is my physical location. I live and spend most of my time in Sydney, yet I am attempting a nation-wide project. Geographical limitations can be overcome using telecommunications, principally the Internet itself, for communication with Web site operators and the solicitation of survey contributions. However, it is difficult for me to analyse general public events and localised non-Internet media in any other region. Publicity for the online user survey was partially conducted through means that depend on physical handouts, geographically limited to the greater Sydney region.

4.4 Methodologies and Questions

With so many methodologies and research questions being presented, it is appropriate to review the connections between the two.

Research Question R1 (To what extent has the Internet transformed the established model of news delivery?) is a broad investigation of the overall state of news on the Internet. As such, it begins with an overall survey of Web sites dealing with news (Methodology 1: Web Site Inspection) to determine the characteristics of news delivery on the Internet. The survey is designed to specifically address the potential advantages of Internet news proposed by the theoretical model.

Methodology 2 (Site Update Racing) will provide specific data on the ability of these sites to deal with breaking news and Methodology 3 (Interviews with Web site Operators) will provide more specific detail on certain Web sites, and also expose internal operations in ways that are not possible through external observations.

Methodology 5 (Case Studies of Personal Reporting) will contribute to this Research Question by seeing if amateur journalism on Usenet is transforming the established model of news delivery. This potential influence of amateur reporting will also be addressed by Methodology 1, which will search for amateur news on the Web.
Hence, these four methodologies will all contribute to this very broad research question.

Research Question R2 (Is the style of Internet journalism any different from the established model?) will be answered concurrently with Research Question R1. This specifically explores differences in content, such as the selection of stories and news values, matters that are considered particularly important in light of the suggested influence of space/time factors on newsworthiness, and the potential of space/time factors to be transformed by the Internet. These issues could be considered a subset of the overall structure of news delivery, as explored by R1, but the prominence of news values in media research suggested that these matters deserved special attention in a distinct research question. This question will be answered through the use of Methodologies 1, 2 and 3, which also contribute to Research Question R1.

Research Question R3 (How do publisher and audience perceptions compare on the Internet?) will gain insight into publisher perceptions through questions raised in Methodology 3 (Interviews with Web Site Operators), which also supplies material for the previous research questions. Methodology 4 (Online Media Survey) was designed specifically to address this research question, and no others. It provides insight into the attitudes of the readers of Web-based news.

Research Question R4 (To what extent will the Internet contribute to general research into the area of agenda-setting?) is informed by two methodologies that were specifically designed for this question, and contribute to no others. Methodology 6 (Tabulation of Online Polls) explores the concepts of variable influence and agenda resonance. Methodology 7 (Internet Versus Media Survey) maps a traditional agenda-setting methodology into a new environment, namely Usenet. Both methodologies are distinct, and are designed to provide a reasonably broad insight into issues relating to agenda-setting.
4.5 Summary

An appropriate set of methodologies for conducting research has been presented. Taken together, they provide a basis for answering all of the principal research questions of this thesis. Some of these methodologies are similar to research conducted by academics who have previously studied news production and delivery. Others are relatively new. This is due to the fact that some of them are designed to study the Internet in ways that are not possible with previously applied methodologies. In every case, the methodologies have been informed by theoretical frameworks that are designed to address the research questions. Hence, the research questions, the theoretical framework that informs them, and the methodologies for research designed to answer them represent three interlocking elements. They are consistent with each other, and provide a means for instigating academic inquiry. The results of this inquiry will be presented in subsequent chapters.
Chapter Five

Structure of Media News Sites

This chapter presents an overview of the news delivery mechanisms of more than 50 Australian Web sites, with reference to elements raised in Chapters 2 and 3. It draws upon data from Methodologies 1 and 2 as described in Chapter 4 (Web Site Inspection and Site Update Racing).

This chapter will provide data and conclusions that answer aspects of research question R1. Due to the broad scope of this question, it is not possible to answer it entirely in a single chapter. Consequently, this chapter outlines general trends in the nature of news on the Web by comparing the general characteristics of Web sites. From this, the general impact of the Internet on established forms of news delivery can be deduced. Trends that can be examined in this data include the ownership of these Web sites and the use of specific technological features of the Internet. Subsequent chapters will examine, in greater detail, Web sites cited in this chapter.

Comparing Web sites is a potentially difficult exercise, as so many variables could be documented within the context of various frameworks. Many of the judgements that are made in formally describing and categorising Web sites rely on principles that are highly subjective. Factors such as the quality of design simply cannot be quantified in precise variables and units of measurement. For this reason, much of the documentation of these Web sites is presented in a qualitative form.
5.1 Overview of Sites

Methodology 1 provided the relevant data on the nature and content of more than 50 news-based Web sites published in Australia. The sites were evaluated according to a set of criteria for the putative advantages and modes of delivery on a news-based Web site. This information was entered and analysed in a spreadsheet. The full data set from this spreadsheet is included in Appendix A.

The data was sorted into 54 entries. For reasons of continuity, Web sites run by Rural Press Limited, The McPherson Group, the Independent News Group, Sunshine Coast Newspapers and the South East News Group were each placed under a single entry. This was prompted by the fact that these conglomerates had enacted common production and managerial strategies for the creation of Web sites for the newspapers they owned. These sites feature common design elements and editorial strategies. Production of these sites has been highly centralised, with the same technical and managerial staff operating all of the sites for a given conglomerate. In some cases, common Web pages featuring aggregated content for all of these papers in a single site have been created. Hence, it was judged to be inappropriate to classify sites from these organisations as discrete entities.

*The Canberra Times* and *The Examiner* in Tasmania, both owned by Rural Press Limited, are exceptions to this trend. Both newspapers have highly original online sites that do not reflect a common design strategy. For this reason, these sites were given their own individual listings in the spreadsheet. *The Daily Mercury* is also an exception to this trend. This newspaper has ownership ties to Rural Press Limited, yet the Web site for this newspaper is not incorporated in the aggregated Rural Press Limited site.
The following Web sites were selected for this evaluation.

ABC Online                          www.abc.net.au
Ninemsn                             www.ninemsn.com.au
The Sydney Morning Herald           www.smh.com.au
The Age                              www.theage.com.au
Yahoo Australia                     www.yahoo.com.au
The Canberra Times                  www.canberratimes.com.au
The Newcastle Herald                www.nnp.com.au
The Illawarra Mercury               www.illnews.com.au
The Wollongong Advertiser            www.illnews.com.au
Network Ten                          www.ten.com.au
The Warrnambool Standard            www.standard.net.au
The Examiner                         www.examiner.com.au
McPherson Group                     news.mcmedia.com.au
Independent News Group              www.inews.net.au
The South East News Group           www.senews.com.au
The West Online/West Australian      www.thewest.com.au
Post Newspapers                     www.postnewspapers.com.au
Border Mail                          www.bordermail.com.au
Bundeena Village Noise               www.villagenoise.org.au
Dunoon and District Gazette         main.nrg.com.au/~village/dg
The Murray Pioneer                  www.murray-pioneer.com.au
Green Left Weekly                    www.greenleft.org.au
Bendigo Advertiser                   www.bendigoaddy.com.au
Margaret River Online                www.margaret-river-online.com.au
The Advocate                         www.theadvocate.com.au
Border Watch Online                  www.adelaide.net.au/~tbwprod
The Bunyip                           www.bunyippress.com.au
Byron Bay Echo                      www.echo.net.au
The Plains Producer                  www.rbe.net.au/~producer
The Queensland Times                www/qt.com.au
Shoalhaven Independent              www.shoalhaven-independent.com.au
The Weekly Times                    www.weeklytimes.com.au
Whitsunday Times                    www.whitsundaytimes.com.au
Village Voice                        www.villagevoice.com.au
Toowoomba Chronicle                 thechronicle.toowoomba.com
Warrandyte Diary                    home.vicnet.net.au/~warrandy
Western Echo                        www.powerup.com.au/~hotmetal
Western Herald                      www.nvo.com/westernherald
YPCT Online                          kadina.yp-connect.net/~ypct
Daily Mercury, Mackay                www.dailymercury.com.au
2GB.com                              www.2gb.com
2UE.com                               www.2ue.com
The Zeitgeist Gazette                host.zeitgaz.com.au
Crikey                               www.crikey.com.au
Space Daily                          www.spacedaily.com
These sites were found to meet the criteria outlined for a traditional source of journalism as outlined in Chapter 1. All update their contents regularly, and all of them are ostensibly charged with operating for an indefinite period.

Some titles are well-known. Others are not. The inclusion of Space Daily may appear unusual as this is a specialised publication dealing with astronautics and space activities, and not a general news site. However, it was deemed appropriate to study Space Daily in depth for this thesis because of its Australian origins, its status as a purely online publication, its success with both local and international readers, and its claims of being a profitable venture (Space Daily 2000).

Data from the spreadsheet analysis of these publications were examined for trends and patterns. A general profile of the Web sites analysed is presented below.

5.1.1 Links to Other Media

One of the most significant characteristics drawn from the data is that almost all of the Web sites are strongly tied to parent organisations that are primarily involved in news delivery in conventional (non-Internet) media. New companies with no ventures outside of their Internet projects are rare. Only four of the sites studied did not have a tie to a previously established conventional media product. 45 were linked to print projects, and one (Network Ten) was linked exclusively to television. Two were linked to commercial radio, and ABC Online was linked to radio and television. Ninemsn was linked to television and some print, although the legacy tie for its news content is television.

5.1.2 Size of Organisation

The sheer dominance of sites with links to conventional media suggests that it is appropriate to examine the nature of the conventional media products. Furthermore, the dominance of print-based media allows their comparisons in terms of circulation size.
Circulation data for these print-based media products was obtained from the *Australian Media Guide 65th Edition* (Margaret Gee Media 2000). Each print-based publication was sorted into one of three classifications: Small, Medium or Large. Small publications had circulation figures lower than 30,000. Medium publications had circulation figures between 30,000 and 60,000. Large publications had circulation figures in excess of 60,000. In the case of aggregated sites combining content from several publications, the largest circulation figure for a publication represented on the site was used for classification.

Five sites were found to be linked to organisations with large print publications. These were *The Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, news.com.au* (incorporating several News Limited newspapers), *The Wollongong Advertiser* and *The West Australian*. Precise audience figures for news programs on radio and television stations could not be obtained, but telephone calls to *Channel 9* (connected to the *Ninemsn* Web site) and *Channel 10* (connected to the *Network Ten* Web site) suggested that both stations enjoyed a national audience in excess of one million viewers for their news programs. It was decided to classify these as large organisations, due to the size of their viewing audience. Estimates for audience levels for the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* (in either radio or television), or the radio stations *2UE* or *2GB*, could not be obtained.

A further ten sites were found to have links to publications with medium circulation figures. Twenty five sites had links to publications with small circulation figures. Circulation figures could not be obtained for the *Bundeena Village Noise*, the *Dunoon and District Gazette*, the *Village Journal*, the *Village Voice*, the *Warrandyte Diary* or the *Western Echo*.

### 5.1.3 Ownership

Twenty six of these Web sites were owned by families or organisations that owned either only a single non-Internet media publication, or owned only the Web venture. Due to its size, its involvement in all manner of commercial projects and its involvement in publishing a new
magazine that did not exist as a prior legacy product, *Yahoo* was not classified as such. Five sites were found to be members of small conglomerates, a term that is used to describe an organisation owning more than one but not more than four small to medium sized publications. Eleven were members of medium conglomerates that owned more than four publications but did not include any large publications. Twelve of the sites were found to have ties to large conglomerates that ran one or more large-scale media publications. Large conglomerates linked to these sites include John Fairfax Limited, News Limited and Publishing and Broadcasting Limited.

Sometimes, the ownership structure of a set of publications results in the creation of a common online strategy for several titles, where content from several papers is aggregated in a common format on the same site. Six Web sites documented in this study are aggregated sites. Although most of the papers included in this format are small, News Limited has also aggregated content from its comparatively large newspapers.

### 5.1.4 Design

Evaluating the design of a Web site is subjective. Standards of design cannot be measured using quantitative methods or variables. Nevertheless, some sites can be judged to appear better in their design than others.

In order to rank the design quality of these Web sites, a specific methodology was developed. Each Web site was examined for its compliance with three basic principles of design. These principles are now outlined.

**Balance of Page Design**

This refers to the overall appearance of the Web page, a balance of layout and design elements. The assessment of balance in a Web page involved factors such as the inclusion of gaps or blank spaces on the page, or the excessive use of either text or graphics.
Navigation and Useability

This refers to the ease of retrieving content and navigating the site. It includes inspection of index and directory structures, as well as the presentation of links and the layers of navigation required to reach specific content.

Composition of Text and Formatting

This refers to the style and layout of text, as well as the integration of text with graphics. This is different from the overall balance of page design, which deals with macro-design. This is more specific, focusing on individual paragraphs. The legibility of text, appropriate formatting and the clarity of photographs or icons are assessed.

Each site was given a ranking for each of these criteria on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. In each case, 5 represented the highest ranking in terms of compliance with the variable under examination. An aggregated design score was produced by adding the rankings for each of these three variables. Hence, the aggregated score represented a value between 3 and 15.

The sites exhibited a variety of scores. The lowest score awarded to a site was 5. This was given to the Alice Springs News, a site with very poor design. Five sites were awarded a score of 6, and nine received a score of 7. Thirteen sites received scores of 8. Seventeen sites received a score of 9. Two sites received scores of 10, and two received scores of 11. Six sites received scores of 12, the highest score awarded during the study. The sites receiving these scores were ABC Online, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, The Illawarra Mercury, The Wollongong Advertiser, and the Independent News Group.
5.1.5 Amount of Content

The amount of content refers to the number of stories published on the site. In the case of multimedia files, the number of individual stories presented in a multimedia presentation was counted.

Each site was classified according to its amount of content in one of three categories: Small, Medium or Large. A site was classified as small if it published 10 stories or fewer in each online release. It was classified as medium if it published between 11 and 20 stories. It was classified as large if it published more than 20 stories.

Fourteen sites were found to have large amounts of content. Fourteen had medium amounts of content. Twenty six sites were found to have small amounts of content. The Newcastle Herald was not included in this classification system, as it does not produce a daily release of content.

5.1.6 Frequency

The frequency of content updates is simply a measure of how often new content or updates are added to the site. Eight sites were found to update their sites continuously, or at least on more than one occasion per day. Thirteen sites were found to update themselves daily, or at least on weekdays. Twenty five sites updated their contents on a weekly basis. One was bi-weekly. Five sites were updated monthly, one was updated bi-monthly, and one was updated quarterly.

The frequency of updates for a Web site is mostly identical to the frequency of publication of the parent non-Internet product.
5.1.7 Use of Images

This refers to the use of photographs or diagrams that are related to the news content of a Web site. It does not include the use of miscellaneous graphics such as mastheads or navigational icons. The number of images used on a site was classified according to three categories; “None” refers to sites that use no images at all in support of their news content. The term “Few” refers to sites that use between one and ten images in a regular issue on their Web site. “Many” refers to sites that use more than ten images.

Thirteen sites were found to use no images at all. 32 sites were found to use few images. Only ten sites were found to use many images.

5.1.8 Archives

Whether they are ostensibly labelled as such by the Web site or not, archives are classified as any form of content published on the site that pre-dates the latest issue. This may be in the form of back issues, or searchable indexes that call up stories from back issues upon request. 24 of the sites were found to have no archival features at all. 30 sites were found to offer the feature.

5.1.9 Multimedia Content

Multimedia Content refers to the provision of audio or video content on the site. The material is usually stored on the site in an asynchronous format. Surprisingly, it is not very popular on news-related Web sites. 47 of the sites featured no multimedia content at all. The remaining sites offered audio and video content to varying degrees.

Multimedia is normally a reproduction of an audio or video production supplied by a Web site's parent organisation. In the case of Ninemsn, video footage of traditional “talking head” news
stories from the Nine Network's news division is supplied. This footage lasts only a few minutes at most. Other multimedia content may be sourced from overseas news agencies or networks.

*ABC Online* and *2GB.com* both reproduced audio files of radio news broadcasts. In the case of *2GB.com*, this multimedia content was not supplemented by any text-based news. Curiously, *2UE.com*, another commercial radio station, reproduces its news only as text. Occasionally, Web sites will feature special multimedia content that is not derived from a parent organisation. Thus, multimedia content sometimes falls within the classification of special content.

### 5.1.10 Feedback

Only two of the sites examined did not provide any form of email feedback to news staff. These sites were the *Warrnambool Standard* and *Yahoo*, which has no news staff. Email feedback is essentially common to almost all Web sites. Despite its lack of email feedback for news, *Yahoo* does offer chat forums for its users on general topics.

### 5.1.11 Online Chat and Polls

An important element of interactivity, chat refers to any form of interactive discussion hosted at the site. This could be anything from real-time chat amongst users in an unmoderated format to hosted sessions where guests answer questions from an online audience. 46 sites have offered no form of chat at all. Seven sites offer chat functions, while one site has elected to discontinue its previous experiments in chat. Four sites offered simply online voting polls.
5.1.12 Special Content

This category refers to the development and inclusion of content for a Web site that does not appear in a traditional media product by the parent media publication. Only five sites with offline products were found to offer special online content. The others either offered no special content on their Web sites or had no links to non-Internet news publications. Most special content is simple text and images, but sometimes, multimedia content will be produced specially for a Web site.

5.1.13 Personalised News

A rarely discussed and a rarely delivered form of online news, personalisation refers to the ability to filter and organise content according to a preprogrammed set of preferences for each user. A user registers a personal account with the site, and selects news categories of interest from what is normally a short and very stylised list of categories such as “politics” or “science and technology”. Content relating to the selected categories is presented when the user logs on to the site, usually at the expense of excluding news from other categories. Alternatively, a user can receive email sent to him or her on a regular basis which contains stories in the selected categories. Only four sites were found to offer any form of personalised news.

5.1.14 Revenue Models

As discussed in Chapter 2, a revenue model for a Web site can be as much about an overall attitude by management as overt mechanisms to directly generate capital on the Web site. It could be perceived that a Web site is attracting readers to conventional media, where they would generate revenue, even if the Web site itself did not produce revenue in a direct sense. Some Web sites may simply have no revenue model at all. An examination of the Web sites included in this survey reveals a somewhat scattered pattern of revenue models.
Nineteen sites were found to host advertising on their Web site, and offered no other ostensive mode of generating revenue. Five sites were found to offer advertising and the provision of online transactions, usually the sale of goods, on their Web site. Three sites were found to offer advertising and direct subscription models for the online service. One site, *The Zeitgeist Gazette*, relied solely on the subscription model. The others were *The Examiner* and *Crikey*.

Two Web sites were found to employ a strategy that could be classified as bundled, either offering their news content as part of an overall content strategy or employing corporate links to an Internet service provider. *Space Daily, Ninemsn, the Fairfax sites* and *Yahoo* also have links to free email services that are affiliated with their brands. These email services usually rely on advertising to support them. A large proportion of Web sites, however, seemed to feature no ostensive form of direct revenue generation.

A failure to include a direct form of revenue generation does not necessarily mean that the site generates no revenue. Indirect forms of revenue generation include raising brand awareness and customer loyalty.

### 5.1.15 Data Trends

Inspection of the spreadsheet data was performed to reveal any trends between these variables. In general, it seems that there are few distinctive patterns or overall rules that can be deduced from the data. The selection of specific attributes for a Web site appears almost random when compared to most other variables. The only trends that can be deduced are of a very broad nature, and exceptions can be found to all of them.

The most significant trend is that sites that are connected to larger publications generally offer more news content than smaller sites. It is not unreasonable to expect such a trend to emerge. Large media groups are likely to have access to more capital and resources for these projects, and the most significant resource is arguably content.
Sites with connections to large or medium-sized publications were also more likely to have a higher standard of design than other sites. *The Newcastle Herald* is a curious exception to this rule and others.

Only the very largest Web sites seem to be in a position to offer most or all of the potential advantages of the Web in their contents. The use of multimedia and continuous updates is found only in sites that are focused on the equivalent of a major city or more. Chat is also more commonplace on large media sites, but its relationship to the size of the parent publication is not as precise as the aforementioned variables. Similarly, larger sites tend to feature more images, but the relationship is not absolute.

The inclusion of non-legacy content that is prepared exclusively for a Web site is strongly related to the size of a Web site and its parent organisation. Again, it must be noted that Web-only products with no ties to a non-Internet product do not match this classification.

Surprisingly, there seems to be no discernible relationship between the supply of archives and the size of a Web site. Archives do not seem to relate to any other variables.

Almost every site offers some form of online feedback, even if it is as simple as a single email address. Sometimes, though, this email feedback is not really the equivalent of feedback to a news organisation where the site in question imports news from a group not connected to itself. Larger sites generally offer more sophisticated forms of online feedback, supplying multiple email addresses and instructing respondents to select the most appropriate one for the nature of their inquiry.

### 5.2 Case Studies in "Site Update Racing"

One of the most critical advantages offered by the Web is the frequency of updates. The only effective way to examine this feature is to actively and intensively monitor the way that sites
update their content in real-time. This research is comparable to watching a race, as sites alter themselves rapidly, and to a certain degree, in competition with each other.

Rapid updates, that is, updates that take place several times per day, is a feature that is essentially exclusive to the largest news Web sites. Ninemsn, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, ABC Online and news.com.au are the principal providers of rapidly updated news.

These sites usually distinguish such frequent updates from the rest of their daily stories by including a special section of their site dedicated to “Breaking News”. The segregation of this content prevents stories with greater longevity from being prematurely deleted, but it also illustrates an important factor in the production of this news: Breaking news is essentially treated as a separate content channel to the principal content.

Sites will occasionally update their front pages and principal news areas with new developments, but this is not the normal mode for the delivery of breaking news. It was discovered through external inspection that rapidly updated content is normally a slightly modified form, or an unmodified form, of stories supplied through a regular feed from a major news agency. This dependence on news agency feeds strongly influences the style and the timing of content delivery.

On several occasions over the course of researching this thesis, studies in update racing were performed with major stories. The selection of major issues was important, as a minor story that was posted as breaking news on one site could be totally ignored by another. A major story would that would be covered by most or all sites was an appropriate subject for comparative analysis. The results of these case studies are presented below.

**Case Study 1: Anwar Ibrahim Verdict**

The imprisonment of former Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim on a variety of charges in 1998 was a major continuing news story that occupied global attention for a period
that extended into the year 2000. On April 14, 1999, a court in Kuala Lumpur found Anwar guilty on charges of corruption. This was a major development in this continuing story and it was judged to be a significant news event. The propagation of this story across Australian news sites was monitored in this experiment.

A summary of the propagation of this story across Australia's major news sites and the CNN Web site, the first Web site in the world to break the story, is presented below. Times quoted were the precise moments when I downloaded the contents of a Web site during a period of intensive analysis and refreshment of the contents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After 12:00 (12:16 probably)</td>
<td>CNN announced verdict (short paragraph on front page)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:47 PM</td>
<td>ABC Online carried no report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:48 PM</td>
<td>ABC Online still carried no report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:50 PM</td>
<td>Ninemsn site carried no report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:53 PM</td>
<td>News.com.au carried no report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:58 PM</td>
<td>Ninemsn site carried no report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:00</td>
<td>Ninemsn carried no report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:01 (probably posted 12:50 PM)</td>
<td>CNN now carried full story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:02 (story prepared earlier)</td>
<td>CNN full story downloaded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:03 (story added 13:00)</td>
<td>ABC Online carried story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:04</td>
<td>News.com.au carried no report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:07</td>
<td>Sydney Morning Herald Breaking News carried no report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:15</td>
<td>Ninemsn carried no report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:16</td>
<td>Ninemsn news had no report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:20 (claimed to be 13:00 on site)</td>
<td>News.com.au carried story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:21</td>
<td>Sydney Morning Herald carried no report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:23</td>
<td>Ninemsn carried no report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At this point, the monitoring of the story was discontinued. The overall conclusions that can be drawn is that despite their claims of rapid updates of major events, the actual supply of such content is haphazard and not always reliable on each site. *ABC Online* broke this story first in Australia, but they were rapidly followed by *news.com.au* and *Ninemsn*. The *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age Online* had failed to report on the story after an interval of more than an hour of it breaking in other media. It is possible that these sites did not carry the story due to different editorial perceptions of its newsworthiness.

The organisations that broke this story rapidly both relied on news feeds, as indicated in the story credits published.

**Case Study 2: Indian Airline Hijack**

In December 1999, an Indian airliner was hijacked and flown to Afghanistan. This resulted in a major continuing news story that attracted global attention for several weeks, while negotiations were conducted with the hijackers in order to end the incident. On February 10, 2000, passengers who had been kept hostage aboard the parked aircraft were spontaneously released with no prior publicity, and their hijackers surrendered to local authorities.

A narration of the monitoring of this story across news sites follows.

2:21 PM: *CNN* Web site posted a notice of the release with a short banner on their home page, but no proper story.

2:25 PM: No appearance of the incident had appeared on any Australian news site.

2:32 PM: *ABC Online* posted a story indicating that hijackers had surrendered.

2:33 PM: Strangely, *CNN* reported that hostages were leaving the plane, but did not state that the incident had ended.
2:35 PM: *News.com.au* site was updated on its front page with a near-identical story. The story was NOT placed in the Breaking News section! Perhaps it was too newsworthy to be buried there.

2:43 PM: *CNN* had not yet updated the report they posted at 2:33 Sydney time.

2:50 PM: No story had yet appeared on either the *Sydney Morning Herald* or *Ninemsn*.

At this stage, I left the terminal to attend to other duties, but returned to monitor subsequent developments.

3:42 PM: *Sydney Morning Herald* story had now appeared saying that hostages were being released, but it did not state that the hijacking was over.

*Ninemsn* had their own similar story about hostages being released, which was apparently posted at 3:33 PM.

It must be noted that all sites were essentially dependent on news feeds for their reporting on this incident, with the exception of *CNN*, which had deployed its own correspondents to the location of the parked aircraft in Afghanistan.

The ending of this hijack was not only breaking news, but a story with a high level of newsworthiness. Hence, it seems that all of Australia’s online services were attentive. There was also a precedent which would allow editors to prepare for it. As with the Anwar Ibrahim trial, everybody knew about the hijacking prior to the update.

Curiously, *ABC Online* pre-empted *CNN* on the conclusion of the hijacking. Was this a case of being faster to react, or were *CNN* making sure that they had their facts straight, or did *ABC Online* jump to conclusions prematurely?

Evidently, AAP news feeds were faster than *CNN*, and sent the story through to everyone. *CNN* probably relied on its own field correspondents, who were not as fast to react. Hence, by relying on an external news service, the local sites were ironically placed in a better position than a major international news site.
It should be noted that although all of Australia's major news sites eventually reported the story, the order of delivery in this "race" differs from other experiments. This suggests that no single site will consistently deliver content before others.

Case Study 3: Suspension of General Wiranto

On February 14, 2000, recently installed Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid suspended his security minister, General Wiranto, for reasons that were ostensibly connected to the General's role in atrocities in East Timor. The story was monitored using the same methodologies as the previous experiments. It is noteworthy that the nature of the story changed dramatically over the space of a few minutes as precise information on the incident appeared. For practical purposes of Internet connectivity, Ninemsn was not monitored for this experiment.

12:07 PM: CNN announced the story with a single-sentence headline on their front page.
12:13 PM: ABC Online announced that Wiranto would keep his job, despite pressures from Wahid.
12:13 PM: News.com.au reported that Wiranto had been dismissed.
12:14 PM: No story had yet appeared on the Sydney Morning Herald site.
12:22 PM: Sydney Morning Herald had a story documenting conflicting reports about Wiranto.
12:23 PM: ABC Online had kept its report that Wiranto would keep his job.
12:24 PM: Sydney Morning Herald announced that Wiranto had been dismissed.
12:25 PM: ABC Online had updated its site, announcing the removal of Wiranto.

In this case, the ABC maintained strong links to covering news in Jakarta, where the story broke. Its failure to update its site as rapidly as others could be a result of news feeds reporting the incident more quickly than the ABC's own reporting infrastructure. However, it could also be just a random effect of the amount of attention paid by Web teams to a specific story at a specific time. All three sites monitored in this experiment updated their contents rather rapidly,
although it is interesting to see the way that two sites were prepared to quickly run stories without fully confirming the details.

Case Study 4: Queensland Light Plane Crash

On September 5, 2000, a light plane carrying mining workers crashed in Queensland. The plane had taken off earlier from Western Australia on a flight that was never intended to leave that state. However, the cabin of the aircraft apparently depressurised early into the flight, and the aircraft continued to fly on autopilot until its fuel ran out. The story is interesting because it was treated as a single breaking news event by most news sources, but ABC Online documented the event continuously prior to the eventual crash. Most events relating to this story occurred during the night, taxing the ability of some Web sites to cover the story when they were apparently understaffed. The event occurred in Australia and had a strong institutional focus in the form of air traffic controllers. Hence, an organisation that was prepared to commit reporters to the event was able to document it thoroughly. The Web sites were examined a few hours after the crash. Times given were posted in datelines on the stories themselves.

A documentation of key events in the coverage of this story follows.

ABC Online story at 12:41 AM: Aircraft has been lost. No precise details are available.
ABC Online story at 1:00 AM: Lost aircraft is now being tracked.
ABC Online story at 2:21 AM: Aircraft flying on autopilot. May soon run out of fuel.
ABC Online story at 2:54 AM: Aircraft has crashed. Police are travelling to the crash site.
ABC Online story at 4:49 AM: Aircraft has crashed, no reports from the site yet.
ABC Online story at 7:24 AM: Police are travelling to crash scene.
ABC Online story at 7:46 AM: Police have just arrived at scene of crash.
ABC Online story at 9:42 AM: Overview of entire story with quotes from Police, Safety Board, Mining Company.

No other Web site could match the ABC for this outstanding continuous coverage of the events. Material from other sites is now presented.
Sydney Morning Herald story at 8:30 AM: Police reach wreckage. AAP story.

Sydney Morning Herald story at 8:30 AM: Air Transport Safety Board believes crew were unconscious. AAP story.

Sydney Morning Herald story at 9:29 AM: Wreck located, no survivors, investigations continue. AAP story.

Ninemsn story at 8:38 AM: No survivors in crash. AAP story.

Ninemsn story at 10:14 AM: Other aircraft watched the plane crash. AAP story.

News.com.au published only a single report as an overview of events, with no precise timing given.

Case Study 5: John Laws Sentencing

On the same day as the Queensland Plane Crash covered in Case Study 4, radio personality John Laws was sentenced by a criminal court. Laws had earlier been found guilty of illegally soliciting evidence of the proceedings of a jury. It had been previously announced that sentence would be passed on Laws on September 5, 2000 at 2:00 PM in the Supreme Court of New South Wales.

This was an ideal scenario for rapidly delivering breaking news. The event was pre-meditated and focused on an easily accessible institution. It was staged in Australia and could be reached by local news nets. It was also very newsworthy, given the high profile of John Laws. Hence, it was worth deploying reporters.

12:15 PM: ABC Online ran its own story in advance of the sentence, on prosecution and defendant.

12:20 PM: Sydney Morning Herald ran AAP story in advance of the sentence, giving the cases of prosecution and defendant.

12:24 PM: Ninemsn ran identical AAP story to Sydney Morning Herald.

The story was then left unmodified for more than two hours. Sentencing would begin at 2:00 PM.

2:40 PM: ABC Online ran short piece on the sentencing.
2:53 PM: Ninemsn ran an AAP story.

3:00 PM: Sydney Morning Herald ran an AAP story.


Clearly, the reporting was handled very rapidly by all these major news sites. It was a blend of reliance on news feeds and special reporting. The nature of this story made it easily accessible to reporters, and it is noteworthy that stories on the sentence were run so quickly.

5.3 Generic Model of a News Web Site

A detailed inspection of the sites catalogued for this study leads to the construction of a generic model of the operation of news-based Web sites. This generalisation seems to be fairly consistent across most of the sites documented above. Cases where this generic model does not apply will be documented later.

Apparently, the overwhelming majority of news-based Web sites are strongly linked to existing news-related organisations that existed before the debut of the Internet as a mass medium, and produce news-related products outside of their Web sites. Figures in support of this were given previously in this chapter. It is fair to say that the typical news-based Web site is essentially a doppelganger of a conventional media product. The titles and labeling of these sites makes no attempt to hide this, and is usually designed to ensure that the link is clearly understood. The contents of these Web sites is primarily, and in most cases exclusively, drawn from the content of these existing publications, as the figures reveal. Given the fact that most of these sites are derived from print publications, this derivation of content is normally a simple text-to-text transfer into an HTML format for the Web. This trend of using material from an existing publication is normally described within the Internet industry as “legacy content”.

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A given news site will publish a representative fraction of the total content of its parent content source, and will update this content with a frequency that matches the publication of the offline media product. The news and journalism thus presented will mostly be text, rendered in HTML layout. If illustrations are used, they will be derived as legacy content. The use of graphics is generally low, as the figures show.

Advanced features such as hypertext within stories or multimedia will normally be absent. There will be minimal opportunities for interactivity. Most sites will accept feedback from readers by email, but there will be little more than this. Figures supplied earlier in this chapter reveal this trend.

The overall use of the Web is highly conservative, and results in a Web-based product that is little different from its offline equivalent.

The production of breaking news in near real-time is challenging. Very few sites offer this service, as the figures show. It is essentially confined to sites linked to large media companies. Even in these cases, bylines in stories show that these sites are heavily dependent, or totally dependent, on feeds from major news agencies such as AAP and Reuters. This has several implications. The most significant is that the production and supply of breaking news is essentially independent of the “legacy content” published elsewhere on the site. It is published with greater frequency than the legacy product, and does not resemble its contents. Furthermore, it does not depend as greatly on staff that produce the legacy content for the offline product. Thus, breaking news provides the most significant departure from the “legacy content” model that essentially defines Web-based news in most cases.

Only four sites offer small amounts of specialised content that appears only on the Web site, and these are all linked to large publications. The publication of such special content is infrequent. It is also usually of limited scope.
Generally, it seems that under the theoretical framework proposed for this analysis, there has been little overall challenge to traditional models of news delivery or power structures.

5.4 Linkage to Legacy Content Producers

Staff listings and credits on these Web sites also allow trends in production to be deduced. For the most part, the linkage between the Web sites and the parent publication is very strong. Small sites openly report that the staff who should be contacted with regard to Web-related inquiries are the same people responsible for writing and editing the conventional product. For a small-scale operation, there would simply be no point in setting up separate divisions to handle the Web site.

A small number (fewer than 10) report that their Web sites are maintained by the Internet Service Providers that host them. Sites that were found to report this used very simplistic layout structures with a minimal amount of graphics, and text clustered in a way that usually simplified the HTML language that would be used to produce it. This suggested that additional stories could be loaded easily into an existing design template. Web sites that were classified as “Large”, such as those maintained by major newspapers, openly report the formation of special divisions and staff to handle the operation of their Web sites. This linkage is thus a critical factor that must be addressed in an overall analysis of the production of online news. The significance of this organisational pattern will be discussed elsewhere in this thesis.

5.5 Amateur Publishing

An important part of Methodology 1 was the search for online news and journalism that was being produced in an amateur format. According to the Cunningham and Flew model outlined in Chapter 2, the economic and technical structures of the Internet produce an ideal environment for the publication of such material. The discovery of such a Web site would be a significant challenge to the traditional modes of delivery and power structures for news.
One foreign precedent for the potential impact of amateur publishing is the rise of Matt Drudge, an American Internet user who became a self-styled independent reporter on his own private Web site. Although much of the material produced by Drudge is created without the use of traditional journalistic methodologies (Tuchman 1978; Fowler 1993), he has had a profound impact on the overall media scene in the USA. Using personal contacts and rumours that were passed on to him, Drudge attempted independent reporting on matters that were not represented in other media sources. He employed no staff and used a minimal amount of infrastructure, such as his personal computer, telephones and radio scanners. Most of his content relates to activities within government departments and political spheres. Drudge’s own words illustrate a routine that is certainly different from the activities of a typical non-Internet journalist.

“For seven premillennial years, I’ve covered the world from my Hollywood apartment, dressed in my drawers.... I’ve reported when, how and what I’ve wanted. ....There’s been no editor, no lawyer, no judge, no president to tell me I can’t” (Drudge 2000).

Drudge’s style of writing is also highly unorthodox, breaking not only with journalistic formats, but the normal conventions of syntax and grammar. The result is often amusing, but it can also be almost incomprehensible.

Drudge played a major role in the instigation of media investigations into US President Bill Clinton’s affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky in 1998, when he published material relating to the emerging scandal. Today, the Drudge Report is well known within the Internet community and the general public.

Searches for amateur publishing in Australia were made using the same methodologies as the search for more traditional Web publications. Search engines and literature searches were used to uncover such material. Searches were made at intervals of roughly one year over the course of researching this thesis.
Surprisingly, this research failed to uncover any use of the Web in Australia as a delivery system for amateur journalism. Hundreds of home pages and Web pages in general were examined. The results of this survey revealed that although the publication of information in an amateur format is commonplace, essentially none of this can be classified as journalism.

A typical home page contains a few notes on a person's lifestyle and hobbies. If any substantial content is provided, it usually relates to a topic of personal interest. These interests, in turn, are usually of a recreational focus. Collections of photographs or diatribes on favourite bands, film stars or sports are commonplace. Organisations of various forms publish newsletters relating to their activities, but this is not informative in a general news sense.

Certain religious, political or social activist groups were found to publish manifestoes and statements expressing their opinions on certain issues, but again, it was not possible to classify this material as journalism. The material was often not grounded in facts or events, factors that differentiate journalism from other forms of communication. Most was primarily concerned with promoting the activities or rationale of the parent organisation.

The only independently operated site containing anything close to journalism is operated by the Queensland-based journalist Chris Graham. His personal Web site holds archival copies of news stories that he has written for traditional publications such as *The Australian*. Sadly, there is no special content that has been prepared for the Web site. The site contains no recently published material, and is not regularly updated. Hence, the lack of regular updates, and the lack of recently published material dealing with recent events, mean that this is not strictly journalism as it was defined in Chapter 1. The site does, however, serve as an archive of journalism from the past. Graham is a professional journalist, producing material for traditional media through traditional processes. His site merely contains personally produced legacy content.

It is proposed that the lack of amateur journalism is a result of several factors. The most significant factor, as documented in the propositions of this thesis, is that news production is
demanding in terms of skill, time and resources. It is a specialised industry in its own right. Journalists are perceived by themselves, and the general public, as newsworkers who produce news as a job.

It is also proposed that home pages and self-publishing on the Internet have developed their own cultural norms relating to accepted content styles and forms. This form of content essentially emphasises "soft" or personal content.

5.6 Operation of News Feeds

Generally, it would seem that news as it is currently presented on the Web offers little advantages in terms of quality, diversity or timing. The major exception would seem to be the provision of breaking news. As Methodology 1 has noted, breaking news and regular updates are essentially products of external organisations, namely, Australia's major news agencies. A proper analysis of the overall structure of online news thus requires these agencies to be studied as news producers in their own right.

The major suppliers of stories for regular updates and breaking news on Web sites are Australian Associated Press (AAP) and Reuters. Given their production of so much news, and the ability to deliver such material across the Web, it would be possible for both of these organisations to bypass traditional news Web sites and deliver their content directly to consumers. In reality, this does not happen. The Web site for AAP is merely an online corporate brochure, devoid of any daily news content. Despite the presence of Reuters offices and infrastructure in Australia, this organisation does not even feature a dedicated Australian Web site. Some general content of a global nature, such as a few current headlines for world news, is provided on their international Web site, but this is not a generally informative news service for the general public.
No effective content is available for free inspection, but it would seem that neither of these major services is interested in offering direct content to consumers for subscription. No indication of a suitable product or marketing strategy could be found in an inspection of both sites.

The American online news service 7am.com offers the provision of international, and even Australian news in the form of a “news ticker” that users and operators of home pages can install on their home pages for free. Resembling an advertising banner, it constantly circulates headlines from news feeds and Australian newspapers. Users can click the “ticker” for more substantial coverage from the 7am.com Web site. One regional Australian newspaper offers world news using a feed from 7am.com site, but the limitations of this service are obvious. The news it supplies is derived largely from Australian Web sites, and coverage is not as substantial as the material available from AAP and Reuters.

Thus, another potential alternative to previous mechanisms of news delivery has not been fulfilled in practice on the Web.

5.7 Provision of Special Content

Australia’s large news-based Web sites (ABC Online, Sydney Morning Herald, news.com.au, Ninemsn) offer limited forms of specialised content that are generated exclusively for the Web site. Apart from the provision of breaking news at a frequency that cannot be matched by print journalism, this represents one of the few other potential advantages of the Web as a delivery system for news.

However, the supply of special content on the Web has been limited. Such content is not produced every day, and seems to be limited to a few stories of major importance. Examples include long-term continuing news stories such as the 2000 coup in Fiji or the international cricket match-fixing scandal. Material that is included in these sections is mostly of an archival
form, where legacy content relating to particular issue is aggregated for easy inspection. These sites will be introduced with some short, textual pieces that serve as introductions and anchors to the subject of the special section.

Another common feature of special content is the inclusion of short overviews of a location that are usually not very informative. If a country is plagued by civil disruptions, the special section will probably feature its flag, a stylised map and a few general geographical and demographic statistics. This information usually resembles a brief entry culled from a fact book. If the story has extended over a long period, a timeline listing key events in its development could be added. Hyperlinks to Web sites that are relevant to the story could also be included, such as the home pages for government departments or organisations mentioned.

Occasionally, special content sections will supply written material, graphics or multimedia that seems to be original content, and is produced in a format that seems to have no ostensive links to the site’s parent company. A newspaper-related Web site that offers video footage of an event that has apparently appeared nowhere else is a novel development for Web-based news delivery. However, such content is relatively rare, even by the already rare frequency of special content itself.

5.8 Chat

The Internet is arguably used in its most truly interactive form when chat forums are hosted. These can allow users to interact with journalists, hosted guests, and each other. A common form that is used on some Web sites (Ninemsn and to a lesser extent news.com.au) is the staging of a moderated forum featuring a guest. These events take place at pre-advertised times. Users log into the site and send questions to a guest, who could be a celebrity or a journalist. A moderator also acts as an intermediary between users and the guest, posting messages relating to the conduct of the forum, or selecting questions for the guest to answer. These questions are then answered in real-time by the guest, and a transcript of the session is gradually produced as
the session proceeds. At the pre-determined end of the session, which typically takes place over a period of around one hour, real-time interaction ends and an archived transcript of the session is stored on the site.

Alternatively, sites may host near real-time chat sessions between their users that resembles the operation of Usenet newsgroups. Users will log on at random intervals to these continuous forums, reading the pool of recent messages and adding others. Sites may or may not elect to monitor or edit the contents of these forums. This format has been adopted on Ninemsn, ABC Online and the Sydney Morning Herald. The Macpherson news site also uses this format.

It is also possible to run unmoderated chat forums that operate in real-time, the structure of discussions resembling a conversation. Ninemsn has also run forums in this format.

In theory, the provision of these chat forums could be an attractive means for amateur journalists to publish their content online. The forums are hosted by Web sites linked to credible, high-profile news organisations, and user levels on these Web sites is known to be high. However these forums do not seem to be used as delivery systems for original news reporting or the supply of previously unreported facts.

It could also be possible for Web sites to attempt to integrate their chat forums, or other forms of interactivity, into their news production and delivery processes, to produce new forms of journalism or elevate content supplied through alternative sources to a comparable level of credibility to traditional news. In practice, the operation of chat forums seems to be highly segregated. It seems to have essentially no link to the delivery or the production of news.

5.9 Online Polls

One interactive feature that can be operated in a straightforward format on a Web site is a simple online poll. This involves a site posing a simple Yes/No question that normally relates to
a newsworthy issue. Users are invited to click an icon to vote on the issue. Responses to the question are tallied and presented on the site. Two sites (Ninemsn and the Sydney Morning Herald) run a poll every day, three others (The Murray Pioneer, The Advocate, YPCT Online) operate them on a weekly or monthly basis.

By definition, the potential impact of such a simple feedback mechanism is limited, but the results of such polls seem to be reasonably effective. Sites do operate them regularly, and participation in these polls appears to be relatively high on Ninemsn, which regularly attracts several thousand responses to a single poll.

5.10 Relationship with the Theoretical Model

It is appropriate to examine how this collected data relates to the theoretical framework of Chapter 3. The precise elements of the theoretical model constructed for the overall operation of Internet-based news will now be re-stated, with observations on its relationship to the data.

Real-Time Publishing

Clearly, this rarely happens on most Web sites. The frequency of publication is mostly tied to the frequency of the legacy product, and most legacy products do not publish news at rapid intervals. Data for this is documented in the “Frequency” section of this chapter. The experiments in Web site “racing” reveal that when real-time publishing is carried out by large Web sites, it is mostly done effectively, but the performance of a given site will vary with the characteristics of particular stories. This is a result of the mechanics involved in collecting stories and transferring them to the Web.

Asynchronous Delivery

This is essentially fulfilled by every site examined. No site was ever devoid of content. It is fair to say that an Internet user could retrieve relatively recent content at any time. The frequency of the addition of new content and the lifespan of earlier content vary between sites.
Multimedia Content

The delivery of multimedia content is documented in the “Multimedia Content” section of this chapter. As this section remarked, the overall use of multimedia is limited. Surprisingly, the use of multimedia on the Internet does not precisely relate to the use of multimedia by the parent organisation.

Large Quantities of Content

This theoretical proposition stated that Web sites could elect to publish more material on the Web than in a conventional media product, owing to the removal of spatial or temporal constraints in the conventional media product. In practice, content that appears on these sites is generally less than what appears in legacy products. The delivery of special content on some sites does not produce any overall increase in the total amount of Web content when compared to the legacy product. Later chapters will explore this significant result in greater detail.

Archives

The provision of archives is documented in the “Archives” section of this chapter. Archives are carried by many sites, and this is one of the advantages of the Internet that seems to be fulfilled in practice by more sites than most other proposed advantages.

Geographical Scope

The theoretical framework observes that any Web site is potentially accessible to a geographically dispersed audience. In practice, there is no reason to doubt this possibility. However, an external inspection of Web sites does not allow this to be confirmed. There is no way to tell if these sites are being read outside of the geographical region served by their parent organisation. Furthermore, it is not clear that most site operators are seeking to achieve this.
Specialised News

Although the thesis is focused on general news for reasons of logistics and practicality, it is clear that specialised news catering to niche audiences does exist. The publication Space Daily is explored in this thesis as an example of this.

Self-publishing and opinion diversity

As documented in the “Amateur Publishing” section of this chapter, self-publishing of news appears to be extremely minimal. Opinion diversity seems to be fulfilled through the publication of multiple sources of news with different ownership structures, and the existence of a few Web sites that are ostensibly focused on offering news and opinions that is different from most other online publications.

Interactivity

Interactivity seems to be relatively common, if taken at its most basic definition of offering feedback through email. Some sites offer more sophisticated options. Sections in this chapter dealing with Feedback, Personalised News, Online Chat and Polls, are relevant.

The sub-categories of interactivity proposed by Heeter (1989) that were considered relevant are hereby assessed.

Effort users must exert: No Web site is totally passive. Users must generally select stories and content from indexes by clicking hyperlinks. Users must exert more effort for specialised functions such as archives. This criterion is fulfilled by the mechanics of the Web itself, and the design of the news sites.

Responsiveness of the user: Although users must exert effort, it is clear that the overall level of responsiveness is not very sophisticated. A mere mouse click to draw content from a server is not a sophisticated level of response under this criterion. Responsiveness increases when feedback or chat is used. Most online polling is not very responsive, as it is simple Yes/No
voting. Personalised news is rare, but it is arguably important for its relatively sophisticated level of responsiveness in the construction of a user profile.

**Ease of Adding Information:** Generally, it would seem that the users of most Web sites cannot add information to the site in any capacity. Letters to the editor sent by email are published on some sites, but unmoderated chat forums are arguably the easiest way of adding information. This is not a feature of most of these sites.

**Facilitation of Interpersonal Communications:** In practice, the only feature of any Web site that is compatible with this criterion is chat. It is not featured on most sites. Where it exists, chat is usually reasonably easy to use.

**New News Values and Agendas**

An inspection of the contents of these sites suggests that no new news values have emerged. Web content is mostly legacy content. Hence, traditional news values that were used to generate this content are imported with it. Similarly, the failure to generate any changes in news values or news suggests that there is no change in agendas propagated by the media. Special content for the Web is generally too infrequent and too limited to inform any conclusions on the development of new news values or agendas in this material.

**Revenue Streams**

This proposition is documented in the Revenue Models section of this chapter. Mings and White (2000) divide revenue into four distinct categories. Commentary on these will now be presented.

**Subscription:** This revenue stream is extremely rare.

**Advertising:** This is the most common form of revenue. Its application on Web sites where advertising appears is relatively consistent. Some legacy newspapers place their classified advertisements on the Web.

**Transactional:** This is a relatively uncommon revenue stream.
Bundled: This happens in some cases where a traditional media company owns an Internet Service Provider, or where a Web site bundles news with other forms of content.

Additional information on the fulfillment of this theoretical model will be presented in later chapters, as each site documented in this chapter is examined in greater detail, and perceptions of the Internet are explored from the perspective of individual Web site operators.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter has begun the process of answering question R1. At this stage in the analysis, overall perceptions are fairly generic, owing to the fact that I have provided a broad overview of Web-based news in Australia that does not examine any specific site in detail.

This overview suggests that the Internet has transformed the overall model of news delivery to only a minor extent, if at all. The entities creating news-based content for the Internet are mostly the same ones who create content for traditional media. Web-based news products are branded using the same titles as non-Internet products, and present much of the same material as these products.

Stories on the Web mostly resemble newspaper reports. They are composed of text, with a few illustrations. Only four sites without ties to a conventional media organisation could be found. Their methods of supplying content appear to have no significant differences from the mechanics of any other news-based Web site.

The use of interactivity as a means of transforming the journalistic process appears to be minimal at best, as no examples were detected in the data presented in this chapter. Few sites offer any form of chat or polling. Where interactivity exists, it appears to be segregated from any potential interaction or influence on journalism.
One of the most innovative processes that has appeared on news-based Web sites is the supply of breaking news in a rapid format. However, this already occurs in broadcast news. The reliance of these services on the same news feeds that supply broadcast news suggests that the result is not substantially different.

The major impact would seem to be the fact that minor regional publications could be accessible to a wide geographical area. However, the contents of these sites contain no content that suggests they are seeking to attract readers from outside the distribution area for their legacy products.

More information relating to question R1 will be presented in subsequent chapters as individual sites are examined in greater detail.
Chapter Six

Operation of the “Big Four” Web Sites and News Feeds

Chapter Five provided an inventory of the principal sources of Web-based news sites in Australia and their general features.

Chapter Six analyses these Web sites in more detail, through the use of closer inspections from Methodology 1 and interviews with representatives of these sites from Methodology 3.

This chapter will focus on the “Big Four” Australian Web sites for the delivery of news: ABC Online, Ninemsn, news.com.au and the Sydney Morning Herald as a representative of Fairfax news sites.

These sites are tied to very large parent media organisations, and publish large quantities of high-quality content with broad geographic appeal. They also attract larger numbers of Internet users than other news sites. Surveys such as a September 1999 study by the Australian survey organisation Top100.com.au revealed that these “Big Four” sites all attracted substantially more hits than any other dedicated news sites in the country.

This chapter will also address the utilisation of news feeds by these sites. Organisations such as AAP are major sources of news, and the internal mechanics of news feed organisations directly affects the way content is presented on the “Big Four” sites.

Chapter Five addressed research question R1 by surveying Web sites from an external perspective. It revealed little change in the overall model of news delivery on the Internet. This chapter examines these major Web sites from an internal perspective through interviews with
their staff to further document the delivery model, and reveal reasons why so little change is visible from an external perspective.

Closer examination of the contents of these sites, and examinations of the internal operations of the sites will also provide answers to question R2. The style of journalism used on these Web sites will also be examined.

6.1 ABC Online

Peer review through interviews in Methodology 3 suggests that this Web site is regarded by other Web site personnel as the best news Web site in Australia. *ABC Online* is praised for the quality and scope of material supplied by its parent organisation, the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, and the ability of its developers to transfer and supply this content on the Web.

The *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* is a government-owned organisation that produces and broadcasts radio and television programming. The ABC does not accept commercial advertising and is supported through taxpayer funding. It is worth noting that although certain ABC ventures are involved in publishing books and journals, the ABC does not supply regular news in a printed format.

*ABC Online* has a clean, professional design to its layout, content and navigation. Its opening page normally features a single news-related image, a few headlines, and indexes to categories dealing with specific forms of news, such as world news and local news. This broad-ranging geographical scope is highly unique to *ABC Online*, which supplies ample quantities of world news, national news, and regional news from 48 locations around Australia where ABC journalists are based.

This geographical scope, which is both wide and detailed in terms of covering specific areas, is a result of the ABC’s own highly developed infrastructure for collecting news. Under the
predominant Web delivery model of using legacy content, this suggests that ABC Online can attribute much of its quality to the vast pool of legacy content it can use.

ABC Online is a very large site that contains all manner of material relating to ABC programming, products and the operations of the ABC itself. For logistical reasons, as well as remaining within the focus of the research questions, this thesis will focus exclusively on the news-related sections, which essentially dominate the site.

Navigating through news content on ABC Online is a precise and systematic process. The vast quantities of material available on the site is categorised into indexing formats. This is a form of classification and navigation that is commonplace on most well-designed Web sites, news-related or otherwise.

The most significant element of news delivery on ABC Online is that content is primarily delivered as text. This represents an unusual trend for the ABC in general, given its almost exclusive focus on audio and video delivery.

Multimedia content is present, but its layout and total quantity suggest that the site does not emphasise this as the primary feature of the site.

6.1.1 Internal Operations

Robert Johnson, a manager at ABC Online, was interviewed by email to gain a greater understanding of the site.

ABC Online is operated by a separate team of personnel employed specifically for this purpose. The site is maintained from office premises in Brisbane. The site employs 18 journalists. Johnson claimed he decided to focus on recruiting journalists so as to gain an "editorial underpinning" to every task. In practice, some of the journalists now perform tasks that are
mainly related to Web development instead of reporting. But Johnson felt that their background
results in an editorial approach to factors such as design.

*ABC Online* wished to avoid the creation of a demarcation between journalism production and
Web development. Even a technical co-ordinator who has been recruited to expand video
content on the site was hired from a mainstream news television background.

News content delivered by *ABC Online* is essentially legacy content. Johnson stated that "there
is virtually no primary newsgathering undertaken" by *ABC Online*. The Web site is maintained
and updated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with work routines focused on the repackaging of
content generated by ABC radio and television reporters. Two editorial conferences are held
daily to examine news stories and select overall content options.

Despite the continuous coverage provided by the site, updates are less frequent during late night
hours, when ABC reporters are not engaged in much domestic newsgathering. The site can,
however, respond to events overseas quite rapidly.

*ABC Online* has unrestricted access to the ABC’s existing news computer system, known as
*Basys*. This system serves as a storage and distribution system for content generated by ABC
reports for legacy broadcast products. Selection of content is made by the Online team
themselves, who are able to extract material from this system as soon as it is filed. One
application that is heavily used is *ABCWire*, which is used to transfer news content interstate.

Despite the general editorial independence of the online team, ABC regional journalists seem to
be specifically empowered to select content for the Web site and supply it. Johnson claimed
that regional journalists typically file a selection of their best stories for inclusion on the
regional news sections of the site. In most cases, fewer than three stories per day are filed from
a regional location. Certain active regions can occasionally generate as many as eight stories
per day.
"The extent to which regional journalists involve themselves in the Web site is really defined by the individual journalist," explained Johnson. The overall strategy advocated by the online team is to ensure that content submission does not strain their resources. Johnson observed that many regional news “teams” consist of a single person, who must handle various responsibilities.

Although most content on the site is from legacy sources, ABC Online does have responsibility for some of its online reporting, and even generates content that feeds back into other delivery channels for the ABC. The Web team’s overnight shift provides emergency services coverage for the entire organisation. This involves making telephone calls to major police, fire and ambulance services around the country. Material collected by the team is transferred to the Basys computer system. In the event of a major event occurring in Australia during the overnight shift, the Web team has the responsibility for mobilising radio and television coverage.

6.1.2 Production Technicalities and Content Adaptation

The transfer of legacy content from what is primarily a broadcast product into a text-based form is potentially difficult. Technical mechanisms within the production of ABC legacy content ease some of the potential problems.

Johnson noted that extensive use is made of scripts that are prepared for spoken broadcasts, whether they are narration by news readers, voice-overs by reporters or actuality recordings. This material is accessed through Basys. This generally provides enough material for written stories, but Johnson claimed that some radio stories are found to be too short to be adapted directly, without supplemental research.

Overall, the team perceived that “large wads of text” are not appropriate for Web-based news delivery, leading to an emphasis on the brevity of content. Johnson claimed that quality control
of this material is problematic, as these scripts are not designed to be published in a Web-based format. Journalistic adaptation of the material is required.

The ABC is increasing its supply of audio and video content on the site, a move that Johnson felt is logical when the nature of ABC legacy content is considered.

A brief review of technical production matters is appropriate, given the scope of operation of the site. ABC Online uses a combination of in-house production systems. WebNews, developed by the Information Technology department of ABC, is used to transfer stories straight from the Basys computer system into an HTML format with virtually no requirement for HTML coding skills. As this allows the fast transfer of stories through largely automatic means, this system is used to publish Breaking News on the site.

Another production system developed by ABC Multimedia, nicknamed Kenny, is used to add images and multimedia elements to certain stories. Raw material from Basys is transferred into Kenny, where this extra material is added. Kenny requires slightly more knowledge of HTML than WebNews, but Johnson claimed that it can be used effectively by personnel with few coding skills.

Breaking stories can be transferred onto the Web site within minutes of their delivery to Basys, and the semi-direct transfer is the most common method of producing breaking news for the site. However, Johnson stated that in some cases, the Web team has written stories by watching a live broadcast of a media conference.

6.1.3 Decentralised Production

The production of content for ABC Online faces an organisational dilemma. The ABC deploys its reporters and broadcast nodes across the nation, yet production of its Web site is heavily centralised. This poses a potential dilemma in the supply of content for a national, as well as specific regional audiences.
This issue is partially addressed through the role of regional journalists in selecting content that they feel is most appropriate, given their proximity to local issues and news values. Johnson claimed that the active participation of regional reporters in this process has been somewhat minimal in the past, although awareness the opportunity to participate in active content selection and filing has increased during 2000. Some regional journalists call the Web team to ask if they can file extra material for the site, but Johnson admitted that this level of enthusiasm is not widespread.

*ABC Online* has embarked on a trial project to devolve responsibility for the production of certain state news sections back to the states concerned. The trial is taking place in Victoria, Tasmania, Queensland and South Australia. At the time of study, results from this trial were still being evaluated, but Johnson claimed that the trial had identified production problems that would need to be addressed. Johnson believed that a greater level of decentralisation at a state-based level is a goal that *ABC Online* will work towards in the future, in the interests of providing conventional journalists a greater level of engagement with the Web, and providing better newsworthiness for stories.

### 6.1.4 Summary of ABC Online

The success of *ABC Online* seems to be a result of technical and organisational factors. The availability of vast quantities of legacy content, the creation of an appropriate division to produce the Web site, and a culture of enforcing journalistic professionalism with the online content seem to be major factors that have contributed to its high standard. Despite its resources, it is noteworthy that the site is essentially just a delivery system for legacy content in a modified format. The active participation of the Web team in primary newsgathering for emergency services during the night is a minor role in the overall organisation, but it is most exceptional for any Web team to contribute material back to its parent organisation.
6.2 Ninemsn

The Ninemsn Web site was created as a joint venture between the Microsoft Corporation, the world's largest supplier of computer software, and Publishing and Broadcasting Limited (PBL), owners of the high-profile Nine television network. Microsoft has become active in the field of online publishing, and has created a number of regionally focused general information portals around the world. These sites provide a variety of content, ranging from indexes, shopping, chat, email (using the Microsoft-owned Hotmail service) and news. Most of these sites are assembled in partnership with legacy content providers who supply news content. In Australia, PBL is the regional development partner. The Nine Network is the primary source of news generation within PBL, and this content is exclusively produced for television. Again, there is no legacy source of regular print news.

The overall design of Ninemsn is consistent with other Microsoft-related portals in other locations such as the Microsoft Network in the USA. The use of white backgrounds, blue borders, index-style headlines and a single news-related image has some design elements in common with ABC Online, but the site is not as specifically focused on news.

The delivery of news on Ninemsn is not as elaborate as ABC Online, although there are still common design elements. Stories are presented in a mainly text-oriented format, and are of a comparable style and length to ABC Online content. Similar categories for news organisation, including national news, world news and sport, are used to organise content. Headlines that are hyperlinked to full stories are also included. Surprisingly, Ninemsn does not offer any more precise form of geographical focus within Australia than its national news section. There is no attempt to focus news sections on states or regions.

There is a minimal use of graphics in the news section. Some multimedia content is included, which is mostly legacy news broadcasts from the Nine Network, but this is limited. Audio content is sometimes included.
Content for the news section is mostly generated through a story feed from the news agency AAP. This results in a news product that is regarded as inferior to other members of the "Big Four", according to peer review.

Jane O'Connell, News Director at Ninemsn, was interviewed. Production of news at Ninemsn, and most of the other content featured on this Web site, is concentrated in a single building in Sydney.

The site has one dedicated news producer, who manages news content. The main source of news is a semi-continuous feed from AAP which supplies text-based content. AAP supplies between 60 and 70 stories every 90 minutes, which is automatically transferred and updated on the Ninemsn site. O'Connell regarded this as a "hands free" system from the perspective of the site production team in Sydney. This AAP feed is supplied throughout the day, every day, meaning that Ninemsn's news updating is essentially constant. This automatic system means that the Web team does not staff its news desk at night.

Additional content for the site can be produced by the news section in Sydney if it is deemed necessary. This usually occurs with major news stories. Multimedia content will be sourced from the Nine Network, which is constantly creating material through the deployment of news crews throughout the day and night. Caution is exercised with the use of footage that is not domestically produced by the Nine Network, as some of it may not be licensed for use on the Web site. This means that multimedia footage is primarily concentrated on domestic news.

In the event of a major breaking story, updates would be expected to appear quickly through the news feed. Staffing of the news desk in the early morning would enable Ninemsn to add other content by 7:00 AM.

An interesting example of the way Ninemsn handled a major story without disrupting its highly stylised method of operation was the 2000 Fiji coup. By the 30th of May 2000, with the coup crisis at its height, Channel Nine had deployed a reporter in Suva who was filing stories for
Nine news. These stories were stored in a video format on the Ninemsn Web site, in a short archival grouping. However, regular coverage of events in Fiji was still being made on the Ninemsn site from AAP reports, printed as ordinary text. There was no attempt to transcribe or alter the legacy content from either source.

For a very short period in the earliest stage of its operation, Ninemsn employed a small number of journalists who were tasked with generating original news for the Web site. These staff were eventually dismissed, and the AAP news feed was introduced as the primary method of news generation. O'Connell was unwilling to discuss this phase of the operation of the Web site. However, it seems likely that the expenses of employing these extra staff were higher than the use of a news feed.

The operation of Ninemsn’s news delivery system is relatively streamlined, given the fact that most responsibility for its supply has been outsourced to a major news agency. O'Connell defended this decision, claiming that the quality of the material thus delivered, and its frequency of refreshment on the sites, negates any concerns over the lack of original production.

The Nine Network is regarded as the most prominent source of news production amongst Australia’s commercial television broadcasters, yet its contribution of news to a site that is ostensibly linked to it is surprisingly minimal. The logistical demands of adapting this content to the site on a regular basis would seem to be too much for the resources that have been allocated to Ninemsn.

Although news production is not as elaborate as at ABC Online or other members of the “Big Four”, the site is still very comprehensive in its ability to supply content on local and international news.
6.3 The Sydney Morning Herald

*The Sydney Morning Herald* is reviewed in detail as a representative example of a major John Fairfax Ltd. news site. The only other major Fairfax site dealing with general news is *The Age Online*, a derivative of the Melbourne-based daily newspaper. However, it was difficult to study *The Age Online* in detail, as the researcher is geographically removed from its targeted distribution base, and was refused access to its Web team. Conversely, the *Sydney Morning Herald* granted an interview with a representative of its Web team, and was easier to study for its overall news relevance, given the fact that the researcher lives in Sydney.

Fairfax is primarily involved in newspaper publishing, and owns no broadcast outlets. *The Sydney Morning Herald* has a circulation of 259,000 for its printed version (Gee 2000). Its principal geographical target, metropolitan Sydney, has a population of approximately 3.2 million people (1996 Census).

The *Sydney Morning Herald*’s design is as clean and professional as any other major Web site, but the overall layout seems to more closely resemble that of a traditional newspaper than *ABC Online* or *Ninemsn*. This could be due to the nature of the legacy content provider. The front page includes more photographs and more written text than *Ninemsn* or *ABC Online*.

However, a user who clicks through to specific news sections will find a collection of clickable headlines and summaries, an index format that is very similar to these sites. News is aggregated in a typical collection of groups such as national news, world news and sport. Although it is not precisely identical, similar design principles are found on *The Age Online*.

*The Sydney Morning Herald* features large quantities of text-related content that is essentially legacy content from the newspaper. However, it also features multimedia content that clearly has no relationship to the legacy provider.
It should be noted that Fairfax has developed a general services Web portal called F2 that attempts to mimic some of the functions of the Ninemsn site, including indexes of services and the provision of email. Links are provided on this site to all Fairfax news sites, and links to F2 services are also provided on each Fairfax news site in turn. However, the overall Fairfax Web strategy preserves its newspaper-related Web sites as distinct entities.

Carlos Monterio, Deputy Night Editor for the Sydney Morning Herald site, was interviewed.

The Sydney Morning Herald Web team is entirely located on the same floor of the Sydney offices of Fairfax as the normal journalistic team of the print version. According to Monterio, this close physical integration is a deliberate strategy that is designed to produce synergy and close interaction between the teams. Other Fairfax sites on the F2 network are located in the former Sydney casino site, but these have no operational connection to news production.

Approximately 12 people are on duty at the site at any given moment, and work on the site is performed continuously throughout the day.

Around 40% of the news stories that appear in the paper apparently are published on the Web site. Nevertheless, Monterio claimed that some news is tailored to appeal to their perceived audience and provide a distinct service from the newspaper. Gossipy stories such as "Madonna has had a baby" are emphasised. "The sort of thing that people like to discuss when they are standing around the water cooler". Monterio claimed that this is different from tabloid journalism, but the difference is arguably rather thin.

Another interview conducted by an American journalist with Tom Burton, editor of the site, confirms this editorial policy: "Our readers are not all that interested in the World Trade Organization (sic). ...They’re much more interested in Tom Cruise" (Benning 2000).

Editors for the site start in the early morning, examining news feed stories that happen outside of the newspaper’s production schedule. This is strongly influenced by events that happen
overseas when it is night in Australia. As an example of the adaptation of this content, Monterio
cited the crash of a Concorde airliner in Paris on July 26, 2000. The crash occurred on this day
at approximately 2:00 AM Sydney time. News agencies such as AAP had circulated the story
by 4:00 AM Sydney time, and a story on the crash was posted to the *Sydney Morning Herald*
Web site by 6:00 AM. The site continued to provide running updates on the story throughout
the day, yet the printed version of the newspaper contained no news of the event.

The principal preparation of the site's legacy content occurs during the night shift. The updating
of content on the site closely parallels the timing of editorial production for the print version.
The first edition of the legacy print version is prepared at approximately 9:00 PM every night.
This legacy content is normally rendered on the Web site by 12:30 AM that night, but
production of the Web version can sometimes take until 1:30 AM or 2:00 AM. If developing
news appears between the preparation of the print version and the layout of the Web site, it will
be added to the Web site. This frequently occurs with overseas sports stories. The selection of
legacy content for the Web site is made by the Web team, under the guidance of special Web
editors. The Web site also reports independently to the Fairfax managerial board.

6.3.1 Special Content

In 2000, about 70% of the site was legacy content and 30% was specialised content for the Web
site. This growth in the use of specialised content for the Web site represents a growing priority
for the Web team. According to Monterio, less than 10% of the site was legacy content in 1999.

The site has two full-time dedicated content providers to produce additional material. Much of
this content is multimedia, produced by small teams who visit newsworthy events with audio
recorders and video cameras. Deployment of these multimedia crews is done in co-ordination
with the main news editors for the paper, who plan the deployment of reporters. Sometimes
they will attend the same events. Sometimes, the Web crews will cover events that are not
being reported in the paper. A strong factor motivating the selection of these stories is their
potential for effective coverage in multimedia. Examples of such stories include the Olympic Arts Festival and the exhibition of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Sydney. The site can elect to publish audio clips, video footage, still images, or “slide shows”, which are successions of still images circulated with an audio background. Occasionally, these stories will be accompanied by specially prepared text.

The Web team also prepares sub-sites that cover issues or major stories. These sections are mostly aggregations of Herald stories on these issues, with minor textual overviews, illustrations or timelines. Examples of news stories that have been deemed worthy of sub-sites include: the 2000 coup in Fiji, the Childers backpacker hostel fire in Queensland, organ donation, the US Presidential election, the prospect of a second Sydney airport at Badgerys Creek, and the Elian Gonzalez custody battle between Cuba and the USA.

The mix between local and international events is fairly even, but all could be classified as “developing news” or “continuing news” under the classification system outlined by Tuchman (1978) in Chapter 2.

6.3.2 Integration with News Teams

For the most part, the supply of legacy content for the Web site requires minimal interaction or interference with most journalists. Representatives of the Web team attend general editorial meetings, but this is mainly for the purpose of understanding what legacy reporters are about to produce.

A recent development, begun in mid-2000, was the trial of a new and somewhat radical procedure for integrating legacy journalists with the Web team. Editors for the Web site would sit at the paper’s news desk and intensively monitor content as it was filed. This enabled some stories to be published as breaking news flashes on the home page.
According to Monterio, most print journalists are not aware of how the Web can be used for breaking news, and the trial was designed to educate traditional reporters about this system. On an average of once per day, a reporter will file a 6 to 8 paragraph story for the site in a breaking news format.

Mostly, though, breaking news on the site is still heavily dependent on AAP news feeds. Unlike NineMSN, this is not an automatic process. Stories from news feeds must be manually transferred to the site. A breaking news editor selects the stories and runs them. The breaking news section is normally updated every half hour, but sometimes it can take two hours for new stories to appear if there is nothing much happening. Stories in the Breaking News section are updated between 7 AM to 8 PM on weekdays.

Although the Web team is expanding its use of breaking stories, updated material and special content, one limitation on content does exist. Monterio claimed that in the event a reporter from the conventional newspaper generated a very exclusive news story, the Web team would not post it immediately to the site. It would be published first in the print version. However, if a member of the online news team generated an exclusive story, it would be placed online with no hesitation.

Generally, little content generated by the Web team feeds back to the print version. The only situation where this routinely occurs is in sports reporting. Monterio stated that the level of feedback was scheduled to increase during the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, when members of the Web team would be deliberately sent to venues where no Herald print reporters appeared. The content they generated would be used on both the Web site and the print version.

6.3.3 Summary of the Sydney Morning Herald

Overall, the Sydney Morning Herald represents an excellent use of the Web as a delivery system for news. The formation of a separate Web team that is equipped with appropriate resources has clearly played a strong role in its success. The supply of a large stream of legacy
content from a credible parent organisation is also significant. It is interesting to observe the way that the Web team has branched into the delivery of multimedia, when such content is not found in any form of legacy content.

6.4 News.com.au

The news.com.au site is a derivative of News Limited, publishers of several newspapers around Australia, including the prominent national daily The Australian. News Limited is a major supplier of news and general media products on an international scale. Despite this, the legacy ties of news.com.au are exclusively linked to Australian newspapers. The print version of The Australian has a circulation of 131,500 (Gee 2000). Other publications include the New South Wales-based Daily Telegraph, with a circulation of 432,488 (Gee 2000).

News.com.au represents an unusual strategy for a major news provider. It is an aggregated supplier of content from most Australian newspapers owned by News Limited. Although legacy content from specific newspapers can be found on the site, the overall strategy of the site presents content with little emphasis on a specific legacy source. There has been essentially no attempt to provide totally separate sites and development teams for different newspapers, as Fairfax has done.

Content on the site conforms to many of the elements found in other Big Four sites. News is primarily supplied in a text-based form. The use of illustrations is somewhat minimal. News is organised into predictable categories such as world news, national news, and state-based news. The provision of these national and local categories is a reflection of the wide distribution of News Limited newspapers around the country, which provides a source of legacy content.
News stories are reached through an indexing system similar to other major news sites. The stories are mostly derived from News Limited newspapers, and a small graphical depiction of the masthead of the parent newspaper appears on each legacy story published on the site.

Breaking news is also provided on the site, and again, the site is heavily dependent on content from news agencies such as AAP.

Elsewhere on the site, selections of legacy content that are grouped according to specific newspapers can be found, but the organisation and navigation within the Web site deemphasises these sections.

Mark Bruer, director of news.com.au, was interviewed. All production of news on the site is performed from offices in Sydney, where a separate team of journalists and other personnel works exclusively on the Web site.

Bruer claims that a deliberate strategy was made by News Limited to create an aggregated content site for all of its newspapers, as it was believed that this would have a greater appeal to Internet users. He acknowledges that the strategy is unusual by comparison to other major news sites. "The thinking behind that decision was that there were a lot of newspaper Web sites, and we thought we could offer something different by aggregating the best content". This decision to produce a general news sites that generally mixes content from different legacy sources means that the site is not ostensibly an online derivative of any specific paper. This, and other factors, has created tensions between legacy content teams and the producers of the Web site. Bruer was more frank about these problems than other people interviewed for this thesis.

Confusion and concerns have appeared within News Limited over the specific role of the news.com.au Web site and the relationship between the Web team and legacy content staff. According to Bruer, the exact future of the Web site and its links to traditional news teams is still not entirely resolved. Decisions over content for most parts of the Web site is handled by
the Web team, but control over sections of the site that are aimed at duplicating content from specific paper is still invested in the editors of these newspapers.

The dual focusing of responsibility is another unusual aspect of the management of news.com.au. Unlike the close integration between Web teams and traditional reporters at The Sydney Morning Herald, no attempts have been made at News Limited to generally educate reporters in new work practices for the benefit of the Web site.

The selection of content for the general news sections of the site is the responsibility of an editorial team that operates independently of these newspapers. Bruer claims that the overall editorial policy for these news sections is to select the best content that can be found, regardless of its point of origin. This means that content can be selected from a News Limited newspaper, or external sources such as AAP. There is no explicit reason why news for the “national” section of the site would automatically be selected from the national newspaper, The Australian, or any similar rules for selecting content for New South Wales from The Daily Telegraph.

However, Bruer claims that the specialised geographical focus of specific newspapers does produce a relationship in the overall transfer of stories to areas of the Web site with similar geographical definitions.

Although content is still primarily supplied in an aggregated format, Bruer claims that the eventual goal is to strengthen the individual identities of each newspaper on the Web site, and create distinct Web sites for each newspaper. However, news.com.au will still provide aggregated content. As with ABC Online, Bruer observes that local editors would have a better sense of local newsworthiness for stories than a team that is exclusively based in Sydney. This is one reason why news.com.au is also considering the devolution of responsibility for content in the State News sections of the site to News Limited newspaper editors in different states. The news.com.au site is operated by a total of 19 staff, of whom 13 are journalists. The site is maintained 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In keeping with overall trends, staff numbers are
smaller at night than during the day. At its peak of operations during normal office hours, 5 or 6 staff are on duty. Between 8 PM and 5 AM, the site is staffed by only two people.

In a routine that is similar to the Sydney Morning Herald’s Web site, content from News Limited newspapers is uploaded to their dedicated sections at 2:00 AM, before the newspapers have generally appeared in circulation.

The breaking news sections of the Web site are updated 24 hours a day in a relatively constant routine, but Bruer observes that updates are not as extensive or frequent during the early hours of the morning. Nevertheless, journalists who are on duty at night would follow up a major story if it broke during their shift. News.com.au has access to news services such as AAP, but content from these services is never placed on the Web site in an unmediated form. Stories are constantly monitored and selected by editors. Sometimes, news feed material will be rewritten or complemented with other material to form new stories.

Original content for the Web site is generated regularly by news.com.au staff, but this content represents a minimal proportion of the total material on the site. Bruer observed that one advantage of generating independent content is that the site can supply material at a higher frequency than the daily routines of newspaper content. Original content can be aggregated text stories that have been sourced from news feeds or newspapers. However, the site also produces original multimedia content.

Despite the vast resources available to News Limited on an international scope, news.com.au has no access to legacy multimedia content. Approximately 2 or 3 multimedia files are posted to the site every day. Examples of this content include video footage of Nelson Mandela speaking in Sydney, or an audio interview with an aviation safety expert after the crash of an aircraft. The production personnel for these multimedia files frequently attend events that are unattended by reporters from News Limited newspapers. However, the production of this material is limited by the rather small resources that have been committed to multimedia production by news.com.au, and the geographical location of these personnel in Sydney. For
reasons of ease of production and reaching people outside of Sydney, telephone interviews that are reproduced as audio files are the most common form of multimedia content.

Much of this material is not as newsworthy as legacy content from newspapers, but news.com.au produced a very newsworthy report during the 2000 coup in Fiji. A reporter from the site telephoned Parliament House in Suva, and interviewed coup leader George Speight. Speight explained details of ongoing events in Fiji that had not been reported by other media sources at the time. Within 20 minutes of ending the brief interview, an unedited audio file of the conversation was posted to the Web site.

News.com.au staff have also broken significant stories on the Web site that have been independently collected. In August 2000, rumours emerged that the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission was investigating the commercial practices of four oil companies. Reporters telephoned various people using standard journalistic research methods, composed a text-based story, and published it on the Web site.

Video footage is rarely produced and published on the Web site. Bruer claims that production of original video content is expensive and time-consuming. He does not believe that news.com.au would invest in extensive production facilities for video in the short term.

6.4.1 Summary of news.com.au

The aggregated publishing strategy for news.com.au is its most distinctive feature. However, content selection and presentation is highly similar to other major news Web sites. The development of small quantities of original material and multimedia content is an understandable strategy, but commitment to this does not seem to be as strong as the level displayed at the Sydney Morning Herald. It is surprising that news.com.au have not, at the time of study, developed links with legacy producers of multimedia content.
6.5 Legacy Content Analysis

Representatives of the “Big Four” Web sites stated that legacy content was essentially unmodified in terms of its textual content when it was adapted for the Web. It was decided to perform an independent study to illustrate this. As this study is merely designed to provide examples of an already-established principle, it has not been conducted with the same approach as a research methodology.

Content from several print copies of the Sydney Morning Herald, The Australian and The Daily Telegraph were compared to equivalent legacy stories reproduced on the Web sites of the Herald and news.com.au. This involved the intensive study of the texts of both printed stories and stories obtained from the Web. The goal of this study was to detect changes that may have appeared in the presentation of legacy stories on the Web.

This study illustrated the statements made by interview subjects, as most of the content on the Web that had a legacy equivalent held no changes. However, changes were detected in some stories.

The most frequent changes to legacy stories involve the modification of headlines. Headlines are sometimes expanded or contracted in length, but there are also examples of headlines being changed with no substantial changes in length. It would seem that the whimsy of Web editors has prompted them to make occasional changes.

A few instances could be found where paragraphs from legacy print stories had been deleted from their Web equivalents. This occurred in instances where these paragraphs seemed to be tautologous.

On some occasions it seemed that the syntax of certain sentences had been rearranged for clarity. Sometimes, the name of a person would be interchanged with pronouns such as “he” or “she”.
On one occasion, a typographical error in the legacy print version of a story was corrected in the Web version.

Despite these changes, it is fair to say that the overall structure and content of the stories remained the same. Generally, legacy content is reproduced with no changes at all.

A full documentation of this study is included in Appendix B.

6.6 Overview of the Big Four

Despite their various differences, all of Australia's “Big Four” Web sites for news delivery feature a common set of strategies. News is regular, frequently updated, and presented as text. Navigational strategies are also very similar. This is noteworthy, as each site is the product of parent organisations with different scopes and styles of products.

Every site is connected to a large legacy content provider of news, but curiously, Ninemsn has not made effective use of its legacy ties for news production and delivery. It is arguably more accurate to label AAP as their legacy content provider, despite the lack of an ownership or branding link.

Overall, it must be said that all of these Web sites offer a reasonable service. Professionally produced content is supplied in large quantities on mainstream news topics.

A common problem to ABC Online and news.com.au is the issue of the centralisation of content production and editorial control. Both of these Web sites aim to supply news with both a nationwide reach and a focus on localised content. The organisational response of both of these groups is to experiment with decentralisation, but at the time of study, neither organisation had implemented its plans to do this.
6.7 Operation of News Feeds

The overview of operation of Australia's “Big Four” Web sites has revealed a heavy dependence on news feeds for the supply of breaking news and general news stories. In the case of Ninemsn, news feeds supply most of the news content on the site. This justifies a close study of the operation of these services and their influence on the overall scope of Web-based news.

6.7.1 Operation of AAP

Australian Associated Press (AAP) is a broad-based information supplier that started as a co-operative in 1935 and developed its own means of collecting news and other forms of information. The organisation was modelled on existing news wire services that existed in other nations, and was designed to supply a “news net” and content for subscribers. Ownership of AAP is primarily held by John Fairfax Limited and News Limited. Although AAP has since diversified its commercial interests into areas such as telecommunications, its role as a news provider has remained constant.

Tony Vermeer, a manager at AAP, was interviewed at AAP’s Sydney office.

The supply of news to Web sites is a relatively new area of business for AAP, but overall, Vermeer perceived little difference in this from other media. AAP supplies between 20 and 30 Web sites in Australia with information of some form. Many of these are finance-related, and obtain stock prices and other financial data from AAP.

The major Web news clients in Australia for AAP are Ninemsn, Fairfax Web sites and news.com.au. Hence, three of Australia’s “Big Four” Web sites are major clients. ABC Online is a client to a lesser extent, as their charter prohibits them from taking domestic news from a domestic news agency. The ABC site uses AAP to supplement coverage of international news.
AAP produces both domestic and international news using their own reporters in Australia and other nations, as well as links with other news organisations in other countries. The organisation employs 160 full-time journalists in Australia and runs three overseas bureaux.

As an organisation already charged with the regular collection and supply of news, it is understandable that AAP would be in an ideal position to supply news for Web sites. Existing production routines that were well-entrenched before the arrival of the Web also emphasised the regular production of breaking news stories and their rapid delivery to client media outlets. Vermeer claimed that the creation of news-based Web sites has done little to influence the overall operation of AAP. It is generally perceived as just another distribution channel for an existing product. However, the type of stories and the format of delivery for Web clients can be tailored to specific requirements, as with any other client.

Vermeer claimed that most Web site clients want AAP news feeds delivered in bulletin form. “They don’t want a continuous feed of single stories. They want the stories arranged”. Bulletins composed of several stories are produced at intervals of roughly one hour to 90 minutes. Stories are usually re-written with new developments between bulletins. The AAP bulletins are divided into areas of special interest, such as international news, national news and sports news.

Vermeer was unwilling to supply any details on specific arrangements with clients, or outline precise product options in terms of cost or content delivered. Speaking generally, AAP offers a variety of options in terms of the amount of content that is supplied and the frequency of updates. The more content a service provides, the higher the price.

In terms of its journalistic style, content for these Web news feeds is no different from any other form of AAP content. The service provides no differentiation in style between different media. Vermeer claims that the emphasis on constantly updated written content suggests that existing strategies are ideal for the Web. The major difference in terms of content supply that does emerge with Web sites is the technical presentation and supply of the content. AAP renders news feeds in HTML or XML format, which enables the easy translation of this content.
onto a Web site. Major sites prefer the XML format, and download this material from AAP using the FTP protocol across a communication link.

The use of AAP-supplied content by a client Web site is largely a matter outside of the control of AAP, and Vermeer professed a certain level of indifference in the way that AAP content is ultimately adapted for the general public. The only significant rule surrounding the use of AAP content is that if a story carries AAP attribution when it is reproduced, the content should not be modified. Web sites are free to modify AAP content to produce their own stories, but these stories should not be attributed to the organisation.

AAP supplies text-based news feeds, but also supplies multimedia content. The latter is not very popular with news-based Web sites, and when multimedia is delivered, it is usually not sourced from a news feed. Vermeer explained the emphasis on text by the physical limits of bandwidth on most Internet connections, which make text relatively easy to download, but place limitations on high-bandwidth content such as audio and video. AAP audio and video feeds are also not updated as frequently as their text-based news services.

Another service offered by AAP is the provision of less time-sensitive journalism such as news analysis and fact boxes. The organisation has found little demand for this content on Web sites, which are mainly interested in frequent updates.

### 6.7.2 Operation of Reuters

Although AAP is the dominant supplier of news feeds to Australian Web sites, *Reuters* also supplies a substantial amount of content. *Reuters* is an international news organisation with its headquarters in the United Kingdom. In Australia, the organisation has a substantial presence with personnel and infrastructure, but *Reuters* does not offer a full news service to Australian
clients. Content is restricted to the political, business and finance sectors. The lack of a general news service in Australia is a result of an historical partnership of operations with AAP.

Paul Morgan, a manager at Reuters in Australia, was interviewed.

Around ten Web sites are Reuters clients in Australia. The majority of these sites are business-related. Reuters also supplies content to the Web portal Yahoo Australia and ABC Online. Reuters generates around 150 stories per day, but restricts the availability of content to its clients according to pricing schemes. Clients are given specific limits on the number of stories they are allowed to use, but do not generally approach these limits. "The sites that have a right to use 48 ran 12 to 20 stories per day," claimed Morgan.

Most material transferred to Web clients is text-based. As with AAP, material is not prepared specifically for Web delivery. Content for Web sites is primarily transferred using FTP in a format called NewsML, a specially developed form of traditional XML. The organisation can also transfer material as plain ASCII text.

Conditions are also attached to the use of this content. No Reuters content can appear on a site without it being branded as a Reuters story. Clients are offered a hyperlink to a Reuters graphical logo stored on their server, which is transferred to a user's Web browser when a Reuters story is called up. Nevertheless, Morgan claimed that clients are given reasonable levels of freedom to edit stories.

6.7.3 Operation of 7am.com

The US-based online news service 7am.com has had only a minor role in Web-based news delivery in Australia. It is not used by any major news Web site in Australia as a feed source for news. In fact, the only news-based Web sites with any legacy content tie that use content from 7am.com are YPCT Online, the Web site of a regional newspaper on the Yorke Peninsula in
South Australia, and the *Whitsunday Times* in Queensland. These Web sites use 7am.com as a source of world news. A 7am.com banner that constantly circulates a small selection of world news headlines appears on the sites. Users who wish to read these stories can click the banner, whereupon they are taken to a full-length text story on 7am.com's own Web site.

7am.com is not as sophisticated or well-known as the aforementioned agencies. Its content is largely drawn from other publications, including Australian media sources such as *The Australian*. Updates do not appear to be frequent, and content is limited. 7am.com does not generate any of its own news content and has no connections to any traditional news agencies.

7am.com offer their banner service as a free add-on to any Web site, gaining revenue from advertising on their own site when people click the banner to read stories.

### 6.7.4 Direct Feeds to the Public

In theory, the availability of the Internet to the general public should allow these news agencies to market their products directly to consumers, potentially bypassing the Web sites that currently redistribute their stories. In practice, this potential reorganisation of the mechanics of news delivery has not materialised.

The ownership of AAP by two major Australian newspaper publishers suggests that its parent organisations could issue direct instructions to AAP that forbid this. Direct sales to consumers could reduce revenue for Fairfax and News Limited publications.

However, Tony Vermeer insisted that there are no direct prohibitions on this form of activity from either of these companies. AAP is authorised to generate revenue independently. However, the company has formulated its own decision internally to avoid direct sales to the public. Vermeer claimed that such activity would be a conflict of interest for a company that would then be a wholesaler and a retailer at the same time.
Reuter is arguably in less of a position to offer such a service in Australia than AAP. The company is limited in the forms of news it covers, and has a historical partnership of working in tandem with AAP. Morgan claimed that, in his opinion, the small amount of free content that is already published on the Reuters Web site is “too much” for his company to supply. He was not aware of any plans to alter current Reuters strategies of avoiding direct sales to the general public, either in Australia or overseas.

7am.com does offer a direct and free service to consumers, but this form of news feed is limited, and grossly inferior to content that can be freely gained by inspecting a major Australian news site. It is also not breaking news in a true sense.

6.7.5 Concentration of News Supply

The heavy dependence on news feeds from a limited number of news feed sources is an unfavourable model for content diversity in breaking news on Web sites. Indeed, inspection of breaking news stories on the same topic on independent Web sites has frequently revealed little or no differences between the contents, especially when the story is derived from an AAP report.

Morgan claimed that this problem highlights the difficulties in producing the content in the first place, and the costs involved. He observes that there would be a greater supply of wholesale news if News Limited and Fairfax themselves became wholesalers.

Under the present mode of operations of News Limited and Fairfax, it would seem that their ability to match AAP and Reuters for the delivery of breaking news is essentially non-existent. However, both of these sources could arguably supply less time-sensitive content.
Vermeer also observed that this dependence on news feeds is arguably no worse for Web-based news than for other forms of media. Sites that wish to differentiate their news products can supplement the material with original reporting. Whitney (1982) observed that 46 newspaper editors examined in the USA selected news stories in specific categories (such as national news and political news) from news feeds in levels that were proportional to the quantity of stories delivered in the news feeds. This study highlights Vermeer’s observations about the already-established influence of news feeds on content in traditional media.

6.8 Conclusion

A closer examination of these major Web sites has revealed little additional changes in the overall model of news delivery from Chapter Five, which itself concluded that changes from the fundamental mechanics of a non-Internet style of delivery seemed to be rare. Internal operations of these sites have revealed a process of repackaging legacy content from existing sources, or simply transcribing content from news feeds.

Rapid reactions to breaking news or special events by Web teams can sometimes be enlightening, as the news.com.au exclusive interview with George Speight or the Sydney Morning Herald Web site coverage of the Concorde crash demonstrated. These events produced content that was not available in legacy products, but this additional material was produced and presented using the same methodologies as any other form of journalism. It is more content, but is arguably not different content.

The dependence of these Web sites on material prepared for conventional media products means that they are often tied to the production routines and organisational structures of their parent companies. These routines are geared to supply content at the same frequency as the legacy product. This in turn influences the type of content that can be provided for these sites, and the timing of its appearance. Hence, institutional constraints have affected operations of
these Web sites. Despite their regularity and the rapidity of their delivery, news feeds have not
changed their style of content or rate of publication in response to the fact that Web sites are
now clients. Again, this is another institutional factor. Innovation only seems to appear from
activity that is conducted outside of the influence of these traditional organisational structures,
such as a Web site operator updating breaking news at midnight, using informational sources
that are independent of the legacy product.

The Web could allow news feed organisations such as AAP to reach consumers directly, and as
Tony Vermeer explained, there are no externally imposed policies that would prevent them
from doing this. Such a development would be an interesting variation to the traditional model
of news delivery, in which AAP and similar organisations are purely wholesalers. However,
this potential model has not been fulfilled in practice due to policies developed within AAP.

This chapter has not conclusively answered research question R1, but the material it has thus
contributed to this question does not suggest that much innovation exists.

Research question R2 has been addressed through discussions on the preparation of content,
and a comparison of legacy content in print newspapers and Web sites. This has revealed no
significant modifications to the adaptation of legacy content for the Internet. This question will
be further addressed in subsequent chapters.
Chapter Seven

Operations of Mid-Range to Small Web Sites

In the previous chapter, the operation of Australia’s largest Web-based news sites, together with the news agencies that feed much of their content, was analysed. This chapter continues this analysis with regard to mid-range and smaller Web sites with ties to legacy content providers. Thus, this continues the process of answering research question R1. Some material for research question R2 will also be supplied.

This chapter draws upon material collected in Methodology 1 and Methodology 3. Representatives of Web sites examined in this chapter were interviewed. Where no reference to specific personnel or interviews is made, the request for an interview was declined.

At the end of this chapter, theoretical considerations arising from the analysis of the “Big Four” Web sites in the previous chapter, and those in this chapter, will be presented.

7.1 Network Ten

*Network Ten* produces regular news reports, and transfers some of this into news reports on its Web site. It is well-known as a major broadcaster, although its profile and its budget are not as extensive as Channel Nine.

For the record, the only other commercial television network in Australia, *Seven*, did not include news on its Web site at the time of the study, and declined to be interviewed for this thesis.

The *Network Ten* Web site has a design that is highly distinctive from traditional news-based Web sites. Its use of strong colours and graphics is very different from the white backgrounds
of most news sites linked to legacy print suppliers, and seems to reflect a greater emphasis on visual impact. The legacy link to a television network could be a major factor that has influenced this. The site does not present news as its major form of content from a navigational perspective. Information relating to other Network Ten programming, such as the youth-oriented Video Hits and The Simpsons, is promoted to a similar extent.

The site presents roughly a dozen news stories in a text-only format with no illustrations. Even the layout of these stories is unorthodox, making use of white type on a dark black and blue background.

Angela Cole, manager of online news at Network Ten, was interviewed.

The site is a relatively small operation, with only Cole herself managing news content during the working week. On weekends, a news producer updates the site’s news content. Cole’s background is in television news production at Ten. Apart from the news, Cole is also responsible for maintaining other content on the site. A technical manager and a graphic artist also contribute to the development of the site when required.

The site is updated more than once through the day. Stories from the previous day are deleted at around 8:30 AM. All news content on the site is legacy content that is adapted from inspecting scripts in the newsroom’s computer system. This usually requires more than a simple transfer of files, owing to the fact that this legacy content was only written for broadcast.

“They are sometimes like shorthand. I have to correct spelling, grammar, and add pronouns. I have to write out the sound grabs fully. I have to add peoples’ names because there are no super titles,” Cole said.

Cole claimed that the site’s link to a television network means that a different style from print journalism is required. Stories are written in a form that allows them to be short and easily read.
Scripts written for *Network Ten*’s 11:30 AM news broadcast are used as a basis for updating the site at roughly the same time as the broadcast itself. Afterwards, Cole generally works on updating parts of the Web site that are not related to news. Later, material from the 5:00 PM news broadcast will be used to update the site.

Cole claimed that friction between herself and the legacy content division is minimal, and identifies her own background as a former television news producer at the network as a beneficial factor. Cole will discuss aspects of stories with journalists and editors at the network if certain parts require clarification, but generally works alone without interaction. The selection of content and modes of adapting this content are under her editorial control. The site contains a minimal amount of advertising.

### 7.2 The Illawarra Mercury and The Wollongong Advertiser

The *Illawarra Mercury*, a Wollongong-based newspaper, is the principal newspaper in a small city. The population of Wollongong is approximately 220,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 census). The *Illawarra Mercury* has a print circulation of 33,420 (Gee 2000).

The *Illawarra Mercury* is owned by John Fairfax Limited. A Web site featuring legacy content from the *Illawarra Mercury* exists on the Internet, and has been developed separately from the Web sites of other Fairfax newspapers.

The site is less complex and content-heavy than a large-scale Fairfax paper, but the design of the site is consistent with the general principles of a “Big Four” Web site. The site uses index categories in the same format, and makes minimal use of graphics and illustrations. The use is so minimal that most stories carry no graphics of any sort.

The site covers local, national and world news, a format that reflects the objectives of the legacy content provider in being a generally focused newspaper to the Illawarra region.
Padma Iyer, editor of the Illawarra Mercury Web site, was interviewed.

Production resources for the Web site are minimal when compared to a major Web site. Only one full-time person (Iyer) is assigned to the site, although technical support can be sourced from other general IT personnel. Production of the Web site is handled from an office loft within the same premises occupied by editors and journalists for the newspaper. Prior to being assigned to the Web site, Iyer was a features editor at the paper.

The most significant aspect of the Web site is that all stories presented are legacy content derived from the newspaper. Between 50% and 70% of stories printed in the Illawarra Mercury are reproduced on its Web site. The site contains no multimedia, special sections or breaking news.

The primary constraint on content supply for the site is the minimal amount of human resources that have been allocated. Operating the Web site in its current format leaves little time for other functions when a daily news site is being run by a single person.

The site is updated daily, during the night, when content for the newspaper has been finalised.

The selection of content for the Web site is made by Iyer. He claimed that there is little organisational friction in operating the Web site within the staff of the newspaper. Most journalists are enthusiastic about seeing their stories reproduced on the Web site. Sometimes, a journalist will call him if a story has not been selected, and will ask for it to be included. Iyer may or may not do this, depending on circumstances.

Iyer claimed that his origins as a former member of the editorial team, and his personal contacts with other staff, have eased the integration of the Web site into the organisation. Iyer liaises with journalists and editors from the paper on a daily basis. The mode of production, which does not generate original content, or place added demands on the performance of other staff members, also minimises disruptions.
Stories of minimal news value are not regarded as suitable material for the Web site. Stories are sometimes not included on the Web site due to technical reasons. The procurement of legacy content is made by accessing the newspaper’s production software, CyberPage, which is common within the publishing industry. Pages are reproduced in a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) format.

Colour coding reveals stories that are being edited, or have been fully edited, allowing Iyer to select material that has been fully processed. Problems with the system used to transfer the content, mostly caused by the computer's inability to deal with certain layout topologies, sometimes mean that too much effort would need to be expended in importing a story. When this happens, time pressures usually mean that the story is not included on the Web site.

Legacy content is generally not re-edited for the Web site. However, Iyer does make occasional changes to headlines. This is a result of the freedom from space limitations on a Web page, which allows room for more words. Two-word headlines are normally expanded, by Iyer sometimes shrinks eight-word headlines if he feels that they are too verbose.

The Wollongong Advertiser is a weekly newspaper that is distributed for free in Wollongong. It is a community newspaper that is also owned by Fairfax. Although production of the Wollongong Advertiser is handled separately to the Illawarra Mercury, Iyer also has responsibility for managing the Web-based content of this newspaper. The newspaper is presented in a similar format to the Illawarra Mercury, but owing to its small size, the entire news content of this newspaper is reproduced online. Although content from the Wollongong Advertiser is presented in a discrete format under its own masthead, the content for this newspaper is stored under the same overall Web address as the Illawarra Mercury.
7.3 The Newcastle Herald

The *Newcastle Herald* is a newspaper with several common elements to the *Illawarra Mercury*. It is a Fairfax-owned medium-sized newspaper that is focused on being a general source of news for Newcastle, a city of comparable size and situation to Wollongong. Newcastle has a population of approximately 270,000 (1996 census). The print version of the *Newcastle Herald* has a circulation of 50,300 (Gee 2000).

The Web site for the *Newcastle Herald* is surprisingly different from *The Illawarra Mercury* and other Fairfax sites. Its design represents a significant departure from the normal conventions of a professional news-related Web site.

The opening page of the site presents no stories or hyperlinks to specific stories. The inclusion of a smattering of cartoon figures depicting hard-hat wearing workmen appears somewhat unprofessional. Indexes direct visitors to various elements of the site, but the easy delivery of current news stories simply does not appear anywhere. The site's news content is essentially in the form of a searchable index for previous stories, an archive.

Stories that are retrieved from this search engine-based archive are legacy content stories that appear without illustrations.

In terms of news delivery, it is fair to say that this Web site is nothing more than an online archive of old content. Contemporary stories are not included in this archive. Thus, the site seems to be designed with a deliberate strategy of avoiding the supply of current news.

A full explanation of the rationale behind the design and operation of this Web site could not be obtained, as the *Newcastle Herald* denied all requests for interviews. A noteworthy aspect of this unusual site is its clear independence from Web sites for other Fairfax publications.
7.4 Warrnambool Standard

A medium-sized regional newspaper owned by John Fairfax Limited, The Warrnambool Standard has a Web site that is as independent and distinctive as that of other Fairfax papers. The population of Warrnambool in Victoria is approximately 26,000 (1996 census). The circulation of The Warrnambool Standard is 12,729 (Gee 2000).

The site is reasonable in its design, but is not as polished as larger Fairfax sites. It suffers from unsightly gaps in its layout and the use of annoyingly small fonts for text. Content on the site is legacy content derived from the newspaper, and updated daily. Photographs are included with some stories.

7.5 The Canberra Times

The Canberra Times is a newspaper with a somewhat paradoxical placement. It is the primary newspaper of the nation’s capital city, yet the small population size of Canberra has resulted in a newspaper that lacks the size, content and resources of publications from Sydney and Melbourne. The population of Canberra is approximately 297,000 (1996 census). The circulation of the Canberra Times is 40,299 (Gee 2000). The Canberra Times is currently owned by Rural Press Limited.

The Canberra Times Web site is highly polished and content-rich. Its content is presented with headlines and short summaries of stories, and a minimal use of graphics. The overall design is similar to sites such as The Illawarra Mercury. The site’s contents are exclusively legacy content.
7.6 Localnews Australia / Rural Press Limited

This aggregated content portal serves as an entry point for a large collection of regional newspapers owned by Rural Press Limited. The creation of this common portal, along with the reproduction of common design elements and strategies across the papers it covers, mean that it is appropriate to review papers linked through Localnews Australia as a single entity.

Localnews Australia features seven newspapers in New South Wales, one in the Australian Capital Territory, two in Queensland, one in Tasmania, one in Victoria, and one in Western Australia. Subsections for each paper are reached through state-based indexes.

An example is the Daily Liberal in Dubbo, a regional city with a population of around 30,000 (1996 census). The newspaper has a circulation of 6020 (Gee 2000).

The editors of two Rural Press newspapers represented on Localnews Australia were interviewed. Comments from Mick Ticehurst, editor of the Blue Mountains Gazette, and Brian Hurst, managing editor of the Redland Times and Bayside Bulletin, outlined the operation of the parent company and its portal.

Each newspaper owned by Rural Press Limited selects a small quantity of news stories each week and uploads them to the Localnews Web site using a standard template. Design of most sites is handled by RPL Interactive, a special division of Rural Press that has been established for maintaining Internet content, although some sites make use of design templates supplied by Murchison Productions, a Web design company. RPL Interactive seems to draw strongly on talent supplied by the Canberra Times, a relatively recent acquisition by RPL with a Web presence so strong and individualistic that it is essentially a separate entity to other Localnews sites.
This uploading of content using standard templates results in easy operations and a standardisation of design, but it does reduce content diversity. Most sites offer a few illustrations alongside the standard selections of legacy content. No specialised content or breaking news is included.

The design of the Web sites is usually consistent, although the template approach does generate mediocrity in some pages.

Overall, Rural Press Limited does not seem to have generated much in the way of cross-publication integration or special features in any of its Localnews content. The exceptions are in the form of two Rural Press papers that have links to the Localnews portal, but have been developed with an independent style and a superior level of content. These papers are reviewed separately. Another Rural Press newspaper has a Web site that is not linked to the Localnews site, and this is also reviewed separately.

7.7 McPherson Newspaper Group

The McPherson group of newspapers has taken a more aggregated approach to the construction of its common newspaper site than even Rural Press Limited with Localnews.

Fifteen McPherson publications in regional New South Wales and Victoria are represented on a common Web site. Examples are the Shepparton News with a circulation of 10,479 (Gee 2000) and the Campaspe Valley News with a circulation of 1600 (Gee 2000).

The overall design of pages for each paper is common, simplistic, and template-driven. The only difference in presentation between each newspaper is the inclusion of different news stories and the use of a different masthead on the top of the page. A photograph is normally included with each newspaper, although the use of graphics is minimal. Stories are listed in an
index format, but the use of templates to run the site means that the overall layout is frequently not as professional as a more labour-intensive production. One page on the site presents aggregated content from all of the papers as one continuous page, a practice that results in a lengthy swath of text that is difficult to read or navigate.

The site incorporates some advanced features that are essentially common to all papers on the site, and are not linked specifically to any individual newspaper. A chat forum allows readers to post messages on local topics and reply to them.

The site also offers the relatively rare option of allowing users to produce customised news through the use of filtering processes. Archives are also included on the site. The site does not include specialised content or breaking news.

Noel Sharrock, Webmaster for the site, was interviewed.

One of the most unusual features of McPherson is that the company owns a regional Internet Service Provider (ISP). Sharrock explained that the ISP was established specifically to provide a technical basis for rendering McPherson newspapers online. This has resulted in the design of specialised software that enables content from these publications to be rendered online on a regular basis. Most newspapers appear every week.

Sharrock stated that the editors of each paper have a right to exercise editorial control over the stories selected for the Web site, but this is not always exercised in practice. A sub-editor from each paper is appointed to review the content that is loaded onto the site for each issue.

7.8 Independent News Group

Another medium-sized media conglomerate with an aggregated Web site, the Independent News Group publishes content from five regional newspapers on its site. Examples are the
Dandenong Examiner with a circulation of 52,220 (Gee 2000) and the Cranbourne Independent with a circulation of 17,810 (Gee 2000).

Its home page presents a collection of aggregated content from all ING papers in an easily read format. Only certain stories are selected for this page. The overall design is clean and newspaper-like in its layout. Some photographs are included. Curiously, the site also features a small number of links to selected World News stories from CNN and other international news stories. This is not a reproduction of these stories, but just a link to these external sites. Hence, this can hardly be described as a news feed or the supply of specialised content.

The site also features dedicated pages for each specific newspaper. Each one reflects a common template design strategy, but the presentation is clean and professional. Roughly six stories, together with at least one photograph are included from each paper. The site features archives from its papers. No other special features are included on the site.

Tony Murrell, editorial director at the Independent News Group, was interviewed.

Murrell claimed that, for the most part, he selects the content for the Web site, which are mostly the major stories from each paper. Editors of each individual newspaper do, in theory, have a right to select the content that is reproduced on the Web site, but most express little interest in participating in the process, citing workloads. Murrell claimed that the organisation is attempting to integrate the editors of each newspaper more closely into the online editorial process, in an effort to reduce work pressures on the Web team, which is mostly himself.

7.9 Sunshine Coast Newspapers

A small conglomerate of three newspapers situated in coastal Queensland, this Web site presents a small selection of legacy content from each paper. The layout is somewhat
inconsistent between sites, and content is usually restricted to a single story from the front page. The papers themselves are published fortnightly or weekly. Archives for the papers are included on the site. Generally, this portal offers no special features or elements of interest, and suggests a somewhat haphazard approach to Web site design and integration. An example of a Sunshine Coast newspaper is the Mary Valley Voice, with a circulation of 2200 (Gee 2000).

7.10 South-East News Group

A conglomerate of three small newspapers in regional Victoria, this site presents a selection of legacy content in a clean and easily navigable format. The opening page for the site displays a selection of major stories from all three publications, but each newspaper also features its own separate page. The papers are published weekly, and a selection of approximately eight stories appears on the Web site. Photographs are included with most stories. The overall design of the portal reflects a consistent approach. The design is unsophisticated but acceptable. Archives are included. There are no specialised features on this Web site. An example of a newspaper featured on the site is the Berwick Gazette, with a circulation of 9001 (Gee 2000).

Despite their different sizes and operational structures, the tendency of these five mid-range to small regional media conglomerates to adopt similar Web strategies is interesting. All have implemented Web sites that makes no attempt to conceal a common ownership between the individual papers. In some cases, this content is aggregated in a format that tends to obscure the exact legacy point of origin.

7.11 The West Australian

The West Australian is the principal state newspaper for Western Australia, and attempts to provide general coverage of local and international news. It is owned by West Australian
Newspapers, a company that does not own any other major news publications. The circulation of *The West Australian* is 245,358 (Gee 2000).

The design of *The West Australian* Web site appears to be influenced by general trends on comparable sites, but the spacing of text in its front-page index of stories is not very professional. The site uses a few images with its stories, and surprisingly, allows users to click small versions of them to retrieve a slightly larger version. This is a relatively sophisticated use of images and magnification that is not found on many sites.

The content of the site is legacy content. In general, this is another Web site that has taken a conservative approach to its design and delivery.

### 7.12 The Examiner

This is a mid-sized newspaper based in Tasmania, and majority-owned by Rural Press Limited. The paper is mostly concerned with Tasmanian news. Based in Launceston, the newspaper has a circulation of 36,241 (Gee 2000).

The Web site for *The Examiner* is a surprisingly sophisticated operation for a regional paper.

It is worth noting that although Rural Press Limited have essentially integrated most of their papers into a common Web portal, *The Examiner*, like *The Canberra Times*, has its own distinct online identity, owing to its size, design and operation.

The layout and design for the site is generally professional, but slightly more avant-garde in its use of shading than most other Web sites. Problems emerge with the layout of headlines on some indexes, where there is no use of spacing and a generally poor presentation. Graphics are
included with some stories, and can be enlarged with mouse clicks. The presentation of headlines and text is legible and consistent with the design of other sites.

Julian Burgess, Internet Services manager for the newspaper, was interviewed.

The contents of the site are legacy content. Unusually, every story from the print version appears on the Web site. Contents are updated daily at approximately midnight, when the contents for the print version are finalised.

The site is surprisingly effective in its supply of breaking news. Roughly six to eight updated stories are posted to the site per day that originate from The Examiner’s own reporters, and focus mostly on local issues. This frequency of original material is barely matched by the largest news sites in the country. The breaking news section is not as frequently updated as those of larger Web sites, which mostly focus on stories from AAP feeds. Despite its complexity, the newspaper does not have an extensive division that is dedicated to the Web site. Burgess is the only person who works full-time on the site. Two IT staff provide assistance to Web development when required. The transfer of legacy content is mostly done through automated means using custom software from Murchison Productions, a Web development firm that has extensive connections to the development of regional news Web sites. Other stock software from Cybergraphics is also used. The transfer of legacy content is carried out by editorial and production staff for the newspaper, who do little more than click icons to achieve the transfer.

Burgess also explained that the newspaper’s internal hard copy library system is being replaced by the online archive of stories. The production of both is an integrated function.

Although the technical rendering of content is relatively straightforward, The Examiner has integrated the supply of content at a rapid pace for the Web into its overall production schedule. The editor of every production shift is instructed to provide breaking news content, and up to eight stories a day are produced this way. Breaking news is sourced from reporters as they
return from researching stories, but is also sometimes collected from monitoring news broadcasts from other news sources. Thus, the change in editorial operations has occurred at an editorial level instead of that of individual reporters. Burgess admitted that the process is proving “difficult to build into our system”.

The most unusual aspect of the design of The Examiner is its dependence on subscription fees for revenue. Six lead stories from the paper are presented for free on the Web site, but the rest of the site’s legacy content requires users to create a user account and pay fees. The site charges a maximum of 90 cents for a single, continuous usage session, the same cost as the print version. Users are charged 5 cents for every story downloaded. Retrieving old stories from the online archive is charged at 10 cents per story. Users are given a three month trial period to experiment with the full service before fees are charged. Transactions are performed through debiting a subscriber’s credit card account.

When asked about the rather uncommon economic model of charging a subscription fee, Burgess explained that the newspaper could not afford to see a transfer of readers to a free delivery system. The Examiner has high overheads, employing no fewer than 60 journalists. “That is probably more journalists than the total employed by the rest of the electronic media in Tasmania,” he claimed.

7.13 Green Left Weekly

The Green Left Weekly is a non-profit, alternative weekly newspaper that is distributed nationwide, with a circulation of 10,000 (Gee 2000). It reports on national and global news events with a direct editorial focus on environmental issues and left-wing politics. The paper is written and operated by volunteers.
The design of the GLW Web site is colourful but not very balanced. This is consistent with the appearance of the legacy print product, which makes use of non-traditional design. Layout and navigation is not as user-friendly as most other Web sites. Archives are included.

Terry Townsend, Webmaster for the GLW Web site, was interviewed.

Unusually, the GLW Web site reproduces the contents of the entire legacy newspaper. Townsend claimed that rendering the legacy content of the paper for the Web site takes approximately four hours for a single person. The stories are not edited for the Web site, and are actually taken from the pre-production copy of the newspaper, which contains less sub-editing than the finished newspaper. Software automatically processes each article into HTML, speeding production. Illustrations from the newspaper are also reproduced on the site.

The publication schedule of the Web site is not rigorous, but is generally done on Sunday, which is the last production day for the newspaper. Content is placed on the Web on Sunday night, and the newspaper appears on Monday morning.

Special content is not usually placed on the Web site. Townsend cited one example where an article from a back issue of the newspaper was republished on the Web site because the staff of the newspaper wanted to draw attention to the topic. Hyperlinks to Web sites on issues covered by GLW are also sometimes included.

7.14 2GB.com

The Web site of a Sydney commercial radio station, this site reproduces audio files of its hourly news broadcasts on its site. No other form of news-related content is included. The mere repackaging of an audio file with no additional content represents a rather limited use of the Internet. It is curious to see a site that delivers multimedia, but has no text-based content.
7.15 2UE.com

This commercial radio station merely reproduces news in a text-based format, but does not include any multimedia news. There are no archives.

7.16 Daily Mercury

This Rural Press Limited-owned newspaper in Mackay, Queensland, has a brief summary of current news stories with no archives or special features. The overall design is unlike most newspaper-derived sites, but is neat. Curiously, this site was not incorporated into the Localnews Australia site that holds most Rural Press Limited newspaper sites. The circulation of the print version is 18,000 (Gee 2000).

7.17 Kiama Independent and Lake Times

Both of these newspapers have common ownership, and the appearance of their Web sites reveals common design elements such as the same layout templates and fonts. However, each newspaper has its own distinct Web site that is not linked to a common portal. The sites are not even linked to each other. Hence, these newspapers are classified as separate entities for the spreadsheet analysis, but are examined together in this chapter.

The Kiama Independent has been operated as a family-owned newspaper since 1863, and is believed to be the oldest independent newspaper in the country. Its circulation is 3088 (Gee 2000). Its sister publication, the Lake Times, is owned by the same family, but has only existed
for roughly 20 years. Its circulation is much larger, at 42,126 (Gee 2000). Both are aimed at adjacent geographical regions in southern coastal New South Wales.

The design of the sites is less sophisticated than most news-related Web sites, but they are easy to navigate and read. Simple colours, borders and graphical icons are used. The sites contain no illustrations or graphics with any of their stories. Approximately one dozen stories from the latest issue of these weekly newspapers is presented on their respective sites.

Barry Wilson, managing editor of the Kiama Independent, was interviewed.

Preparation of the Web sites for both newspapers is integrated through the editorial department and not the production department. Text for the site is marked up manually, using simple cut and paste methods. The site contains mostly legacy content, although a historical supplement on the paper and the region is included.

Editors from each paper select the stories to go online, and usually select the major stories from each paper. There is a deliberate policy of only reproducing a small proportion of the total legacy content, as it is feared that publishing the entire contents online would harm sales.

The papers are produced on Wednesdays. Content is finished on Tuesday afternoons, and the Web sites are updated at approximately the same time.

Breaking news does not generally appear on the sites. Wilson claimed that the only time the Kiama Independent updated its content outside of a weekly revision was an attempt to publish an item of community news quickly, and avoid having their production of the legacy content version disrupted! Hence, this was not so much user-driven as production driven.
7.18 Alice Springs News

Independently owned, this weekly newspaper covers local events for the town of Alice Springs in central Australia. Its circulation is 10,780 (Gee 2000). Its Web site contains only legacy content. The overall layout of the site is unsophisticated and quite amateurish. Navigation and use of the site is hampered by poor design that uses only the most elementary features of HTML. It is arguably the worst designed regular news site in the nation.

Erwin Chandla, owner of the Alice Springs News, was interviewed.

The site is updated weekly at the same time that the legacy print version is published. Summaries from current news stories appear on the site, but an online archive contains the full contents of back issues. Photographs from the legacy issue are also included, making the site relatively graphics-rich.

Updating of the Web site is handled by the same news staff who produce legacy content for the paper. This process takes approximately two to three hours every Wednesday. There are no dedicated Web staff.

7.19 Post Newspapers (Perth)

This independent, regional paper has created a clean legacy content site that reproduces a small selection of major stories. The newspaper and the Web site are updated weekly. Stories are reproduced without illustrations. The circulation is 14,050 (Gee 2000).
7.20 The Border Mail Online

Located in Albury-Wodonga on the New South Wales/Victorian border, The Border Mail offers a combination of local and national news. The layout and design of its Web site, The Border Mail Online, is clean and easily navigable. Legacy content is printed with graphics for many articles. The circulation is 26,790 (Gee 2000).

7.21 Bundeena Village Noise

A quarterly non-profit newsletter for a small region on the suburban fringes of Sydney, the Bundeena Village Noise covers local events. The online equivalent of the Village Noise reproduces all of the legacy content of the print version, together with graphics. Updates are made when print versions appear. The layout and design are unsophisticated but easy to read.

7.22 Dunoon and District Gazette

A small non-profit monthly magazine that is published by The Dunoon & District Sports and Recreation Club, this publication covers local news and community events. The site contains a moderate amount of text which essentially constitutes all of its legacy content. A few illustrations and even a local cartoon are included on the site. Layout and design are conservative and easy to navigate.
7.23 The Murray Pioneer

A medium-sized regional newspaper based in Renmark, South Australia, the Murray Pioneer has generated a surprisingly sophisticated and content-rich Web site. Its layout resembles a major Fairfax news site with its heavy use of text-based content and graphics in a format similar to a newspaper itself. A small selection of legacy stories is reproduced. A search engine enables access to online archives. Letters are also published. The circulation is 6700 (Gee 2000).

7.24 The Riverine Grazier

A small, independent newspaper based in Hay, New South Wales, the Riverine Grazier makes poor use of frames an overall layout in its general design, resulting in a site that is not easy to read. A selection of stories with a few illustrations is reproduced as legacy content on the site. Searchable archives are included. The circulation is 2200 (Gee 2000).

7.25 The Bendigo Advertiser

A regional Victorian newspaper owned by the New Zealand-based Independent Newspapers Limited, the Bendigo Advertiser has a pure legacy content site with a small selection of its total weekly news stories. No illustrations are included. This site is not sophisticated in its design. The circulation is 14,448 (Gee 2000).
7.26 Margaret River Online / Augusta-Margaret River Mail

A simple but well-designed site, this contains a few legacy content stories from the weekly print version of the *Augusta-Margaret River Mail*, together with some links to regional information and surfing news. This free newspaper is located in the south-west of Western Australia and has a circulation of 5800 (Gee 2000). No illustrations are included. The site is reasonable in its design.

7.27 The Advocate (Tasmania)

Daily-updated and surprisingly sophisticated for a regional newspaper, this site prints daily news with some illustrations and a very clean, professional layout. The legacy print version is independently owned and published daily except Sundays. The circulation is 25,246 (Gee 2000).

7.28 The Bunyip

A small, independent newspaper serving the regional town of Gawler in South Australia, the Web site for *The Bunyip* suffers from a poor use of frames, but is still generally legible. A selection of stories is reproduced with illustrations. Archives are also included. The circulation is 8700 (Gee 2000).
7.29 Byron Bay Echo

A weekly newspaper published in the coastal town of Byron Bay in New South Wales, the Byron Bay Echo has essentially reproduced all of its legacy journalistic content on its Web site. The layout of the site is unusually colourful, but the legacy newspaper itself is not published in a conventional style of layout. The design is easily navigable.

David Lovejoy, an editor at the paper, was interviewed.

The overall production of the Web site is not precisely integrated into the production process. One person, who works with the production of legacy content, creates an HTML version of the content without illustrations. Another person, working in parallel, renders the same content as Adobe Postscript files, which essentially mirror the precise appearance of the legacy paper. Both versions are published on the Web site. The circulation is 17,000 (Gee 2000).

7.30 Border Watch Online

A small and somewhat peculiar site that displays only a minimal amount of content, this weekly-updated site barely qualifies as an acceptable source of news. The Border Watch is located in the town of Mount Gambier in South Australia, close to the border with Victoria. Its circulation is 8014 (Gee 2000).

7.31 The Lower Clarence Review

A weekly newspaper from regional New South Wales, the Lower Clarence Review Web site manages to preserve its legibility and navigability while utilising an overall design template that
does not resemble a typical legacy content site at all. The use of a strong red banner at the top, coupled with a lack of column-style layout, is unusual. Melissa Lutton, editor at the *Review*, was interviewed.

A selection of legacy content from the print version and letters to the editor are reproduced. A few illustrations are included. The overall presentation is quite acceptable for a small-scale legacy source. Lutton stated that all production of the Web site is handled by an external contractor, who is sent legacy content selected by the editor in a non-HTML format. The circulation is 8597 (Gee 2000).

### 7.32 The Plains Producer

Possibly the strangest online news site of all in terms of presentation, this South Australian regional weekly paper makes almost no use of conventional Web design. A legacy copy of the appearance of the printed page is reproduced in a format that includes illustrations and text in one bulk Web page. Content is minimal, but the overall design is still reasonably sound. The circulation is 2800 (Gee 2000).

### 7.33 The Queensland Times

A clean but relatively unsophisticated site, this just prints a few extracts from major news stories from a daily paper. The site contains very little content. This newspaper is owned by Australian Provincial Newspapers (APN). The circulation is 13,844 (Gee 2000).
7.34 The Shoalhaven Independent

A strange but still legible design contains a small selection of news from this weekly newspaper in regional New South Wales. There are minimal illustrations. The circulation is 13,000 (Gee 2000).

7.35 The Village Journal

Published in regional New South Wales, this independently-owned monthly newspaper displays a surprisingly professional layout and use of illustrations. Selected legacy content appears with photographs.

7.36 The Weekly Times

An independent newspaper published in the Sydney suburb of Ryde, this site displays a small selection of legacy content weekly, with a reasonable number of illustrations.

Ulrike Eichmeyer, office manager of the newspaper, was interviewed.

As with other small newspapers, there is no separate Web production team. Major stories from the print version are selected by Eichmeyer. It is noteworthy that neither the editor of the newspaper nor any of the journalists participate in story selection. These stories are emailed in a raw text form to a Web site manager who works for an Internet Service Provider. There, layout and design of the site are handled. The format is reasonably readable, and its column-style design is intended to reflect the layout of the print version. The circulation is 43,000 (Gee 2000).
7.37 The Whitsunday Times

A small Web site with a minimal selection of content from an independent weekly newspaper in Queensland, this site makes use of a relatively high number of illustrations. The layout is professional, but not in the usual style for a news-based Web site. This site incorporates a news feed from the 7am.com service.

7.38 Village Voice

An independent monthly newspaper focused on the Sydney suburb of Glebe, Village Voice runs a small selection of legacy content without illustrations. The overall design of this site is very professional, but it is another site that departs from the usual layout for a news-based Web site. The circulation is 21,416 (Gee 2000).

7.39 Toowoomba Chronicle

A daily Queensland newspaper owned by the APN group, this site features a minimal amount of headline news summaries with no illustrations. Overall layout and design of the site is competent. The appearance of this site suggests no ostensive link to any other online newspaper owned by Australian Provincial Newspapers. The only common feature of any note is the relative scarcity of news content. The circulation is 33,524 (Gee 2000).
7.40 Warrandyte Diary

A small monthly community newspaper run from a town near Melbourne, this site is clean and minimal in its design. A small selection of illustrations is included in each issue. Data from an interview with the Warrandyte Diary will be presented elsewhere in this thesis.

7.41 Western Echo

A small Queensland monthly newspaper, this site is somewhat amateurish but generally clean in its design. A large selection of legacy content, together with illustrations, is reproduced.

7.42 The Western Herald

An independent Tasmanian weekly newspaper, the Web site for this publication is crude in its design and navigation. Nevertheless, an adequate selection of legacy content is reproduced, with a few illustrations.

7.43 YPCT Online

The Web site for the Yorke Peninsula Country Times, a weekly regional paper on the Yorke Peninsula in South Australia reproduces a small selection of community news. Its layout makes poor use of colours, which is distracting to readers. The most curious feature of this site is its supply of world news through a small regional Web site, using a free news feed supplied by the American site 7am.com. The circulation is 8080 (Gee 2000).
7.44 Production Mechanics of Web Sites

Interviews with representatives of many of these Web sites, and in some cases visits to their premises, has provided insight into the internal dynamics of Web-based news. It is appropriate to compare these to the model of news production outlined by Tuchman (1978) in Chapter 2.

The principal features of this model will now be reiterated. News was produced in regular intervals and quantities according to the frequency of the news publication and its size (number of pages or time of broadcast). The production of news is a very labour-intensive enterprise. A major city newspaper employs dozens of people, such as journalists, who are co-ordinated through the use of management structures and hierarchies. News is mostly collected by dispatching journalists to specific institutions that are expected to generate newsworthy events, such as parliaments and courts. The process is linear, with news being collected by reporters, processed into stories, organised by editors and packaged into a product for delivery to consumers.

Tuchman’s industrial model of news production is evident in the production of online news, primarily because of the Web sites’ dependence on legacy content. This legacy content continues to be produced with generally the same methodologies as it was before the arrival of the Internet. Most Web sites could be viewed as customers for the content produced by the parent organisation, and in this regard are almost at the end of a linear production process. The overall nature of the organisational process behind online news production, the frequency of production, the editorial process, and the deployment of news nets, has not changed much from the pre-Internet era.

7.44.1 Minimal Impact

On the basis of Tuchman’s model and the observed data, one can propose that the organisation of a Web site is usually structured in such a way that it minimises the impact on existing
organisational patterns and editorial hierarchies within the legacy product. This concept was introduced in Chapter 3 as the “minimal impact” model.

In the case of the “Big Four” Web sites, this “minimal impact” model is demonstrated by the creation of new divisions or entirely new corporate ventures that usually operate with minimal contact with existing organisational structures. The creation of Ninemsn as an organisation for managing Web-based content related to Channel Nine and other media outlets owned by Publishing and Broadcasting Limited illustrates this.

Some medium-sized ventures will assign a single person to the development of a Web site on a full-time basis. The work of Padma Iyer at the Illawarra Mercury is an example of this.

In the case of small Web sites, the operation of the Web site is usually assigned to an editor or a designated staff member who spends only a fraction of his or her time performing such duties. If an organisation lacks the technical resources to maintain a Web site, it will frequently outsource this work to an Internet Service Provider that hosts the site.

Non-legacy content for Web sites is only produced within organisational structures that minimise the impact on production routines for legacy content. Specialised content is produced by specialised staff who work primarily on the Web. It is extremely rare for a conventional reporter working primarily with the legacy product to produce specialised content for the Web.

The minimal impact model can also be demonstrated when temporal constraints for news production are altered. The Web sites for large newspapers such as The Sydney Morning Herald offer news updates several times a day, yet the production routine of the newspaper itself is only designed to supply news once every 24 hours when the newspaper is published. Hence, impact on this temporal production routine for the newspaper is minimised through the use of a Web team that acts independently, and mostly sources its news updates from outside the newspaper’s production routine, such as news feeds.
Even in the event that the legacy production routine produced an interesting story before the newspaper was scheduled to be released, Carlos Monterio stated that the Web team would think carefully before releasing it on the Web. A significant story that was exclusive to the *Herald* would be saved for the newspaper.

### 7.44.2 Legacy Dominance

Although legacy content providers apparently try to minimise disruption on their existing organisational structures in creating their Web sites, the most striking example of the hold that Tuchman's model maintains is the fact that most online publishers of news are linked to legacy content providers in the first place. The most disruptive influence on the proposed "minimal impact" model would be the need to create an entirely new organisation for the production and distribution of news from scratch. In the few cases where this has happened, it will be interesting to see if the organisations that develop to support these Web sites maintain the characteristics of a traditional news organisation. This will be explored elsewhere in this thesis.

### 7.45 Conclusion

Chapters Five, Six and Seven have provided an overview of the operations of most of Australia's news-based Web sites. These sites have been surveyed from an external perspective, and in some cases, internal descriptions of their operations has been supplied through interviews.

All of the sites examined in detail in these chapters have had connections to legacy content providers of news. Although they have yet to be examined in detail, it has been demonstrated that the number of news-based Web sites in Australia with no such connection is very small.
These Web sites are heavily dependent on their parent organisations and publications for content, resources and staff. The result is a series of Web sites that feature little more than online versions of legacy content. This dependence on conventional media publications means that these sites are subjected to the same production and delivery models as the conventional publications.

The use of special features of the Internet such as multimedia and interactivity is rare. Where interactivity takes place in the form of chat forums, it seems to have no interaction or influence with the news production process.

The use of archives has been reasonably extensive. However, there seems to have been few attempts to integrate archival stories on a similar theme through the use of hyperlinks. This means that, although it can be convenient to consult these archives on a Web site, there is little opportunity for presenting an enriched experience for a reader to immediately review a continuing story. Hence, an opportunity to present current news stories in context has not been fulfilled in practice.

The only example of such archived hyperlinking occurring is the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which routinely aggregates stories relating to major continuing news themes such as the Sydney Olympic Games in special news sections. These special news sections are prepared by the Web team.

Breaking news stories appear on several news sites, but the diversity of this content is limited by their almost total dependence on the same news feeds. The frequency of these updates is no better than broadcast radio, which also offers regular news reports at roughly the same intervals. Both radio and Web sites update their content at intervals of approximately one hour.

Hence, in response to research question R1, it can be seen that these sites have produced little change in the established model of news delivery. There is essentially no difference in the
content or frequency of content. Any new content that does appear on these Web sites is produced and presented using the same models as non-Internet journalism.

Further information on research question R2 can also be supplied. This heavy dependence on legacy content, and new content produced using conventional research and presentation methods, means the style of Internet journalism is itself no different from the established model. Web sites are mostly geared to the same temporal and geographical models as their parent companies. Hence, there seems to be no temporal or spatial disruptions on patterns of newsworthiness, despite the fact that the Internet can be used to alter these constraints.

Headlines are sometimes changed on news stories, and one motivation for this is the fact that a Web site is free from the layout constraints of a print page. Hence, as Padma Iyer at the Illawarra Mercury explained, headlines of an appropriate size can be selected. Changes to the text of articles are relatively uncommon, and when they appear, they are just minor sub-editing or the correction of typographical errors. These minor headline and text changes are not related to any criteria of newsworthiness, and do not represent a change in style.

The only significant change to newsworthiness on a single masthead comes when breaking news is published on a Web site connected to an organisation that doesn’t normally supply it, such as a daily newspaper. However, in this case, existing news values for breaking news that existed long before the Internet are merely imported. As Tony Vermeer stated at AAP, newsworthiness, style, and production models at his organisation have not changed, either. Breaking news is breaking news, whether it’s delivered instantly by radio or a Web site.

The very conservative replies to both of these research questions reflect the influence of the “minimal impact” model that has been observed in every site relating to legacy contact that has been studied. It would be difficult for these companies to produce any alterations in the model of delivery or criteria of newsworthiness without disrupting the “minimal impact” model. This suggests that although these organisations are experimenting with the Internet, they are not yet willing to seriously disrupt their organisations for the sake of it.
Chapter Eight

Purely Online Publications

Previous chapters have illustrated a significant trend in Internet-based news. The overwhelming majority of news-related content published on the Internet in Australia has strong ties to previously established providers of non-Internet news. This chapter analyses the relatively small number of regular news-related Web sites with no direct ownership ties to legacy content providers of news. This type of site is classified as a purely online publication, in accordance with the definition supplied in Chapter 1. A purely online publication lacks an ownership or managerial connection to a non-Internet source of news. It is not designed or presented as the online equivalent of a non-Internet news publication or program.

However, a site that reproduces legacy content sourced from another organisation can still be classified as purely online if the Web site itself is not presented as, or designed to be, the exclusive or primary online equivalent of the legacy publication. Such a publication would need to differentiate itself from the source of legacy content through the use of different brand names or mastheads in order to remain within the category of “purely online”.

Material has been provided from Methodologies 1 and 3. This chapter presents material in support of research question R1, by completing the survey of all the news-based Web sites in Australia. It also serves to add material to research question R2 by examining if the style of journalism presented on these sites has been influenced by their publication on the Internet.

The unique features of the Internet outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 suggest that a news-based Web site could be operated in a different format to that of a conventional news organisation. There would be no need to be constrained by the sort of regular production routines of a newspaper, as delivery is asynchronous. Furthermore, content could be updated in minor increments, such
as adding just one story per day, avoiding the typical routine of delivering a large amount of fresh content in a single update.

The "minimal impact" model outlined in Chapter 7 that seems to restrict innovation on Web sites with legacy ties would not apply to a purely online publication.

Purely online sites could also experiment with interactivity to a greater extent, perhaps taking commentaries from readers and making them an interwoven part of the news that is presented.

8.1 Yahoo Australia

The world's most recognised brand in the area of Internet "portal" sites, Yahoo has created a dedicated site for Australia that supplies copious quantities of news.

A "portal" is a Web site that offers a multiplicity of functions and services, usually of general appeal. Typical services include indexes of Web-based content, news, email, and chat. Yahoo offers all these functions on its Web site, but this chapter will focus exclusively on its delivery of news.

The layout and design of news on Yahoo is clean and minimalist, with no illustrations. Yahoo does not generate any news content by itself, and relies upon content produced by other sources.

News is organised into categories such as top stories, business and politics. Content for general news is essentially in the form of a news feed from ABC Online, with business updates from Reuters. Stories from ABC Online are reproduced in a text format, and contain no changes from the content published on the ABC Online site. This results in a news product that has no distinctive features from news that is available elsewhere, but is still presented as a separate entity from ABC Online itself.
The site does include archives. Content is updated regularly. Feedback to Yahoo can be achieved by email for general business purposes, but this does not relate to news, as Yahoo does not produce any of its news content. The site also offers chat forums.

Anna Featherstone, a content manager at Yahoo Australia, was interviewed.

Featherstone observed that as news is just one of several services offered by Yahoo, “it’s important (but) it’s not overriding”.

When stories of interest on a particularly newsworthy topic are published online by other Web sites outside of ABC Online, Yahoo incorporates hyperlinks to them. A “surf crew” employed by Yahoo regularly examines other Web sites for this content.

Generally, news on Yahoo reflects the portal’s overall strategy of aggregating and sorting content from other sources, instead of generating material internally. Despite this, Yahoo remains an independent product that is managerially distinct from any other site.

8.2 Space Daily

A curious venture in Web-based news, Space Daily is a regular news site that focuses primarily on stories relating to astronautics and space exploration, although the site does deal in broader scientific issues. It is a major source of information on this topic. Despite Australia’s relatively small global participation in space-related activities, Space Daily is managed and produced from Sydney, Australia. Space Daily is independently owned and has no ties to a legacy content product.
The overall layout and design of Space Daily is a mixture of columns, featuring short introductions to stories with small illustrations. Its lack of ties to a legacy product influences the design.

Content for Space Daily is updated on a daily basis in varying quantities. New stories are simply added to the home page of the site, while older content is pushed off. This incremental form of updating means that stories are normally visible on the front page for a week as they move downwards. Periodically, the site will publish several new stories at one time, but there are occasions when Space Daily will add nothing more than a single story. There seems to be no specific deadline for adding content to the site. Archives are provided in the form of a search-engine driven index. No chat forums or interactivity is included, apart from an email address for contacting the editor.

Content on the site is presented as text-based stories. Most have small illustrations. The site also divides its content into sub-sections relating to specific topics such as Mars exploration and space activities in China. These sub-pages merely aggregate the same content that is presented on the home page, but filter out stories that do not relate to their specific topic.

Simon Mansfield, editor and founder of Space Daily, was interviewed.

Content for Space Daily is mostly based on the re-writing or unmodified presentation of media releases from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the USA, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) in Australia and other organisations related to space exploration. Stories from news feeds relating to space, particularly Agence-France Presse, are also included in an unmodified form. Periodically, guest writers will contribute material written specially from the site. These vary from employees of space-related firms in the USA to industry analysts in Australia. Mansfield described the methodology of sourcing content as standard journalistic practice.
Space Daily is essentially produced by one person, with Mansfield handling almost all of the duties relating to the site. The site is run in a format similar to a cottage industry from Mansfield’s home. However, the site is actually hosted on servers based outside of Australia. Mansfield stated that this is essential to overcome what he perceives as generally poor communication links between Australia and the rest of the world. Although Space Daily has a loyal readership in Australia, most readers of the site are located in the USA. The site does not generally deal with breaking news, as events in the space community do not normally occur in this format. However, the site has adopted a highly original strategy for breaking news on some occasions. A prime example of this strategy occurred on December 22, 1998, when NASA was preparing to place a spacecraft in orbit around an asteroid for the first time. The Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous (NEAR) spacecraft is a small robot probe launched in 1996 that was finally approaching its target, the asteroid 433 Eros. The mission had proceeded relatively smoothly prior to the approach to Eros, but problems quickly developed with the spacecraft as it entered this critical phase of its mission.

Plans for the approach at this time were well-known and pre-planned. Hence, Mansfield was able to prepare to cover the event in almost real-time. Sitting in his home office in Sydney, Mansfield constantly telephoned personal contacts among the NEAR mission control team in the USA and the NASA Deep Space Network tracking station near Canberra in Australia, who were communicating with the spacecraft.

The dynamics of the story became unpredictable when contact with the spacecraft was suddenly lost as it approached the asteroid. It was feared that the spacecraft could have malfunctioned or been destroyed. Tensions rose as controllers attempted to communicate with NEAR. Mansfield employed an easily managed format of breaking news reporting, adding brief notes to a Web page he had established to cover breaking news on the NEAR mission (Space Daily 1998).

Each brief report was given a time and spatial reference, such as 2 PM Australian Eastern Standard Time, Canberra. The reports were added to the same page in sequence. In one case, reports on this event appeared within approximately 90 minutes.
During the incident, Mansfield continuously telephoned his sources in Canberra and the USA on an hourly basis, waiting for contact with the spacecraft to be re-established. Through the use of his own “news net” through telecommunications, Mansfield was able to establish that operators of the Deep Space Network in Canberra had finally re-established contact with NEAR after roughly five hours of no telemetry. This was posted quickly to the Web site, without waiting for an announcement from NEAR’s own media centre.

The NEAR spacecraft eventually recovered, but plans for placing it in orbit around Eros had been postponed due to the malfunction. Images of the asteroid were taken by the spacecraft’s camera as it flew past, and Mansfield persuaded NEAR controllers to send him these images before they were released to the general media, or even published on the official NEAR Web site. *Space Daily* was hence able to break this story before any other media source, publishing a crude image of the asteroid on its Web site.

*Space Daily* gains its revenue through the use of advertising, sales of products such as books and the operation of a free email service that is advertising-supported.

### 8.3 The Zeitgeist Gazette

*The Zeitgeist Gazette* was an Australian news site formed by an independent team that was both created and decommissioned during the period of research for this thesis. Although the site is no longer active, the *Zeitgeist Gazette* achieved a relatively high profile and attempted some highly innovative strategies.

*The Zeitgeist Gazette* was published daily at approximately 3:00 PM, with no updates or breaking news. Its content could be described as meta-journalism. Journalists working for the site would examine content from the Australian media. This content would be summarised and
subjected to criticism on the site. Hence, although the site was not specifically tied to a legacy content provider, its heavy dependence on the traditional media for topics suggests that it cannot be classified as totally independent from an operational perspective.

The *Gazette* took a highly critical stance on overall standards and ethics within the Australian media, routinely pointing out conflicts of interest and perceptions of underlying agendas in the way certain stories were covered. However, the site did not actively break its own news.

Stories were presented in a text-based format with the occasional use of illustrations, mostly in the form of "Zeitgag" photographs of newsworthy people with funny captions. A general tone of satire was present throughout the publication.

The site did not experiment with multimedia, chat forums, or any genuinely innovative features of the Web. Its style and frequency of publication resembled a newspaper.

*The Zeitgeist Gazette* was a highly original form of Web-based news from a content perspective, but its economic model was also unusual. Revenue was generated entirely through user subscriptions, and no content on the site could normally be accessed for free. Prospective subscribers were allowed to examine the site for free for a short period, but would need to pay if they wished to read in the long term. The site had no other streams of revenue generation.

This economic model proved to be unsustainable, and *The Zeitgeist Gazette* eventually ceased publication due to an inability to generate enough revenue. The lifespan of the publication was approximately six months, starting in August 1999 and ending in March 2000.

*The Zeitgeist Gazette* was founded by Richard Walsh, former CEO and publisher at Australian Consolidated Press, and former ABC Television *Media Watch* Executive Producer David Salter. Its editorial approach reflects the background of one of its founders in dissecting the media for television.
Richard Walsh was interviewed after the publication ceased operations. The Gazette was headquartered in a rented office in Sydney. It employed two technical staff to assist the co-founders in their work, along with a chief of staff who organised the content.

The production routine for the Gazette was fairly regular and intensive, almost resembling the dynamics of a traditional print publication. The previous editorial backgrounds of its founders, and the need to react to traditional publications, seems to have affected this. It is worthwhile examining this routine, as Walsh was willing to provide a high level of detail about the internal operations of the Gazette.

Most of the contents of the site were written by Salter and Walsh. Walsh would begin his work routine at 5:00 AM when he would listen to the Wall Street Report on 702 AM ABC Radio in Sydney. Next, he would listen to the ABC news, and then hear ABC presenter Philip Clark read the newspaper headlines. This gave Walsh an overview of the major stories that were being covered by the media on the day. Phil Clark also narrated pre-planned media events and news stories that were expected to occur on the day.

At 5:30 AM Walsh would listen to the news on Sydney commercial radio station 2UE, which, according to Walsh, has different news values to the ABC. He would then listen to 2UE presenter Alan Jones and the issues he examined. Walsh would then get in his car at 6:00 AM and drive to work in 15 minutes. The chief of staff would arrive at 6:00 AM, having read the day's newspapers on the bus. Walsh would then read the newspapers, taking notes. Co-editor David Salter would arrive, and at 7:15 AM the three journalists would have an editorial meeting.

The Gazette also used media monitors who listened to various radio stations and television programs like the ABC 7:30 Report and SBS Dateline from the previous night. Walsh explained that “David and I would then decide which topics we wanted to write about that day. Some subjects were dominant news. What we were looking for was different accounts of the
same news. Papers would reach different conclusions about the same events. Some events were also too late for the papers. We wanted to make sense of this cacophony”.

Writing for the day’s issue of the *Gazette* would start at roughly 7:30 AM. The chief of staff would pass updates from the syndicated John Laws radio show and other sources to the editors. “We would write until about 1:00 PM. We could all see each other’s copy. Our paper was divided into four sections, and sometimes we would allocate the stories ourselves, but sometimes Bob (the Chief of Staff) would move them to different sections. Bob would do the ‘Zeitgag’ photo parody. We combined proofing and subbing together. At 3:00 it was all on the Net”.

After content for the *Gazette* was placed on the Web, Walsh would prepare a summarised version of the day’s stories, called the *Zeitwatch Express*. This was emailed to subscribers who had requested it. The *Gazette* offered this email summary for a cheaper rate than the regular Web-based version. On Fridays, an email edition reviewing content for the entire week would also be prepared.

Being a Web-only publication, the *Gazette* was free to choose any publication time that it wished. The selection of 3:00 PM as the time of publication was due to a combination of factors.

Walsh explained: “It was connected with my personal experiences of liking to take a break from work at 3 PM. I used to do this by reading the afternoon tabloid papers, when they still existed. 3 PM was also a good time because we could report on the contents of the London and New York papers. We also wanted to be able to monitor (radio personality) Alan Jones and (radio personality) John Laws, who have a lot of influence in Sydney. All of these factors pointed to this time”.

*The Zeitgeist Gazette* dealt with some issues of national relevance, but deliberately focused on events and media in Sydney. “Our view was that we could only physically comment on Sydney.
We did have interstate monitors, including some who monitored (Melbourne radio stations), but we are Sydney people. Even reading *The Age Online* doesn’t give you the same experience as being there,” explained Walsh.

### 8.4 Crikey

*Crikey* is a weekly Web-based publication that is independently owned and has no ties to a traditional legacy product. It delivers original commentaries on news issues that are normally written exclusively for this publication. *Crikey’s* editorial focus is somewhat similar to that of the *Zeitgeist Gazette*, in that it seeks to expose alleged deficiencies in the material presented by conventional media. However, *Crikey* also breaks original stories that are not responses to existing media reports. These are frequently of an investigative format, and concentrate on corporate, government and media issues.

The overall layout of *Crikey* is simplistic but neat. The publication runs text-based stories with no illustrations. There is no multimedia. Letters emailed to the publication are published on the site, but there is no chat forum or other means of interactivity. Short replies to each published email, usually only one sentence long, are normally included.

The site promotes the availability of archived material “soon”, but seems reluctant to actually supply this. *Crikey* publishes content for free, but gains revenue through subscriptions. *Crikey* subscribers receive a weekly “sealed section” email that contains additional content not available for free on the Web site.

The operation of *Crikey* is also subsidised through revenue from *Shareowner*, a Web site dealing with shares and financial information that can only be read by subscribers. A subscription to *Crikey* is separate from subscribing to *Shareowner*. Both are owned by the same editor.
Content for *Crikey* comes from a variety of sources, including the editor, a small team of regular contributors, and certain pieces that appear sporadically from one-off contributors.

Stephen Mayne, editor of *Crikey*, was interviewed.

As the editor of *Crikey*, Mayne ensures that the site is highly interactive, despite the relatively low presence of interactivity to a general reader. He claimed to personally respond to several tens of emails per day, and that someone sending a letter to the editor will never wait more than a day for a reply. Mayne checks emails constantly throughout the day.

The site is run very leanly in a format that, like *Space Daily*, resembles cottage industry. One room in Mayne’s apartment in Melbourne serves as an office. Content written by Manye is emailed to the *Crikey* Webmaster, who lives and works in a different location. Here, the raw content is rendered into a Web format. The server hosting *Crikey* is located within an Australian Internet Service Provider. As *Crikey* is normally a weekly publication, there is no specific daily routine for operating the Web site. Mayne claimed that he usually performs different sorts of tasks on different days, with no pre-set routine for allocating specific tasks to certain days.

Mayne claimed that he promotes a “community as journalist” approach where readers are invited to contribute material. “I am the filter of the site who decides what is worth running. I also commission stories from people. I set up the lineup of stories and send it to the Webmaster”. Content is managed on an ad-hoc basis. Some journalists contribute for free. Others have been paid over a thousand dollars for stories. Much of the material on the site is written by its editor. Mayne claimed that in the period of a few months, 20 different people contributed to the site.

*Crikey* is sometimes updated with minor additions throughout the week, but the majority of its contents is published according to a routine that sees content published on Sundays. As with the
selection of the publication time of *The Zeitgeist Gazette*, Crikey’s publishing schedule is influenced by perceived deficiencies in coverage by the conventional media.

“We had the view that there was a gap in the market on Sundays, because there was no good national Sunday paper. The Monday papers were also looking for material then, and if we could break a story, it could make the Monday papers. This led to a weekly format on the slowest news day,” he said.

### 8.4.1 Crikey’s Email Leak

In mid-2000, *Crikey* found itself involved in a peculiar set of circumstances that illustrates some of the dangers of conducting journalism on the Internet. The Webmaster of *Crikey* was dispatching a *Crikey* “sealed section” to the publication’s subscribers in early July. At one stage in the process, the Webmaster accidentally sent off a batch of emails that included the email addresses of a significant proportion of the subscriber base.

Under long-established principles of Internet professionalism, this was considered to be a major mistake. Several dozen people had their personal email addresses disclosed to a large audience. This was a violation of privacy.

Further problems soon appeared. A self-styled investigative journalist who subscribed to *Crikey* used the leaked addresses to promote his own writings, and criticise *Crikey*. Another journalist who had formerly been a regular *Crikey* contributor also took advantage of the gaffe, sending an email critical of *Crikey* to the addresses, and publishing the email addresses outside of *Crikey*’s subscriber base.

One individual who had obtained the list of email addresses later “spammed” (Internet slang for the mass-circulation of a single email) the mailing list with a commercial advertising message.
The compromise in privacy, as well as the series of unsolicited emails that resulted, prompted a mixed reaction among *Crikey* subscribers. Some were sympathetic, regarding the incident as an innocent mistake. Others were outraged, and at least one cancelled a subscription.

The incident is noteworthy for revealing potential problems in the subscriber model, and the extent to which some journalists were prepared to abuse this opportunity.

### 8.5 Geocities

*Geocities* is an example of a free Web hosting service. Similar services using almost identical revenue models can be found in Australia and other nations, but *Geocities* is the largest and best-known free Web site host.

Using *Geocities* is fairly straightforward. Internet users are allowed to design their own Web sites and upload the contents to servers operated by *Geocities*, which are physically located in the USA. The site creator prepares the content and then logs onto the *Geocities* site. A series of simple operations then transfers pages from a creator’s own computer to a *Geocities* server. Once the contents have been transferred, a user does not need to remain logged onto the *Geocities* service or the Internet. The process is automatically handled by *Geocities* systems and requires essentially no effort by their staff. The creator of a Web site is free to change or update the contents at any time.

These *Geocities* Web sites are as accessible as any other place on the Web, although their addresses incorporate the *Geocities* address followed by other subdirectories that identify each page. Advertising on these Web pages appears each time a *Geocities* page is accessed by a user. A small banner, in a separate window to the rest of the Web page, appears on a user’s screen.

The conditions of use of *Geocities* do not place any ostensible barriers to the presentation of news or journalism on the site. The implications of a service like *Geocities* are enormous. If a
Web page can be produced, it can be presented to the world at virtually no expense to its creator.

I have analysed content on Geocities and similar services for examples of amateur journalism published by Australian Internet users. These searches failed to discover any such content. As I documented previously, the only independent site hosting anything close to journalism in Australia that could be discovered belonged to the Queensland-based journalist Chris Graham, and this was hosted by a traditional Internet Service Provider. This site was only an archive of stories previously published in conventional media.

Clearly, when access to personal computers and Internet connectivity is so commonplace, the advent of free Web hosting represents the removal of the last technical barrier to amateur publishing. The failure of the community to fulfil this potential is curious and significant. It highlights the fact that although the Internet is an ideal delivery system, users who wish to produce journalism must still expend effort to produce this material.

8.6 Conclusion

Each of these publications is unusual in that no ties exist to a traditional legacy news product or news organisation. They are all relatively recent’projects, and with the exception of Yahoo, they are all the products of small, independent teams. All of these factors suggest that these ventures could explore the potential for new methods of content production, and new ways of delivering this content on the Web.

From a theoretical perspective, this means that the large and relatively rigid production model outlined by Tuchman does not need to be implemented, and some of the constraints that the mechanics of this traditional model imposes could be lifted. The need to minimise impact on a
legacy producer is also absent. The model of Internet publishing presented in Chapter 3 proposes that the economic and operational structure of the Internet make it ideal for niche publishing and raising independent voices.

In practice, the operation of these three publications is a real manifestation of these principles. *Space Daily* updates its content in a format that is not tied to a traditional routine publishing structure. The asynchronous delivery model of any Web site allows this to happen without disrupting the experience of its readership. Similarly, *The Zeitgeist Gazette* and *Crikey* are both fiercely independent in their editorial approaches, even if their temporal routines are conventional.

Nevertheless, certain operational factors have meant that the potential expressed by these theoretical models has not been totally achieved in practice. The most significant factor that has influenced the development of these sites is economics.

*The Zeitgeist Gazette* ceased publication due to shortfalls in revenue. This illustrates the fact that although the Internet is a cost-effective delivery system for news, a delivery system is just one component of the production model. Content must still be produced to be placed on the Web, and in the case of a daily publication, this is a highly intensive process.

*The Zeitgeist Gazette* was relatively small in terms of its personnel and infrastructure when compared to an average newspaper, but it still had overheads in terms of equipment, rent, salaries and other operational expenses. Precise figures for the operation were not supplied, but it was made clear that the publication was losing significant quantities of money.

An analysis of the *Zeitgeist Gazette* experience suggests that the Cunningham and Flew model requires some refinement. Independent publication can certainly succeed, but they are more likely to be sustainable if they are not operated as commercial ventures. Such projects would need to rely on voluntary workers to contribute content and produce the Web site. They could use relatively cheap services from a commercial Internet Service Provider, or use a free Web
site hosting service such as *Geocities*. The most likely form of operation that would be carried out under this model would be a single person writing and designing the site as a hobby, with content updated on a weekly or a monthly basis. This frequency of publication would not be as taxing as a daily publication, and would give the journalist time to pursue other activities.

Amateur journalism could not be found on *Geocities*, but it could be argued, in the case of *Crikey*, that certain people who are contributing for free to this publication are amateur online journalists. However, a closer analysis of this situation suggests that this situation is still not a genuine fulfilment of true amateur publishing as outlined in the theoretical model. The journalists are still contributing material to a publication with its own organisational structure and masthead, that is controlled by an editor.

*Crikey* is also a commercial project. Furthermore, the most prominent external contributor to *Crikey* has a background in traditional print journalism. Hence, it is difficult to conclude that any form of amateur journalism operating from Web sites operated by their principal contributors exists anywhere in Australia.

The implications for research question R1 are encouraging, as some examples of moving reporting away from traditional temporal routines have been discovered. However, the journalism carried on all these sites is conventional. The meta-journalism presented in the *Zeitgeist Gazette* is different from most forms of reporting, but this not related to the use of the Internet as a delivery system. Similar meta-journalism can be found in academic journals and even in newspapers in their own sections dealing with the media. Hence, no evidence of style changes suggested in research question R2 was discovered.
Chapter Nine
Perceptions of New Developments

The potential for significant changes in the model of news delivery on the Internet has not been fulfilled much in practice. Previous chapters have noted that news on the Internet is mostly the same news that appears in non-Internet sources, or has been produced and delivered using similar models. This chapter explores the way that interactivity through chat forums, changes in news values, and changes in economic models are perceived by the operators of Web sites. This material is drawn from Methodologies 1 and 3.

This material will allow a deeper understanding of the factors that have generally led to such a conservative response in using the Web as a delivery system, thereby helping to explain the data that has been presented in response to research question R1. Specific answers regarding news values on Web sites will complete the material presented to answer research question R2.

9.1 Examples of Chat

Chat forums of various types are arguably the most sophisticated form of interactivity that has been introduced on these Web sites. In practice, it is absent from more than 80% of the sites documented in this thesis. It is usually featured on sites tied to large parent organisations.

Chat on Web sites is implemented in three distinct forms. These classifications were developed from observations in Methodology 1.

The first form is the hosted guest forum. At a pre-announced time, a celebrity or newsworthy person answers questions sent in by Internet users in real-time. A moderator employed by the Web site hosts the session and edits content that is published. The moderator will select questions sent in by Internet users that he or she feels are appropriate. These questions are
presented to the guest, who supplies answers. The moderator will usually edit these answers and post them to the Web site. A question will usually be answered every few minutes, and the chat forum Web site will be constantly updated through the session. At the end of the session, which normally lasts for a period of an hour, the moderator will close discussions. A full transcript of questions and answers will normally be stored on the Web site in an archival format.

The second format is an asychronous bulletin board, similar to newsgroups. Messages on any news-related topic, or a specific topic allocated to a foram, are posted by users. Depending on the site, a moderator may or may not monitor these discussions. These messages usually have a “lifespan” on the forum of a few days. Other users are free to reply to existing messages or send their own ideas to the board.

The third format is a real-time unmoderated chat foram, similar to Internet applications such as Internet Relay Chat. Users post messages to a bulletin board with a faster rate of content recycling than the second format. Contents appear and disappear in a matter of several tens of minutes, and the overall pace of discussions is much faster. Consequently, a user who logs in to engage in discussion on such a foram will have a limited experience if there is nobody else there at exactly the same time.

9.1.1 Chat on ABC Online

The ABC has made regular use of chat on its Web site. Its overall approach has been somewhat conservative. It has introduced second format chat forums that run in parallel with its news-related content. These forums are run in an asynchronous format, and content is regulated by a moderator. Chat forums are created on specific newsworthy topics and are active for periods of approximately one week.

A message included on every ABC Online chat foram illustrates the mechanics of operation and the cautious approach taken to chat by the ABC. "The views and opinions expressed are those
of the individual who posted the message and not the ABC. The ABC reserves the right to remove offensive or inappropriate messages”. Legal issues seem to be a matter of concern with the operation of every chat forum.

Robert Johnston from ABC Online explained that “our forums process is a little ad hoc at the moment and the subject of a review”. At the time of the interview, the ABC Online news team had introduced a brief hiatus in the hosting of these forums. Johnson claimed that the major issue influencing the introduction of forums was the availability of resources.

Legal issues have influenced the design of previous forums. Johnson claimed that legal advice provided to the ABC suggests that forums should be moderated in order to avoid the publication of defamatory material. However, Johnson observed that moderation is often resented by the users of these forums. The challenge was to provide a balance in the level of moderation.

Johnson claimed that the use of chat forums on ABC Online has not led to any content feeding back into the journalistic process at the Web site, or the ABC in general.

9.1.2 Chat on Ninemsn

Ninemsn has operated chat forums in all three forms. It has offered real-time unmoderated chat where users are invited to discuss news-related issues. I have logged onto this forum on repeated occasions, and have never found any discussions taking place. On most occasions, there was nobody else logged on. In a few cases where other people were registered as being logged onto the forum, no messages were being posted, and my attempts to engage in discussions with them did not generate any replies. It is fair to say that this Ninemsn forum has not been successful.
Ninemsn has also conducted hosted guest forums with individuals such as experts on newsworthy subjects. These hosted forums have been conducted successfully. Ninemsn were unwilling to discuss the use of chat on their sites in detail.

The site also hosts discussion forums that do not operate precisely in real-time, but are much faster than traditional newsgroups. Users are free to post messages relating to news stories and issues. These discussions are rapidly refreshed, with messages generally lasting around one day. Users are free to discuss any topic they choose, and usually express fairly polarised opinions on current events in short paragraphs. There is sometimes interaction between the participants, but postings are mostly of a fragmented nature.

Ninemsn is sensitive to the legal implications of running chat forums. Jane O'Connell explained that moderators of hosted guest forums can elect to not run questions if there are legal implications. A disclaimer is posted on the opening page that appears before users enter any Ninemsn chat forum: “Ninemsn provides discussion boards to facilitate the communication of its users only. The opinions expressed in these boards are those of the relevant users and not Ninemsn. Ninemsn is not responsible for, nor accepts any liability in respect of, the accuracy of the information contained in any discussion board, or the improper application of such information”.

Again, chat on Ninemsn has no feedback or influence on the journalistic process behind news content.

9.1.3 Chat on news.com.au

At the time of research, news.com.au had suspended regular operation of chat services on its Web site, but unlike ABC Online, this was not in preparation for an overhaul. The overall attitude to chat at news.com.au was not enthusiastic. Mark Bruer explained that “we have experimented with chat and found it disappointing”.
The site had experimented with hosted guest forums, but was curtailing their use. It was not clear when the site would attempt another experiment. Bruer claimed that few people will log into chat forums that do not feature celebrities, but when a celebrity appears, so many people log in that people cannot get their questions answered, and feel frustrated.

Bruer claimed that news.com.au feels "challenged" by the concept of unmoderated chat forums. He said that the legal aspects of operating these forums have not been precisely established. News.com.au has never offered this sort of forum.

Again, the limited form of chat hosted on news.com.au has never affected the journalistic process of the site.

**9.1.4 Chat on the Sydney Morning Herald**

The Sydney Morning Herald runs asynchronous chat forums on specific topics that the day editor of the Web site selects. Topics for the forums are selected from news stories that have appeared in the latest edition of the newspaper, or matters of general interest. An aggregated series of continuous discussions is stored on the site.

The chat forums seem to be subjected to editorial moderation. Overall discussions are somewhat fragmented, similar to the discussions that appear on Ninemsn. The design of the chat forums allows traffic patterns to be monitored, and overall, it would seem that the readership is surprisingly low for a major online publication. Individual messages on these forums are generally read around 50 times in a three week period. It seems that the forums have attracted a very small following.

There have been no reports of chat on the Sydney Morning Herald influencing the journalistic process.
The Age in Melbourne offers chat forums of a similar nature. Smaller Fairfax sites do not include this feature.

9.1.5 Chat on Macpherson Newspapers

Unusual for a Web site without a major metropolitan focus, Macpherson features chat on its aggregated site. These chat forums are asynchronous, and users are free to post messages on any topic they wish. The result is fairly chaotic and difficult to navigate, as messages on all sorts of topics are bundled together. Almost every message was related to newsworthy topics and issues. Noel Sharrock explained that moderation exists on its chat forum, but it is rarely activated in practice. He claimed that there have been less than five instances where messages have been removed, due to coarse language or defamatory statements.

9.1.6 Chat on Yahoo

Chat on Yahoo is provided under various headings, but most of these hold a recreational focus. I visited one real-time unmoderated forum that is ostensibly focused on news and current events, but I was unable to find or instigate any discussions on this subject. All the people visiting this forum were conducting social and recreational chat that had no relation to news or current events.

9.1.7 Chat on Network Ten

Network Ten experimented with a discussion board on its Web site, but found that it was not popular with users. Angela Cole observed that message boards generally need to be cleared of "filth". Enthusiasm for chat did not seem to be very high.
9.2 Overview Of Chat

Generally, chat is regarded as somewhat cumbersome to introduce to a Web site. It requires more technical skill to maintain than a simple HTML page, and is perceived as legally dangerous.

The operators of some Web sites that do not feature chat forums expressed opinions on chat. Stephen Mayne of Crikey was sceptical of chat in general, citing an overall lack of quality in discussions he has observed on some sites. He prefers to maintain interactivity with his readers through publishing emails regularly on his site.

Terry Townsend of the Green Left Weekly regarded Internet chat as “pointless and trivial”. He claimed that the overall quality of communication was better when people contributed proper articles to the newspaper, and henceforth to the Web site. The Green Left Weekly has a curious position on the overall use of interactivity. Its Web site offers little in the way of interactivity, yet the overall operation of the Green Left Weekly is highly interactive. The newspaper is mostly sold by volunteers standing in public places, who engage in dialogue on issues with people who buy the newspaper. Townsend claimed that this method of direct personal interaction is preferable.

Barry Wilson from the Kiama Independent said that he was cautious of chat, because “there is no gatekeeper”, a reference to legal complications and problems with the quality of material.

Richard Walsh from The Zeitgeist Gazette felt that the Internet community needed to find a way to convert people who post messages to chat forums into producers of more conventional journalism. “There needs to be a gatekeeper, but how do you do this without too much censorship or placing value judgements on people”? 
9.3 Perceptions of Amateur Journalism

The theoretical framework of this thesis explains the potential for individuals who are not professional journalists to prepare their own journalism and post it on the Internet. Attempts to discover this sort of content have failed to produce any results. The home page of print journalist Chris Graham supplied archives, but this is not amateur journalism.

Interview subjects were asked about their opinions on the potential of the Internet to allow the propagation of amateur journalism. Generally, these people were sceptical about the potential of amateur journalism.

David Lovejoy at the Byron Shire Echo observed that amateur journalism could be entirely fictitious, but expressed concerns over the accuracy of some content in conventional media. “In both cases the reader needs a healthy dose of scepticism”.

Julian Burgess at The Examiner felt that amateur journalism was “dangerous” owing to the potential for defamation.

Tony Murrell from the Independent News Group was also sceptical, saying that amateur journalism had the potential for “running aground upon its own reef of self-interest”. The newspaper had already encountered strange material through email feedback, providing “confirmation of the number of oddballs tilting at all sorts of windmills all over the world”.

Sandy Burgoyne from the Warrandyte Diary believed that “news moves away from the (professional) journalist at the community’s peril”. She acknowledged that many people were sceptical of traditional journalism, “but without the journalist’s role of the gatekeeper and the heavy responsibility that goes with that office, (news) will descend into a mire of advertorial, personal biases and crankism”. Burgoyne cited an example that alarmed her. Shortly before Burgoyne was interviewed, the Warrandyte Diary had received an email from a person claiming that convicted Port Arthur gunman Martin Bryant was innocent.
Ulrike Eichmeyer at *The Weekly Times* was less concerned, claiming that Internet users would distinguish amateur journalism from traditionally produced content, and would place more value on the latter.

Richard Walsh at *The Zeitgeist Gazette* was not convinced that this distinction would be made. "I think that people who are on the Net have lost all sense of provenance. If it's a paranoid with a conspiracy theory or a seasoned journalist with a story, they all seem to have equal weight (on the Internet)". Nevertheless, Walsh believed that "serious maverick journalists" with quality material to publish may find it hard to gain credibility, owing to this overall problem of credibility for amateur journalism.

Walsh compared the overall perceptions of the Internet to the earliest days of television, when people were so amazed by the technical concept of the medium that they were generally uncritical of the quality of the programming it carried.

Overall perceptions of amateur journalism amongst these professional journalists are informed by concerns over a lack of professional values. The theoretical framework of institutionalised news production may have its limitations, but it is perceived as a means of introducing a certain level of standards in the resultant content.

### 9.4 Perceptions of News Values

Generally, it would seem that there has been no change in news values and newsworthiness for stories published on the Internet, as most of this content is legacy content. Importing legacy content also imports legacy newsworthiness.

Galtung and Ruge identified the fact that newsworthiness is tied to spatial and temporal limitations of a media source. The use of the Web should, in theory, liberate certain spatial and temporal limitations, but exploration of news-related Web sites has documented the fact that
organisational factors have strongly influenced the way content is selected for the Web. These factors will be explored in greater detail.

The Minimal Impact model of integrating a Web site with a conventional news organisation from an organisational perspective has already been documented. Under this model, it should be observed that producing changes in news values or style for Web-based news would mean that production teams would need to interact extensively with journalists producing this content, adding to the workload of both teams, and disrupting existing modes of production. Even if this were desirable, it is not clear that Web site operators or journalists perceive any need to explore changes in news values for the Internet.

“A good news story is a good news story,” remarked Mark Bruer from news.com.au. “The Internet is just another means of delivery, and delivery systems are agnostic of news values”. Bruer claimed that he did not perceive any differences in news values between different media in general, regardless or temporal or spatial differences.

Bruer added that legacy content is also not re-edited for the Web for legal reasons and quality control. “Because we are handling material from many newspapers we cannot be privy to all the discussions that have taken place about what goes into, or is left out of, stories. It would be potentially dangerous for us to second-guess or ignore all the considerations that the newspapers have undergone in deciding what to publish”.

In most cases, the decision to avoid editing legacy content is done for purely practical reasons, as it minimises effort.

In Chapter 6, the results of a comparison of stories published in The Australian, The Sydney Morning Herald, and The Daily Telegraph for several days, attempting to detect changes in the adaptation of legacy content, was presented. This revealed that on some occasions, changes were made to headlines, and sometimes, minor sub-editing of the articles would be carried out. These changes did not significantly alter the contents, and did not change the news values at all.
If Web sites are mostly updated at times that coincide with the publication schedules of their legacy content equivalents, then the same temporal values apply. Under the criteria proposed by Galtung and Ruge, this again suggests that temporal influences should be no different on newsworthiness, even if additional content were added.

The major case where temporal factors are changed is in the delivery of breaking news. This is mostly handled through the adaptation of news feeds from services such as AAP. The preparation of breaking news by these organisations is not handled in a special format for the Internet, and hence, no specific news values are added in the preparation of this breaking news.

Most Web sites do not reproduce the entire legacy content of their parent organisation. This seems to be frequently done for practical reasons, as less content is easier to produce. The selection of stories that are reproduced on the Web is usually governed by traditional news values, as the stories that are perceived to be the strongest and most newsworthy are selected. Hence, this merely represents a stronger assertion of these traditional news values. In some cases, as Padma Iyer at the Illawarra Mercury explained, story selection is also influenced by software problems that make it difficult to adapt certain stories for the Web site, due to layout structures.

One factor that does seem to slightly influence the form of news values on the Internet is a result of the fact that the Internet is a derivative of an existing media product. News values and content in general may be selected in such a way that it boosts interest in the legacy product. This could include the selection of the most interesting stories to entice people to buy legacy products. Carlos Monterio at the Sydney Morning Herald mentioned that some stories published in news updates were deliberately chosen for their potential to incite gossip among people in offices.
Hence, news values seem to have changed little, if at all. The differences in content that do appear are not a derivative of temporal and spatial factors, but institutional and motivational factors for the production of the Web site.

9.5 Perceptions of Economics

The economics of operating Web sites can be explored from more than one angle. Some sites will require some form of revenue generation to sustain their operating costs. Others will be prepared to sustain losses if the Web site is perceived as fulfilling certain goals. Some sites are connected with non-profit news projects, and do not seek to raise revenue.

The theoretical model for economics, presented in Chapter 2, has documented four discrete channels for revenue generation from a Web site (Mings and White 2000). Analysis of news-related Web sites has revealed that all of these channels have been implemented on different Web sites. However, little data is available on the exact revenue levels generated by news-based Web sites, or how economic models will influence the development of content in the future.

Web sites interviewed were generally unwilling to disclose financial data of any form. An exception was Space Daily, which issued a media statement advertising its economic sustainability and its ability to generate profit in 2000 (Space Daily 2000). Fairfax has announced losses for its own Web-related activities, but has observed that its revenues are steadily increasing each year (John Fairfax 2000). Information on revenue and profits is generally regarded as highly sensitive by most companies, and the Internet is no exception.

The creation of large teams to produce Web content for some commercial media operations would, by necessity, require the generation of revenue to sustain them. At the present, it is not clear that the revenue gained by these sites is enough to sustain them, as it is difficult for an external observer to match actual expenditure to the revenue generated by these sites. Short-
term losses could be covered by the generation of substantial revenue in the future, but at the present, it is as difficult to predict future revenue levels as it is for external observers to calculate present ones.

The attitudes of the operators of some Web sites to economic factors is somewhat relaxed. Some are non-profit activities that have no plans to generate revenue from their Web activities at all. Examples are the Green Left Weekly and the Warrandyte Diary.

Erwin Chandla at the Alice Springs News said that revenue models for Web sites was still a “big question”. David Lovejoy at the Byron Shire Echo was also asked about revenue models. “If you find out, let me know,” he replied. Melissa Lutton at the Lower Clarence Review also claimed to have no idea of how her site could directly generate revenue.

Julian Burgess at The Examiner observed that his newspaper could not afford to see a transfer of readers to a free delivery method, and hence had implemented a subscription model at the site.

Padma Iyer of the Illawarra Mercury observed that small, low-budget Web sites could usually justify their existence as promotional vehicles for their parent publications. He claimed that the Illawarra Mercury’s own site was justifiable under this model.

Although it is not a generally popular revenue stream at the present, Mark Bruer at news.com.au claimed that in the near future, the main revenue model for any sort of content-driven Web site would be transactions. He admitted that for news, “transactions are irrelevant. So what we need to do with a news product is advertising. People are sceptical about the value of online advertising, but I don’t share this. Advertising support could become considerable. But it won’t generate as much money as transactions”. Bruer claimed that this predicted emphasis on transaction meant that in the future, the site would attempt to direct people who had logged onto the site to read news into transaction opportunities.
An example of this strategy has been implemented by the multipurpose portal Yahoo, which runs ABC news stories, but is not allowed to run advertising alongside these stories. Yahoo uses news as a means of attracting users to the site, and similarly expects them to move across to more profit-oriented parts of the portal that feature advertising and transactions.

The Fairfax F2 network, a portal with links to the Sydney Morning Herald and other online Fairfax publications, also attempts to raise revenue through the use of a general portal model. Ninemsn is also portal-oriented, with news as one of several services and functions.

Space Daily has actually managed to form a direct link between news and transactional services due to its adoption of a niche approach. The emphasis on space-related news means that the site offers books and other products relating to space for sale on its site.

Stephen Mayne at Crikey believed that even the structures proposed by Mings and White could be inappropriate.

"The culture that everything is free makes it difficult to develop a revenue model. We are trying to use a mainstream approach, but our bigger approach is to create a brand name and use it for other ventures, such as Crikey Investments. If you are using a conventional revenue model, I am not convinced that you will produce a seriously profitable business," Mayne said.

Richard Walsh from The Zeitgeist Gazette was pessimistic about the overall status of revenue models on Australian news sites. "I don't think anyone else has a sensible revenue model, and this will be their undoing. The bubble will burst. (Sites) are working on the belief that if you have eyeballs, you can make money from them".

Nic Burrows, a senior manager at the Internet advertising agency NetX, was asked about overall trends in economic models for news-based Web sites. He believed that advertising was an important source of revenue for dedicated news sites, but that an economic model based solely on advertising would not be enough to sustain them. He claimed that portal sites such as Yahoo,
which offer a variety of functions and hence attract more page views, could be able to survive on advertising alone.

Burrows was unwilling to supply figures or discuss specific sites he had dealt with for commercial reasons. However, Burrows claimed that overall spending on advertising on the Web was increasing with time.

The comments from interview subjects, and the surprisingly low levels of specific information that has been published on this topic, suggest that Web site operators are plagued with confusion, and probably a certain amount of embarrassment, over the economic factors that influence Web sites. It would seem that nobody has demonstrated a sustainable profit-oriented revenue model, with the exception of *Space Daily*. However, some sites are operating, and can be expected to remain in operation, without the explicit inclusion of a revenue model.

In the short term, it is encouraging that editorial standards do not seem to have been compromised by economic factors in any Australian news site.

**9.6 Conclusion**

The comments of these interview subjects reveal that awareness of the potential for changes in delivery and production models exist. However, these subjects have also demonstrated scepticism for their potential to produce actual improvements. Hence, research question R1 can be supplemented with the knowledge that the relative lack of change is not a result of ignorance, but mistrust. Chat does not intermesh with the journalistic process, and it is disliked by several editors. Amateur journalism is similarly disliked, and reports of dubious content arriving by email were documented. It is interesting to see that conservatism and an adherence to traditional delivery models is seen as a way of protecting the integrity of journalism, and of protecting the public. This perception is consistent with the proposition in Chapter 1 that the
arrival of a new delivery system would do nothing to change the level of effort and resources required to produce quality journalism.

Research question R2 has revealed no changes in newsworthiness due to new journalistic models or space/time considerations addressed by Galtung and Ruge. The principal changes in newsworthiness have been to emphasise the most newsworthy stories from legacy content, with a view to enticing people to read the Web site and the offline equivalent. But the criteria used to determine these stories are the same news values held by the parent organisation.

The influence of economic factors on the use of the Internet as a delivery system would still seem to be largely unresolved, despite the fact that economic shortfalls were the principal cause of the demise of the Zeitgeist Gazette. Editors and site operators are still in the process of working out how economics will affect the operation of their Web sites. Hence, this aspect of question R1 cannot be answered adequately at this stage in the evolution of the Internet.
Chapter Ten

Motivations of Online Publishers and Audiences

This chapter analyses the factors that have motivated the creation of the Web sites documented in this thesis. Data was obtained from interviews conducted in Methodology 3. The perceptions of online publishers are then complemented by the data from an online user survey conducted in Methodology 4. The relationship between the two sets of data will be presented. This chapter attempts to answer research question R3.

10.1 Motivations of Publishers

Methodology 1 revealed that the majority of news-related Web sites are derived from legacy news sources, while a few news-related ventures have selected the Web as their only delivery system. It is appropriate to consider motivational factors for legacy and non-legacy products separately.

10.1.1 Theoretical Framework for Legacy Sites

Cunningham and Flew outline the advantages of placing content of any form on the Internet, but do not theorise that these advantages serve as specific motivations.

I have constructed a set of potential motivational criteria for placing news on the Web. These criteria provide an overview of reasons gathered from interviews I conducted with the operators of Web sites of various descriptions (most of them unrelated to journalism). The interviews were conducted during my work as a journalist studying the Internet. Originally presented in Chapter 3, these criteria are reproduced here for continuity.
**Experimentation:** The legacy content provider may simply be experimenting with the Web as a new medium, in order to understand its operation and potential.

**Trend:** The legacy content provider may create a Web site simply because other content providers have done this. It may be a case of simply copying an industry trend.

**Fear:** Aggressive advertising campaigns for Internet services frequently suggest that a person, or a company, is missing out on opportunities if they fail to use it. Some legacy content providers may create Web sites due to the fear of negative consequences if they do not. These providers may or may not have a preconception of what those consequences could be, but it is reasonable to expect that such fears would include a potential loss of readers and revenue.

**Commercial:** The Web site may be perceived as a means of revenue generation, or the protection of existing revenue sources.

**New Product:** The Web site may be perceived as an entirely new media product that can deliver unique content, or deliver legacy content in a different way. It may also be targeted at people who do not consume the legacy product, or are not expected to be converted to the legacy product.

**Augmentation:** The Web site may be seen as an augmentation of the legacy product, with users expected to consume both. The legacy product will be augmented through the supply of legacy content, and a few additional services, on the site.

**Prestige:** The Web site may be perceived as a source of prestige for the legacy product and the organisation behind it.

**Self-Fulfilment:** The use of the Internet is frequently done for purely recreational purposes. It may be possible that some content providers actively enjoy and gain personal satisfaction from the creation and operation of their Web sites.
Under these criteria, the content-related advantages proposed by Cunningham and Flew would fall within the Augmentation category listed above, as they relate to the motivation of delivering a better experience for readers in terms of content supply.

10.1.2 Motivations of Legacy Providers

Erwin Chandla at the Alice Springs News stated that the principal motivation for creating his Web site was “prestige”. He claims that he was unsure if there were any specific advantages to using the Internet when his newspaper went online in 1997, “but it made sense to get in on the ground floor with a medium destined to grow rapidly”.

Mick Ticehurst at the Blue Mountains Gazette claimed that his publication was following what was perceived as a general industry trend.

David Lovejoy at the Byron Shire Echo claimed that his newspaper went online due to the efforts of one employee who was knowledgeable about the Web and wanted the Echo to go online. Lovejoy added that “everyone else would do it, so we couldn’t afford to be left out”. Hence, fear seems to be another motivation.

Lovejoy did not state that reaching out to wider geographical areas was a principal motivation, but site logs indicated it was happening. Most overseas traffic originated from sites connected to the US Military. Lovejoy believed that their interest in the site was “hostile”.

Julian Burgess at The Examiner stated that “there is a perception that every newspaper should be online…and we have yielded to that perception”. He did not state that reaching out to an international audience was a primary motivation, but remarked that 45% of readers of his site are from the USA and 10% are from other places outside of Australia. He believes that most of these readers are expatriate Tasmanians.
Ulrike Eichmeyer at *The Weekly Times* stated that “I don’t think that any newspaper can avoid this, especially with the younger generation”.

Angela Cole at *Network Ten* explained that the station’s site only started in 1999, and “we needed to catch up”. The marketing of *Network Ten* as a youth-oriented station was also a motivation in this, as *Network Ten also* perceived the Web as a youth-oriented delivery system.

Terry Townsend at the *Green Left Weekly* explained that his newspaper “did not want to miss out” on a new medium. Unusually, he also stated that a prime motivation was the desire to reach readers overseas. The editorial policy of the *Green Left Weekly* means that its contents is of interest to readers around the world who are interested in left-wing politics. The Web was perceived as an easy way to reach areas beyond Australia. Hence, the *Green Left Weekly* seems to be a rare example of a site that is ostensibly reaching out to a large geographical region, as predicted by the Cunningham and Flew model.

Tony Murrell at the *Independent News Group* claimed that the Internet was a natural extension and evolution for an organisation already involved in communications. He also hoped the Web site would eventually become a source of revenue generation. Murrell also noted that the Web site was a source of “prestige”, and could lead to more sales, or produce a value-added product. Hence, Murrell identified several of Cunningham and Flew’s propositions.

Barry Wilson from the *Kiama Independent* and *Lake Times* said that the parent company of both these papers had a general policy of being at the forefront of new technologies. In recent years, the company was also the first in Australia to introduce a new form of computer plate technology. He added that the Web site was also being treated as an experiment with the medium. “Ego also plays a role. It’s nice to be one of the first newspapers online, along with being one of the oldest”.


Wilson did not nominate reaching a wider geography as a motivation, but observed that the site did attract a "steady" level of hits from overseas. He attributes this to people from the region travelling overseas.

Melissa Lutton at the *Lower Clarence Review* claimed that she expected the Web site to increase the profile of her newspaper, and hence boost sales of the print version.

Mark Bruer at *news.com.au* explained that News Limited developed this Web site from the interplay of several independent motivational factors. In 1996, the company built a Web site that aggregated classified advertising from all News Limited newspapers. This was done to protect revenue streams from fears that independent operators, as well as Fairfax, would erode their market share with their own Web classifieds. "We perceived that start-up costs were low and there were opportunities for new players to enter the market".

Later, a Web site for content from the News Limited flagship newspaper *The Australian* was set up. "*The Australian* decided to establish a Web site because it is valued for its computer section," observed Bruer. "It felt that it needed to be seen as keen on a new medium. It was not seen as a revenue opportunity, but an opportunity to extend out brand to the new medium and uphold the core value of *The Australian* as a paper concerned with technology". Despite this emphasis on new technology, the site included general news, as it was perceived that users would want this.

Eventually, the success of this Web site in attracting readers led the company to develop a strategy for placing all of its newspapers online. This resulted in the creation of *news.com.au*.

Rick Ferguson at *The Advocate* said that the original motivation for his Web site came "through the recognition of the Internet as a future information and news resource". The motivations that presently drive the site are mainly economic. The site is perceived as a generator of revenue through advertising, a means of cost reduction through the future payment of accounts in online transactions, and protection of their market share.
Sandy Burgoyne from the *Warrandyte Diary* said that the paper was first placed on the Web when a local resident offered to put selected stories from this volunteer-run community newspaper on the Web. Eventually, the newspaper developed a more permanent presence on the Web than this original site. Burgoyne claimed that one of the principal motivations was reaching former residents of the area who had moved to other locations, and serving as a guide to the area for international travellers planning to visit. Email received by the site confirmed that both of these strategies were succeeding. Hence, this geographical motivation was similar to that of the *Green Left Weekly* and *Space Daily*.

Large publications such as the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Ninemsn* speak of the Web as an area that they feel requires almost no explanation of motivations. It's there, they are large media organisations, and it is a natural part of their business.

Drawing from inspection of the sites, it is possible to draw certain conclusions. Commercial factors and the desire to create a new product are factors that have obviously motivated the creation of *Ninemsn*. Commercial factors and augmentation seem to have been motivations for Fairfax. The ABC is clearly motivated by augmentation, and probably also by prestige.

Hence, the motivations of these legacy content providers are somewhat diverse. It seems reasonable to believe that the interview subjects were not entirely forthcoming, and that fear of losing business in a new medium has played a greater role that some sites are prepared to admit. Every motivation proposed in the model at the start of this chapter has been documented in practice. It also seems reasonable to expect that small non-profit ventures such as the *Warrandyte Diary* also gain a sense of self-fulfilment from publishing on the Internet. Contributors to the legacy version are all volunteers, and presumably gain a sense of self-fulfilment by delivering content in any medium. It is surprising that publishers do not generally express an interest in reaching larger geographic areas, even when some sites have documented the phenomenon. Within the theoretical framework outlined at the start of this chapter, reaching other regions would be classified under the New Product category.
The perception of the Internet as a youth-oriented medium is an interesting motivation, as it is not ostensibly tied to the mechanics or economics of the Internet. It was not addressed in the Cunningham and Flew model, nor was it proposed in the motivational factors for adapting legacy content. Demographic studies in Australia give justification to this argument, as they reveal that a greater proportion of young people use the Internet than people in higher age cohorts (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000b). This demographic imbalance is likely to change as the Internet loses its novelty, and young people who have embraced the Internet grow older.

The creation of a new publication with no legacy ties that is purely online suggests that different motivational factors are at work than for the adaptation of a legacy product to the Web. The original motivations proposed for the transfer of legacy content do not apply as strongly, but the advantages outlined in the Cunningham and Flew model are arguably more relevant to the creation of a purely online publication than a legacy derivative.

10.1.3 Motivations for Purely Online Publications

Stephen Mayne explained that Crikey's origins as a Web-based publication have some connections to the Web from his previous publishing endeavours. Prior to founding Crikey, Mayne had gained a certain level of publicity and notoriety in Victoria by establishing a Web site that featured a lengthy essay critical of then Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett. A former assistant to the Premier, Mayne published information that he felt was not being adequately addressed by the media. The popularity of this site convinced Mayne that further experimentation with independent publishing was feasible.

Mayne claims that he elected to continue using the Web for his new publication because of low entry costs, its lack of regulation and the ability to publish large quantities of information, three critical elements derived from the Cunningham and Flew model.
Similarly, *Space Daily* also has a connection to a previous Web-based venture. Publisher Simon Mansfield explained that his experiments with Web publishing date back to 1995, when he created a Web site in Tokyo with a focus on Japanese space news and archived images of planets taken by space missions. Success with this project motivated him to create a Web site dealing with general news about space-related issues, which became *Space Daily*.

Mansfield stated that his motivations for continuing to use the Web as a delivery system are the low costs of maintaining a Web site and the immediacy of the medium for publishing, factors that are again consistent with the Cunningham and Flew model. Unusually for an Australian publication, Mansfield is strongly focused on capturing readers from a wide geographical region. Most readers of *Space Daily* actually live in the USA.

Hence, both *Crikey* and *Space Daily* have connections to the medium of the Web from previous projects by their editors, and even the topics covered by their predecessors were of a similar nature.

Richard Walsh explained that although *The Zeitgeist Gazette* was a purely online publication, the *Gazette* did not have any ties to previous publishing on the Web. "It wasn’t so much a belief in the Internet as a belief in the need for a daily commentary on the various news media in Sydney,” he remarked.

Walsh claimed that after examining various modes of delivery, it was concluded that the Web was the only medium that fulfilled a preconceived set of requirements for the publication. The most critical of these requirements was the need to reach people at a specific time of the day. The editors had already selected 3:00 PM on weekdays as the specified time of publication and delivery.

Walsh claimed that the only delivery systems that would have allowed this were fax and the Internet. Fax delivery was rejected due to the fact that delivery would not have been as
instantaneous as a Web site, and the quality of layout would have been compromised. The Web site placed a strong emphasis on graphics and sophisticated layout.

Walsh also claims that the ease of using the Web as a delivery system meant that most of the staff's attention could be focused on production, instead of paying for and dealing with distribution. Hence, he has identified the Cunningham and Flew factors of immediacy and the ease of self-publishing for small groups.

It is not appropriate to classify Yahoo in exactly the same context as these ventures from a motivational perspective, even though it is a purely online publication. Yahoo is a multipurpose Web portal that exists on the Web because it is primarily concerned with linking to content on the Web. The selection of the Web as a delivery system for its news is thus a circular argument. News content is included because it is popular with Web users and can be used as a means of attracting them to Yahoo, where they can be leveraged to other profit-oriented parts of the portal for commercial motivations. Hence, this site cannot be explored for motivations for choosing the Web above other media.

It is interesting to see how two of these publications were started by people with previous experience in Web-based publishing. This factor was not predicted in Cunningham and Flew's theoretical model, arguably because at the time of its construction, there were very few people who had any serious background in working with the medium as publishers. This is not related to the specific advantages of the medium, and it is also difficult to argue that the "previous experience" factor is linked to organisational models. Tuchman does not specifically address this concept, and it is difficult to speak of organisational and institutional factors influencing these very small ventures, one of which is essentially a one-person operation.

Perhaps it could be argued that the lack of an organisational framework that can be achieved in this publishing context attracted Simon Mansfield and Stephen Mayne to pursue their own independent publishing ventures. The closest one could link this concept to the theoretical
model is to argue that previous experience with the Web would demonstrate the validity of certain specific advantages outlined in the Cunningham and Flew model.

*The Zeitgeist Gazette* is interesting for its neutral approach to using the Web, which was motivated purely by perceptions of mechanical and operational advantages.

### 10.2 Motivations of Online Users

The motivations of online users for reading online news does not appear to have been documented by any previous academic study. It should be observed that this is a different line of inquiry from general research into uses and gratification from the media, or specific reasons for consuming news. The thesis seeks to explore the reasons why news is consumed on the Internet as opposed to other media. It is expected that consumers of these products would be motivated by the perception of specific advantages.

#### 10.2.1 Online User Survey

A Web-based survey of Internet users was conducted in order to document the consumption of Web-based news and the perceptions of users. The methodology for this survey is documented in Chapter 3. Complying with University regulations, I note for the record that an explanation of the methodology, data and conclusions drawn from this survey was presented orally by me at the IAMCR 2000 conference in July 2000 in Singapore.

The survey ran between July 1999 and January 2000. During this time, responses were steadily accumulated as publicity for the survey spread. Most responses were judged to be bona fide, although some respondents were rejected for evaluation owing to my screening procedures. When 200 suitable responses had been received, the results were analysed and prepared for presentation.
The methodology used in this survey is susceptible to errors, owing to its passive nature and the difficulties in verifying the identities of respondents. The operator of a major commercial online survey organisation in Australia revealed that his own surveys frequently attract bogus replies, such as respondents claiming to be celebrities or individuals answering the survey several times under different names (Jones 1996). For this reason, it was important to pay close attention to the replies.

I am satisfied that the data collected by this survey is of an authentic nature. I was unable to detect any evidence of deliberate mischief or misrepresentation in this survey. Nobody claimed to be prominent identities, and no responses contained jokes. The manager of one commercial research company believed that some users submit multiple entries in order to boost their chances of winning prizes offered by the survey companies (Jones 1996). Respondents to this survey would have no such motivation, as no substantial rewards were offered.

Nevertheless, some replies were rejected, owing to perceptions that the respondents had been careless or did not understand the questions they were answering. Screening procedures were introduced to detect such replies. These functioned by rejecting answer sets that were internally inconsistent. A person above the age of 25 who claims to be a school student could have been careless or misperceptive. In either case, it was judged that the detection of internally inconsistent answers would automatically cause a reply to be rejected. Roughly ten respondents were rejected under this screening procedure.

The responses were analysed throughout the data collection period. It was decided to limit the data set at 200 for several reasons. The survey had operated for an extended period, and logistics demanded that further activity should be curtailed. The response level was also judged to be high enough to supply accurate data for the research. It was also believed that further data collection would not increase the accuracy of the data. After roughly 100 responses had been collected, certain discrete trends in the data could already be detected. No change in these trends emerged by the time the response level had doubled. Hence, it was apparent that the
trends the survey was designed to explore had already been documented with as much accuracy as this research methodology could provide.

The following is an aggregated presentation of data collected from this survey, together with conclusions drawn.

10.2.1.1 Demographic Trends

Demographic data provided enough entries from a wide range of ages and gender to ensure that the response was reasonably representative. The data is skewed towards younger users and males. This skewing of the demographics partially reflects imbalances of the Internet user community itself (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000b). The ages of respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Age of Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group (years)</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage (%) of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-60</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of these, 144 respondents (72%) were male and 56 (28%) were female.

The higher proportion of young people responding is consistent with documented usage patterns of the Internet in general. In the 12 months to February 2000, 77% of 18 to 24 year olds in Australia accessed the Internet compared to 13% of adults aged 55 years or over (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000b). However, the bias towards male respondents is more substantial than current demographic trends. 46% of male adults in Australia are Internet users, while 41% of female adults are also Internet users (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000b).
160 respondents (80%) were Australian citizens living in Australia. Seven (3.5%) were Australians living outside of Australia. 28 (14%) were non-Australian citizens living in Australia and five (2.5%) were non-Australians living outside of Australia.

103 (51.5%) respondents described themselves as “Working” and 88 (44%) were “Tertiary Students”. This provided large and closely matched numbers for both categories. Four respondents (2%) classified themselves as “Looking for Work”, two (1%) were “School Students” and three (1.5%) classified themselves as “Other”.

One of the first analytical tasks was to compare data for age and gender with answers to non-demographic questions. Curiously, there was no relationship between age or gender for other trends in the usage of Web-based news, with the exception of one specific Web site (slashdot.org). This case will be explored in greater detail elsewhere in this chapter. The lack of any other relationships between age and gender removes concerns that the disproportionately low number of females answering the survey could affect overall trends in other data. Trends involving other demographic variables will be explored next.

10.2.1.2 Location of Usage

The demographic variable of employment and education was useful in exploring the context of usage, which could influence the motivations of users.

The number of respondents who described themselves as “School Students”, “Looking for Work” or “Other” was so small that no conclusions can be drawn concerning these demographic categories and their relationship to other variables. However, data from these individuals were included in other aggregated results from this survey.

With substantial representation from both workers and tertiary students, it was possible to examine how the location (work or college) where respondents presumably spent large amounts of time during the day influenced the way they used the Internet for accessing news.
It is noteworthy that in Australia, as well as many other industrialised countries, Internet access is freely available to both tertiary students and office workers. Access in this form is mostly provided on computers that are connected to local area networks, and in turn to semi-permanent connections to the Internet. Users, whether they are students or employees, click an icon to activate a Web browser, and immediately gain access. This is a fast and simple process, which should offer these people ready opportunities to use the Internet.

Of the 88 (44% of total survey) tertiary students who replied, 43 (21.5% of total survey, 49% of tertiary students) said that they read news from their tertiary college or university and 45 (22.5% of total survey, 51% of students) did not. It was found that 42 students (21% of total survey, 48% of students) read news from Internet connections at home. Two (1% of total survey, 2% of students) reported logging in from other locations. Two (1% of total survey, 2% of students) log in from work, while two (1% of total survey, 2% of students) log in from work, home and college.

The clearest trend that emerges from this data is that large numbers of tertiary students are reading news on free connections at their places of study. However, the trend was even more extreme for people in full-time work.

Of 103 respondents (51.5% of total survey) who classified themselves as workers, 78 (39% of total survey, 76% of workers) responded that they read news on the Internet from work. Only 25 (12.5% of total survey, 24% of workers) did not. 34 (17% of total survey, 33% of workers) log in from home, and of these, 12 (6% of total survey, 11% of workers) log in from both work and home. Three respondents (1.5% of total survey, 3% of workers) nominated logging in from other locations, with one (0.5% of total survey, 1% of workers) logging in only from other locations.

In both student and worker categories, variables relating to nationality or country of residence produced no differentiation of the data.
While students were somewhat divided in their choice of access points, the level of workplace
use of Internet access for news is large, constituting more than three quarters of respondents.
The physical mechanics of Internet access in the workplace or at college, coupled with the
demographic trends outlined above, contribute to the formation of a new model that is
consistent with other data in this survey. This model will be presented later in this chapter.

10.2.1.3 Online Publications Read

Question 5 asked people to nominate the publications that they usually read online. The survey
was not designed to produce precise “ratings” data for news-based Web sites, and no such
conclusions were drawn from the data. It is noteworthy that even though technology should, in
theory, allow very precise measurements of the popularity of specific Web sites, producing
trustworthy “ratings” figures is still a highly controversial matter in both technical and
commercial spheres (Swartz 2000).

In general terms, the most striking conclusion that can be drawn is the general domination of
the Web (at least, from a general audience perspective) of the “Big Four” sites linked to large
news organisations. Respondents routinely nominated sites such as news.com.au, Fairfax sites
such as The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, ABC Online, and Ninemsn. Yahoo was also
regularly nominated. Generally, it would seem from the data that large legacy content
providers, and this large Web portal, are the most popular sites with respondents.

As previous chapters have documented, all of these sites are essentially sources of legacy
content from popular conventional media sources. Ninemsn draws most of its news from an
AAP feed, but even this is conventional and predictable.

The overwhelming emphasis on news sources and styles that differ little from content that’s
available through other media is informative. It suggests that concepts of alternative news
sources and alternative styles proposed under the Cunningham and Flew model have not been
strong motivations for online users. Nobody nominated publications like Crikey, The Zeitgeist Gazette, or the Green Left Weekly, which have slightly countercultural editorial policies.

Attempts were made to explore relationships between the popularity of specific Web sites and other variables. Surprisingly, replies were consistent across age, sex and education versus employment variables.

One surprise that did emerge was the popularity of slashdot.org, a highly innovative Web site dedicated to technology and cultural issues related to technology, such as politics and science fiction. It is not a source of general news. Slashdot.org is a US-based publication that has no legacy equivalent, and is independently owned. It is often countercultural in its focus, draws much of its material from snippets from other media sources, and is highly interactive. Billing itself as “news for nerds”, slashdot.org is clearly designed to appeal to technologically savvy young people. Slashdot.org was the only frequently mentioned publication to exhibit any distinct demographic trends. Its readers were overwhelmingly male (female readership was well under 10%), and generally younger than other respondents (the average age was 26, versus 29 for the entire survey). Slashdot.org declined to be interviewed for this thesis.

10.2.1.4 Geographical Scope

The survey did attract replies from Australians living overseas, non-Australian citizens living in Australia, and non-Australian citizens living outside of Australia. This allowed the data to be examined for the possibility, proposed in the Cunningham and Flew model, that the Web-based news could be read outside of its legacy geographical area, even if publishers themselves were not generally aiming for such a result.

The results showed that Australian citizens living in Australia almost totally concentrated their attention on Australian news sites. When attention was directed overseas, it was mostly at international news sites, or at ostensibly localised news sources that have become internationally prominent, such as the New York Times. Only 16 of the 160 Australian citizens
and residents did not read an Australian news site regularly (8% of entire survey, 10% of Australian citizens in Australia). Of these, 11 (5.5% of entire survey, 7% of Australian citizens in Australia) regularly read international sites such as CNN or the BBC.

Only 28 non-Australians living in Australia replied, (14% of entire survey), but this low number still allowed me to reach some broad qualitative trends. Half of these (7% of entire survey) regularly read a dedicated Australian news site, and half (7% of entire survey) do not. Of those who don’t, almost all read a foreign or international news site regularly. The adoption of local news values amongst foreign residents is an interesting phenomenon. Some obviously develop an interest in local events, and others do not.

It was proposed that interest in local news values among non-Australian residents here could be tied to the period of residency. This question could be explored within the data, because many of the foreign residents who answered the survey are students at Australian tertiary institutions. It was proposed that these people had spent little time in Australia in the past, and were planning to return to their homelands at the completion of their studies. Under such circumstances, one could expect a person to develop less interest in Australian news than a foreign citizen who was working here or basing themselves more permanently. Curiously, the data obtained showed no relationship between the adoption of Australian news values and a foreign resident’s status as a student or worker. The adoption of local news values would seem to be an idiosyncratic process.

Foreign residents who read overseas news generally did so for only one country, although two of these respondents followed events in two countries. It is proposed that these people are generally reading news from their countries of origin, although the data does not allow this to be determined precisely.

Only seven Australians living outside of Australia replied (3.5% of total survey), but six of these seven regularly read a dedicated Australian news site (86% of Australian expatriates, 3% of entire survey). Coupled with the data above, it seems reasonable to draw the conclusion that
news readers will usually only develop a strong interest in a specific country if they are living there, or have lived there.

The number of non-Australian citizens living outside of Australia who responded to the survey was too small to use for examining overall trends.

10.2.1.5 Audience Motivations

The most important goal of the survey was to examine audience motivations for reading online news, and to explore the way that these motivations would correlate with the inherent advantages that could be offered by delivering news on the Web.

The primary means of addressing this question was to simply ask survey respondents why they read news online. A form-field entry allowed respondents the freedom to answer in any way they wished, and no prompting or examples were provided in the survey. Nevertheless, clear patterns emerged from the resultant data, and it was possible to correlate this data with other elements of the survey to construct overall usage models for Web-based news.

Some respondents nominated more than one factor, but most related a single point. Without exception, all replies could be accounted for by the categories that follow.

Some replies nominated general media gratification points such as “I want to be informed” or claimed that news was entertaining. However, the overwhelming majority of reasons given by the respondents were related to perceived advantages of using the Web for news over other media. This is a point in itself. It emphasises the fact that Web-based news is a far more active process than news in some media. People must log on deliberately. It is not background noise coming from a radio that people listen to while they perform other tasks. Therefore, online news readers are more likely to be selective and attentive to specific advantages in choosing this medium.
Table 2 presents a breakdown of replies given by the respondents. Note that it is possible for a respondent to give more than one reason. Hence, the number of specific motivations is larger than the number of respondents.

### Table 2: Motivational Factors of Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Raw Score</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Specific Motivations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment/information/general gratification</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work or study-related purposes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult for user to access other media for news</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity of Web-based news</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to world news</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to news from overseas locations</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News on specialised topics</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-depth news reporting</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to archived news</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of news sources and alternative reports</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of browsing and navigation through sites</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of news updates</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, many of the potential advantages of the Web that were presented in Chapters 2 and 3 are mentioned above. Some users are gaining from the Web's potential to supply varied, detailed content. Roughly a quarter of all respondents nominated the frequency of updates of online news as a motivating factor. This was predicted in Chapter 3, and examinations of Web sites revealed that it is a common feature of the “Big Four” Web sites. The popularity of the “Big Four” sites among survey respondents produces consistency within this data set, and support for the concept that frequent updates is a major advantage of Web-based news.

Although some advantages proposed by Cunningham and Flew have been documented in the data, it is clear that respondents who use the Web to its full advantage for news are in the minority. Very few are reading in detail. Only one respondent nominated archives as a motivation, and few care about the interactive advantages. Multimedia was not nominated by any respondent.
The most frequently nominated reason for reading news online was convenience. No other factor scored even half as many nominations. Respondents who claimed that the Web was “quick” or “easy” are included in the convenience category. Several respondents simply typed “convenience” with no further elaboration.

Apart from an understandable interest in overseas news from some expatriates, there does not seem to be any significant correlation between motivational trends and demographic factors.

There does seem to be a very slight relationship between two motivational factors and one publication read online. Slashdot.org was popular with people who nominated interactivity and special news as motivations. Both of these attributes are highly characteristic of this site. This relationship also supports the consistency and accuracy of the data set.

10.2.1.6 Use of Traditional Media

It is worthwhile considering if the consumption of Web-based news is a supplement or a substitute for news from other sources. This ties in with proposed motivations of publishers for creating new products, or augmenting existing ones. It also addresses user motivations.

The final question of the survey attempted to measure patterns of news consumption in traditional media for survey respondents.

The data revealed an absence of any distinct patterns or anomalies in the consumption of news from any specific medium, or consumption of news in general. Examining the news consumption tallies for individual respondents resembles random noise. As individuals, people are quite diverse in their news consumption patterns.

Aggregated data seems relatively flat in terms of its overall analysis. There was no dramatic overall preference for any particular medium, although radio was more popular than others. Radio scored an average of 2.7 out of 4 for aggregated attention, while newspapers, magazines
and television all scored roughly 2.2. The fact that radio is an easy “background” medium which normally features frequent news reports makes this understandable. The average score for the response “None of the Above” was 1.1, a very low score. This suggests that the media listed as distinct categories in the question supply most of the news that people receive.

Tallying individual scores to assess the total interest in non-Internet media for each respondent, and plotting this with respect to the frequency of each potential score, generates a pattern that resembles a bell curve, with an average score of roughly 10.5 and a standard deviation of 2.7. The overall conclusion is that the Internet is neither a supplement nor a substitute for non-Internet news sources. People treat it as a medium in its own right, and will consume news in various media according to their personal preferences.

10.2.1.7 Sidebar Portal News

Portal sites regularly present news as “sidebars”, meaning that a small number of news headlines or paragraphs appear on portal Web pages that are not specifically dedicated to news. This means that users of portal Web sites could accidentally find themselves exposed to Web-based news when they are not specifically using the Internet to read the news. If news was being received this way, it is possible that this could prompt people to feel less need to visit dedicated news-based Web sites.

A question in the survey simply asked people how much attention they paid to sidebar news. Users were asked to rate their attention on a Likert scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being “no attention” and 7 being “full attention”.

When the aggregated results were examined, the result resembled a bell curve, similar to the trend that had been observed for consumption of non-Web media. The average value for attention, 4, served as the mode of the graph with 59 replies. However, there was a secondary peak on the curve at a value of 2, just one point above “no attention”, with 52 replies. Only 26 people gave scores higher than 4.
The results suggest that users seem to be largely indifferent to sidebar news, and do not regard it as a substitute for a dedicated news site.

10.3 Domination of Text

One issue that has been the subject of some interesting research is audience perceptions of text and illustrations on Web pages. This question is different from broader issues of multimedia, which has been explored in interviews and the survey.

Interviews and the user survey have shown that multimedia does not seem to be very popular with either publishers or consumers. However, research conducted by the Poynter Institute, a media research organisation in the USA, suggests that audiences may also be somewhat indifferent to illustrations in a static form, and prefer simple text.

Poynter Institute researchers reached this conclusion from a somewhat logistically complex study. It was impossible to reproduce this for this thesis for logistical reasons, and no evidence of similar research being conducted in Australia could be found.

Documentation supplied by the Poynter Institute explains the methodology behind their study:

"To gain understanding of what draws readers to a page of online news, we used sophisticated camera equipment to capture readers' first three fixation-clusters, a term that describes usually overlapping glances that include the eye's precise point of focus and the immediately surrounding area. We looked at the first three fixation-clusters rather than just the first one in order to avoid a bias toward text that might be created on slower-loading pages.

In the latest analysis, we included a total of 168 pages containing both graphics and text, and examined how these pages were viewed by 66 of the study's 67 subjects. (Data from one subject was discarded because the results were unreadable.) In checking how many of the subjects'
first glances included graphics, we checked the 504 fixation-clusters generated by the first three glances at the 168 pages.

We also checked to see how many of the 168 pages had graphic elements that were viewed among the first three glances. Finally, we examined the frequency with which readers included different forms of artwork — banner ads, photographs or other graphics — in their first three glances.

The study’s participants were recruited through notices published in the Chicago Sun-Times and the St. Petersburg Times. The subjects were experienced and regular users of the web who said they read news online at least three times a week” (Poynter Institute 2000a).

Hence, the Poynter Institute studied volunteers who read news-related Web pages in a research laboratory. The eye movements of these subjects were closely examined using head-mounted scanning devices, and this movement was compared to the Web page they were viewing using special software. The object of this rather sophisticated study was to monitor the parts of a Web page that users examined the most.

This study suggested that readers of online news fixate their attention on text, rather than graphics, as their first reference point for reading stories. The results contrasted with earlier studies of newspaper readers, where it was found that graphics and illustrations attracted more attention.

Quoting from a report on this study (Poynter Institute 2000b), of the 504 glances captured among the subject’s first three “fixation clusters” (areas where eyeball focus was observed), only 112 included artwork.

Researchers involved in the study suggest that graphics on the Web could be less compelling than photographs in conventional print publications, as they are usually displayed at a lower resolution.
The Poynter Institute study is controversial, due to its relatively low sampling number of volunteers and the highly unusual environment that subjects experienced during the study. Very few Internet users read online news in academic laboratories with infrared scanners strapped to their heads. It is reasonable to suggest that this could have been annoying or distracting. Some subjects may have changed their overall behaviour patterns deliberately to suggest they were more interested in text than graphics. Nevertheless, the results of the experiment suggest that this area is worthy of consideration.

The results are at least consistent with the online user survey, which showed no interest in multimedia by survey respondents. No survey respondent nominated any specific interest in illustrations, graphics or the layout of Web sites.

10.4 Time and Tide on the Web

The times when a Web site attracts the most traffic are interesting variables in usage patterns. Precise details of these patterns are also regarded as sensitive information by many Web sites, and these data are not generally shared. Interview subjects were asked about these “time and tide” patterns on their Web sites. Some simply professed that they had no information on the subject at all, a serious omission for a site that wants to appeal to its audience. Some of these sites did not have systems that allowed this data to be collected. Sites that were willing to supply information on the matter usually did so in vague terms, unwilling to disclose specific hit rates or precise hit ratios at different times.

Stephen Mayne explained that the readership of *Crikey* normally peaks on Monday, the day immediately after this weekly journal is published on the Web. Hit levels decrease steadily through the week. Mondays generate 7,000 out of a weekly average of 25,000 page views.
Content for the *Green Left Weekly* is also posted to their site on Sunday, and Terry Townsend claimed that traffic for the site is highest on this day. There is also a secondary traffic peak on Thursdays. Townsend believed that this is related to publicity for the Web site update, which is circulated on newsgroups and mailing lists on Wednesdays.

Tony Murrell at the *Independent News Group* reported that traffic on his collective site is fairly consistent, but increases slightly on Tuesdays and Thursdays when content is updated (different weekly papers are updated on different days). Traffic is also slightly higher on weekends.

Barry Wilson at the *Kiama Independent* and *Lake Times* reported that most traffic on these Web sites occurs in the period from Wednesday, when the sites are updated, through to Friday.

Simon Mansfield at *Space Daily* observed that traffic to his site peaks in the interval between 8:00 AM and 9:00 AM according to US eastern seaboard time, a factor that reflects office workers in the USA beginning their mornings by visiting his site. Traffic is lower on weekends.

Padma Iyer at the *Illawarra Mercury* claimed that traffic patterns on his site are highest between 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM according to eastern Australian time.

Carlos Monterio observed that traffic on the *Sydney Morning Herald* is highest on weekdays, when the site receives approximately 100,000 visitors per day. He did not supply any data on changes throughout the day.

Mark Bruer at *news.com.au* said that the site is most popular between 8:00 AM and 6:00 PM on weekdays according to eastern Australian time, with spikes in the early morning and at lunchtime.

Rick Ferguson claimed that traffic at *The Advocate* is highest between 9:00 AM and 12:00 PM according to eastern Australian time, with a secondary peak in the early evening.
Angela Cole at *Network Ten* claimed that traffic peaked soon after an email teaser on the day’s news stories was sent to subscribers to this email service at 10:45 on weekdays according to eastern Australian time.

Robert Johnston at *ABC Online* observed that most traffic for news on his site occurs during normal business hours, a point that he attributes to people logging in from work. The most significant peaks occur at 8:30 AM, 11:30 AM, and 4:30 PM according to eastern Australian time. This frequency of sub-peaks is understandable, when the heavy supply of updated breaking news on *ABC Online* is considered. Johnston also claimed that the site receives approximately 800,000 to 900,000 page impressions per week, a figure that is comparable to that of the data claimed for *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

The traffic patterns documented in the interviews have a number of consistencies. They reveal an online user population that seems to enjoy reading news during early business hours and at lunchtimes. It is reasonable to expect that many of these people will be at work or at a tertiary educational institution, which mostly operate during the same hours. Traffic patterns do not seem to peak at odd hours or late at night, which suggests that people logging onto the news generally operate on normal temporal routines in their work and lifestyles.

This data also supports the concept that people are reading online news at times when convenience factors would be strong, as they would have access to the Web from terminals at work or their tertiary institution. Aikat (1998) found similar usage patterns in a study of online newspapers in the United States. He attributed that the heaviest traffic levels to people logging in from the workplace, usually at times close to traditional lunch periods such as midday.

Publications also report that traffic peaks soon after the content is updated. This is consistent with the concept of frequency of updates as a motivation, as it shows people reading when an update has been made. It could also be argued that people are simply refusing to delay reading the news when they know it is available.
10.5 News As Fast Food

The user survey and interviews with Web site operators have documented two distinct trends. They have demonstrated that readers are overwhelmingly interested in reading Web sites that offer content that is essentially no different from material in legacy products. Specialised content that appears on certain major Web sites is rarely enlightening from the perspective of understanding current news events, as its production mostly focuses on material that can be easily collected by understaffed Web teams. Breaking news, when it appears, is a news feed with little or no modification from its original source (usually AAP). The concept that Internet users would flock to the Web in order to seek journalism that was more detailed and enlightening than non-Internet media is difficult to support.

The user survey has also revealed little interest in the features of the Internet that would provide a more enriching experience for a news consumer. Interactivity, multimedia and a diversity of sources scored poorly in the question concerning motivation. Even archives, which are available on many sites, attracted only a single nomination.

However, the convenience of reading news on the Internet scored very highly. Slightly more than half of all respondents nominated a convenience factor, and no other motivation achieved even half this score. The second most common reason was the frequency of updates, which was mentioned by just under one quarter of respondents.

These data have prompted the construction of the “Fast Food” model of news consumption on the Internet. The model’s name takes its inspiration from a popular perception that fast food is convenient to access, but its quality is low.

The “Fast Food” model suggests that Internet users consume online news in a similar fashion. There is little interest in seeking out a high-quality news product. Instead, the ease of simply using the Internet is the principal motivation. The “Fast Food” news consumer can access a
networked computer quickly and easily at work or college. With a few mouse clicks, a Web browser can be activated, and a familiar news source (such as the Web page of a major legacy content provider) can be accessed. The news will be read quickly, and then the user will move on to other tasks.

In the case of breaking news, brief news updates can be read quickly, and the user may return to the page for another revision of updated headlines at another point in the day. The large score for updated news lends support to this.

Tony Vermeer at AAP lamented the fact that his agency can supply detailed pieces of news analysis that are more substantial than a typical hourly news bulletin, but the Web sites his company serviced had no interest in this material. He agreed with the suggestion that a “Fast Food” model operated with online news.

It is true that some survey respondents suggested that they were interested in obtaining a more balanced view of the world by reading a diversity of online publications, but the data from this survey suggests that the “Fast Food” model is still larger than any other pattern of usage.

10.6 Conclusion

The motivations of publishers and readers of online news are varied, as data from interviews and the user survey shows. The model I had established for publisher motivations, which was based on previous experience in liaising with Web site operators from non-journalistic ventures, seems to be applicable to these news-based Web sites. All of the expected motivations were documented in practice. It is clear from these interviews, though, that many of these motivations are not grounded in precise reasoning or study on the part of the Web site
operators. Emotional factors such as fear of losing out, or a desire for prestige, seem to be strong motivations. It does not seem that operators are generally motivated to create Web sites that demonstrate the specific advantages raised by Cunningham and Flew. Sites do not generally demonstrate many of these advantages, and the issues raised by Cunningham and Flew were not nominated during interviews. Hence, it can be suggested that implementing the specific technical and operational advantages of Web-based news is a poor motivational factor.

Users, in turn, do not seem to be generally motivated by these factors either. There was relatively little interest in the technical advantages of Web-based news or discussions of better news. The major motivational factor that is consistent with the theoretical model in Chapter 3 is the frequency of updates.

The most significant motivation is convenience, which, coupled with the lack of other motivations, served as a basis for the “Fast Food” model of news consumption.

The convenience of using the Web as a medium is a factor that was not outlined by Cunningham and Flew. It is understandable, if one considers the ease of using the Internet in an office or a computer laboratory, when compared to the effort that would be required to go out and buy a newspaper, or locate and use a radio or television in an office environment or tertiary educational institution. The Web is not only fast and easy, but it is probably being accessed for free by the user, and is non-intrusive on other people.

The emphasis on convenience as a motivation draws attention to a significant point in analysing usage of the Web. The context of usage of the medium is as important as the nature of the medium itself. The Cunningham and Flew model looks at the mechanics of the Internet as an isolated system, and does not account for the way that access terminals for the Internet are distributed in the physical world. This ease of access to the infrastructure is as important as the way that infrastructure operates.
The most disappointing result of this comparison of motivational factors is that online audiences and publishers have mostly failed to research their audiences or their expectations. This is one aspect of what seems to be a generally poor level of commercial sensibility in the operation of these Web sites. Site operators don’t seem to know how to make money from their Web sites (as documented in the previous chapter) and don’t even know what their readers want. Furthermore, it seems that few site operators are prepared to undertake such research. They will simply move with trends that they observe on other Web sites, whether these trends are advisable or not.

The fact that audiences express little interest in some of the potential innovations that could take place on the Internet is also disappointing. It has already been suggested that perceptions of the role of the journalist as a professional newsworker are so entrenched that Internet users express no interest in practicing amateur journalism on the Web. Perceptions that news does not, or should not, differ from the formats of non-Internet media could be so entrenched that some people simply cannot imagine any alternatives.

This overwhelming adherence to conventional roles and structures by both audiences and publishers suggests that there could be little innovation in the use of the Internet outside of the World Wide Web. The concept that Usenet newsgroups could be more suited to amateur reporting will be explored in the next chapter.
Chapter Eleven

Usenet Commentaries on Newsworthy Events

The model of Internet news derived from Cunningham and Flew suggests that Internet users could post their own news reports and commentaries on the Internet. This would be a demonstration of amateur journalism, and a different form of news production from the traditional model outlined by Tuchman (1978) in Chapter 2.

As documented in Chapter 5, attempts to find any sort of regular amateur journalism on the Web by Australians were unsuccessful. This was a significant result, in that it suggested that other factors were preventing this possibility from being carried out in reality.

It was proposed in Chapter 1 that sociological factors that were unrelated to the technology or economics of the Internet could prevent people from practising amateur journalism on the Web. These arguments suggested that the concept of journalism as an industrial process carried out by professional “newsworkers” was so entrenched that people were unwilling to explore alternatives. It also pointed out that the production of news and journalism demands time and effort, along with resources. Many people would be unable, or unwilling, to undertake the production process required for any sort of journalism, even if they knew that the Internet offered an easy delivery system.

The Web may not have been used for amateur journalism, but research has shown that Usenet newsgroups have been used to a limited degree for commentaries that can be judged as amateur journalism, if an extended definition of journalism is used.

This chapter presents the results of investigations into commentaries on Usenet on newsworthy events. It focuses on events that can be directly experienced by members of the general public.
Such events can serve as the inspiration for amateur journalism that reflects the actual experiences of the amateur journalist with the event.

This chapter contributes material to research question R1, by examining one concept of an alternative model of news delivery in greater detail. Material from Methodology 5 is used in this chapter.

11.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this investigation is principally drawn from Cunningham and Flew's generic commentaries on the Internet, applied specifically to online journalism. Where the boundary between audiences and publishers is not distinct on the Internet, anyone can add content. The refined model states that this allows amateur journalism to take place, devoid of traditional news organisational elements, or the mechanics of a traditional news production process.

Results will be compared to the following classification system for amateur content appearing on Usenet, which was first presented in Chapter 4:

- supply of new information.
- new commentary on previously supplied material.
- collation or reorganisation of existing material.
- meta-journalism/criticism of existing material.
- personal interpretation of events.

The characteristics of most events reported as news in the traditional media means that it is normally difficult for members of the general public to experience them directly. For this reason, it is not reasonable to expect amateur journalism to deal with most events covered by professionally produced news. It was considered appropriate to focus this study on events that
could be experienced directly by members of the general public, such as natural disasters, accidents or disruptions to civil infrastructure. This focus is merely a practical consideration of the fact that amateur journalists could find it difficult to report on events they cannot personally experience.

11.2 Selected Events

The following events were investigated for evidence of amateur reporting on Australian newsgroups. These events were selected through the observance of major events that could have been experienced directly by amateur reporters over the course of this thesis. The final event was discovered through monitoring of the Internet while researching other events documented in this chapter.

Event 1: Victorian Gas Crisis

In September 1998, an accident at a natural gas plant in Victoria terminated the supply of natural gas in Melbourne and most of Victoria. This produced considerable disruption to homes, businesses and industries for several days.

21 messages on the subject of the gas crisis were posted to the Usenet newsgroup aus.general after the accident. All were essentially part of the same discussion "thread", with messages replying and adding to each other.

The overall tone of the discussion thread was somewhat jovial, as people reported their inability to use gas heaters or take hot showers. It was easy to expect that this was happening, and repeated postings from people unable to use gas-fuelled appliances would have become somewhat monotonous. This is arguably why only a few of these reports appeared in the thread. Elsewhere in the thread, comparisons were made with the bacterial contamination that Sydney
was experiencing with its water supply at roughly the same time. Some posters wondered how these two events would affect international perceptions of Australia's standard of development.

Some posters speculated on the possible cause of the accident, reproducing statements from media reports. This did not generate any material that had not been reported elsewhere. Sympathy was expressed for the two men who died in the accident, and grumbling was made about possible links between the accident and lower safety standards brought about through cost cutting. This discussion expanded to overall considerations of workplace safety and economic rationalism.

Under the criteria outlined in the propositions, it would seem that discussion of this incident on Usenet was rather limited. No new information was supplied. In reality, the general media and the Victorian government were themselves unsure of the precise cause of the accident. There was little in the way of new commentary on previously supplied material, or collation of existing material. There was no meta-journalism, as reporting on the event in the media offered little to dissect. Personal interpretation of the event was supplied, as people related their experiences and their concerns over the deaths.

This discussion was pleasant and reasonably well-informed, but it seems that no material of any real depth emerged on this topic in these discussions.

Event 2: Sydney Water Crisis

At approximately the same time as the Victorian Gas Crisis, in September 1998, Sydney experienced a contamination scare with its domestic water supply. Residents were advised to boil all drinking water, to kill what were believed to be abnormally high levels of harmful bacteria.

Eleven messages on this subject were documented in a thread on the newsgroup aus.general.
The thread started with a provocative message calling for evidence that anyone had been affected by contaminated water, its author claiming to have suffered no ill effects. A reply to this pointed out that the second author, and several people known to him, had all suffered illness that they blamed on contaminated water. The original poster returned, pointing out that water contamination and illnesses were more common in rural Australia, and were generally ignored. This expanded discussions into issues of city versus country in terms of funding and infrastructure. Messages critical of government attitudes towards the public were interrupted by a message that attempted to explain the crisis. High rain levels had flooded catchment areas.

Someone engaged in meta-journalism, pointing out that the “crisis” was a media-created event when information on what is normally a regular problem was circulated. The message also pointed out the inability of the media to interview confirmed victims of the crisis.

Under the theoretical framework, this discussion thread was more enlightening than the Victorian Gas Crisis. But no new information was supplied, and again, precise information on the crisis was also hard to obtain through the media. There were new commentaries on previously supplied material, as people explained some of the dynamics of Sydney’s water supply and “crisis” incidents that had occurred in the past. There was no reorganisation of existing material, as precise information in the media was lacking. The criticism of media and public relations strategies was well-informed, pointing out how difficult it was for the media to document the “crisis”, and arguing that the whole event could have been misrepresented with regard to the normal state of Sydney’s water. The personal interpretations of the event were quite detailed, sometimes with too much precise detail of medical symptoms for pleasant reading.
Event 3: Sydney Hailstorm

In April 1999, Sydney experienced a catastrophic hailstorm that damaged buildings and infrastructure across large areas of the city, particularly in the eastern suburbs. It was the most destructive storm that the city had experienced since weather records began.

A total of only four postings appeared on a thread on *aus.general* after the storm. This was surprising, as the overall level of discussion did not reflect the widespread nature of the event, or its impact on the community.

Again, the tone of the thread was out of step with the damage that had been caused, as people discussed the possible size of the biggest hailstone they had found, and reported on large ones they had personally witnessed. Nobody posted messages describing damage to their homes. It could easily be suggested that a person who had experienced damage to a home would be preoccupied with repairing this damage, instead of using the Internet.

Two messages did emerge that posted links to Web pages dealing with the event. A branch of the State Emergency Service, with an existing home page, posted a short report about its repair activities with some photographs. This was more like a company document than a piece of journalism, and did not communicate much information on the overall event. However, another person with an existing personal home page added a short report about his experiences of driving a van through the storm ("aminsane" 1999). This was an unusually moving piece of personal journalism, as the person recounted the damage experienced by the vehicle, the unpredictable conditions he encountered, and his personal fears during the incident.

Although discussion on Usenet on this incident was surprisingly limited, the study did generate one fine example of amateur journalism, written from a very personal perspective. This was informative and highly involving writing, although its overall style lacked the polish of professional editing. The author of this report was not a regular journalist, and had apparently not engaged in any other sort of personal journalism. It seems that he was moved to write this...
article and place it on the Web because the event had affected him so dramatically, owing to the circumstances he was in when the storm broke. Without this motivation, it is unlikely that the material would have been written.

This is precisely the sort of activity that this thesis has tried so hard to document. Unfortunately, it seems that there is no site that publishes this sort of material regularly, and no other recorded incident of amateur journalism of this form being published on a one-off basis.

There was no reaction to media reports or reorganisation of existing material, as the event had been an act of God. It was difficult to blame the government or any other organisation for causing the storm. Hence, there were no underlying issues to discuss.

Event 4: Sydney Harbour Oil Spill

In August 1999, a large oil spill was released into Sydney Harbour. The spill was caused by an accident during the transfer of oil between a tanker vessel and a terminal. The oil spill was clearly visible to people in the vicinity of the harbour, and could also be smelled. People living on Sydney’s North Shore were warned to stay indoors if they suffered from respiratory problems, making the incident an environmental disaster and a health hazard.

This incident prompted a rather long thread of 32 messages on the newsgroup aus.general.

The thread began with sardonic observations that the oil company blamed for the spill had offered its apologies. One author then explained that he could smell the oil when he was more than 20 kilometres away from the spill, and wondered how much had been discharged. Discussions on figures for the spill published in the media were reproduced. The thread expanded to discuss ways of cleaning up the spill and overall strategies for handing oil transfer. A user reported feeling ill and blamed fumes from the spill. Criticism was expressed over the imposition of a one million dollar fine on the company, with users complaining that the fine
was insufficient. A comment on a photograph of the incident that appeared in a newspaper appeared, along with speculative comments made by the media.

The overall activity of this discussion was similar to the Sydney water crisis. People reported personal experiences with the event, but could not provide much enlightenment on the causes of the incident. In both cases, a lack of access to relevant information was a problem for both the media and the Internet community. The lack of detail in media coverage of the incident offered little opportunity for meta-journalism or criticism of media coverage. Some collation of existing media material did appear, but this was relatively minor. No new information was posted in this discussion.

**Event 5: Glenbrook Train Accident**

In December 1999, a passenger train collided with another train near Glenbrook in New South Wales, causing fatalities.

The newsgroup *aus.rail*, rarely used for the discussion of major news events, suddenly found itself flooded with messages. More than 50 messages on the subject of the accident were posted to the group in the first 36 hours.

The thread started with postings of news reports, including AAP transcript. Someone reported that he would go and see for himself. A few postings later, he reported approaching the accident scene and seeing emergency vehicles, but does not go close enough to see anything more. Next, meta-journalism, critical of television journalists who did not understand what was visible on their station's own news footage appeared. A user captured still images of the incident from a television news broadcast, and posted them to his Web site.

This newsgroup is populated by people with considerable knowledge about rail systems, and fairly informed speculation on the cause of the accident began to emerge. The authors,
however, responsibly stated that this was only speculation, and no precise details had emerged. Soon, it was reported that the Sydney Morning Herald Web site stated that the incident had been caused by signal failure.

Discussion turned to the relative lack of certain safety features on non-suburban train lines, and one user suggested that someone from the newsgroup should discuss this with a journalist. It does not appear that any attempt was made to do this, and the newsgroup continued to attack the reports that were appearing in the media.

Despite this criticism, the newsgroup remained heavily dependent on media reports for precise facts. Figures on the death and injury toll were reported from television news broadcasts.

Further details emerged from a user who was monitoring the media and also using a radio scanner to monitor communications by the emergency services. He reported that the emergency services were experiencing problems with parked vehicles in the vicinity of the accident. This user also posted reports of investigations he had made into information that was available on City Rail Web pages and telephone information lines. A City Rail Web site had carried a brief note on the accident, but had then been shut down. No updates had been sent to the telephone information services dealing with train arrivals and departures.

This lengthy thread produced ample evidence of all the phenomena proposed in the theoretical model. A fairly accurate perspective of the event was gradually produced from media reports, information previously known to the specialists on the newsgroup, and eyewitness reports. This included interpretations of video footage made by the viewers, and not by the journalists reporting on the story. At least two interesting examples of people investigating the incident personally were reported, and this contributed new information to the newsgroup. Metajournalism was practiced effectively, as the media were criticised for their lack of understanding of rail systems and their ill-informed speculation. There were also personal viewpoints expressed on the matter, including sympathy for the victims. It is interesting to note...
that hyperlinks to existing material placed on the Web by the Sydney Morning Herald and ABC Online appeared in this thread.

**Event 6: Australian Kidney Hoax**

One event that occurred in April 1998 on newsgroups around the world is considered noteworthy for this thesis, but is not of exactly the same format as the previously documented examples. It concerned the discussion of a story by Internet users that concerned Australia. However, the story was not based on genuine events.

A series of messages were circulated on various newsgroups dealing with computer science and Asian regional affairs about an alleged series of kidney theft incidents in Australia. These messages warned visitors to Australia about organised gangs who would drug unsuspecting tourists, then remove their kidneys. The victims would wake up from their ordeal in an empty hotel suite with a note urging them to call an ambulance.

No such incidents of kidney theft have been documented in Australia, and the story was a complete hoax. Nevertheless, many Internet users were observed to re-post the story, expressing concern over the potential for visitors to Australia to be harmed.

The event reveals some of the problems of amateur journalism, where information can circulate without proper editorial checks. It reinforces the suspicions of some of the Web sites operators interviewed elsewhere in this thesis, who expressed concerns over the lack of editorial control on amateur content. It is also interesting to see how a certain proportion of readers of the message sincerely believed a message that was not only false, but potentially quite damaging.
11.3 Conclusion

The examples of amateur reporting and commentary documented in this chapter have fulfilled all of the proposed results of the theoretical model presented at the beginning of the chapter. This is a refreshing discovery, as it suggests that users of the Internet are successfully applying the unique advantages that the Internet offers.

The commentaries that were discovered were often well-informed and interesting. They revealed the potential for users with expertise in particular topics to supply more information than a journalist without specialised knowledge who had been sent to report on a specific issue. However, none of these postings adopted the style or format of conventional journalism. Messages were often sardonic, amusing, or passionate about the issue being discussed. The detached, objective style of modern reporting was rarely used.

The most striking element of this research is the fact that amateur reporting on the Web is essentially non-existent, with the exception of the hailstorm report documented in this chapter. However, commentary on newsgroups is clearly quite active.

This suggests that users of the Internet have drawn a clear distinction between these two Internet applications. Newsgroups were created for the explicit purpose of interactive, informal communications between many users. Internet users who wish to express their views select newsgroups as their mode of delivery.

It is proposed that the history of the evolution of the Internet has provided sociological precedents for this. Newsgroups existed for years before the World Wide Web was deployed. It seems that people have adopted newsgroups as the logical place for interactive discussions, and have used the Web for another purpose. This could explain why the online survey presented in the last chapter did not reveal much enthusiasm for interactivity in reading news on the Web.
Creating a Web page is easy and accessible, but it is not as fast or easy as sending a message to a newsgroup. Furthermore, the page must be publicised, or nobody will find it. It is much faster and easier to send a message to a newsgroup, and an instant readership is guaranteed. Feedback can also be made rapidly, and a user can continue to engage with other newsgroup readers.

When content is published on a Web site, it is noteworthy that its authors post messages about it on newsgroups related to the subject. Without this publicity, it is doubtful that anyone would visit the Web site. This would arguably produce a more convenient and gratifying experience for someone wanting to express his or her opinion.

Hence, a minor level of innovation in news delivery has been documented, suggesting that the quest for such material in support of research question R1 has been successful. This success is tempered by the understanding that such events occur only sporadically, and the lack of conventional editorial checks means that the process can also be abused. The kidney hoax is an example of amateur reporting that was false and potentially harmful. Earlier interviews with Web site operators revealed a high level of suspicion of amateur journalism, and the principal objection raised in these interviews was a potential lack of accuracy or responsibility. These arguments have been demonstrated in practice.

Question R1 also encompassed the search for material that would not be classified as journalism under a conventional definition, but could be considered as a form of journalism under a revised definition. The primary expectation was that amateur journalists could contribute news stories as one-off events, without publishing on a regular basis. It seems apparent that all of the material presented in this chapter fits this definition. None of the people posting messages to newsgroups or a Web site were observed to carry out such amateur reporting on a regular basis. Their temporary role as amateur journalists seems to be a product of them being in the right place, at the right time, to experience a newsworthy event and feel motivated to report it.
Commentaries on Usenet seem to reach their apotheosis when an Internet user with expertise in a particular field is able to witness a newsworthy event and communicate his or her conclusions. However, this form of eyewitness reporting is also commonplace in conventional journalism, where professional journalists will either witness events themselves or interview others who did. The principal difference here is that there is no professional journalist or professionally produced publication to act as an intermediary, but there are also differences in style and research methods. The frequent lack of quality in some unedited discussion threads does make a reader notice the benefits that a conventional editorial process brings to content. Overall, the events that have been documented suggest that amateur reporting in this form will do little to challenge the overall nature of news on the Internet.
Chapter Twelve

Regulation of the Internet

Publishing material on the Internet may be cheap and easy from a technical perspective, but it is also subjected to less regulation than other means of mass communication such as the ownership of radio and television stations. This chapter addresses legal and regulatory issues surrounding the Internet.

This thesis is not the product of a legal faculty, and I hold no qualifications in law. Hence, it is important to state that this chapter of the thesis is not presented as a precise statement of the legal framework influencing the Internet in Australia, nor is it presented as legal advice.

However, it is appropriate to explore certain issues and perceptions that have influenced the way that online publishers of news address legal and regulatory considerations. The legal issues affecting online publishers are presented from the perspective of a sample of specific incidents that have occurred in recent years, and statements from interview subjects. It should also be noted that these statements from interview subjects are also not made by qualified legal professionals.

This chapter supplies the final information relating to research question R1, by examining the potential for legal and regulatory concerns to shape the evolution of models of journalism supplied on the Internet.

12.1 Theoretical Framework: Lack of Regulatory Control

Cunningham and Flew stated that at the time of their study, the Internet was an unregulated, anarchic medium. As a general statement of the operations of the Internet this is still fairly
accurate. A person living in Australia can use and publish material on the Internet with the
intervention of almost no regulatory principles.

There is no need for a person to register as a user of the Internet or report on his or her activities
on the Internet to any regulatory body. A person who wishes to publish content on the Internet
is not required to register or gain approval, either.

Media ownership regulations in Australia place controls on the ownership of newspapers, radio
and television stations by specific owners. No such regulations have been created for the
ownership of Web sites or the publication of content on the Internet. This simple observation by
Cunningham and Flew serves as the theoretical framework for the evaluation of regulation of
the Internet in Australia.

12.2 Defamation

Although the Internet is relatively free of regulation, it is generally perceived that some existing
legislation relating to public communications can be applied to content on the Internet. This
includes matters of defamation and vilification. Mark Bruer of news.com.au observed that one
reason why legacy content was not re-edited for the Web site was a perception of legal
problems. Unlike its parent organisation, the Web site does not employ staff to address legal
issues.

12.3 Lack of Case Law

Stephen Mayne of Crikey observed that perceptions of the legal environment for journalism on
the Internet were complicated by the low quantities of available case law. The novelty of the
Internet has given relatively little time for legal cases to be brought to fruition.
The first case (Rindos v Hardwick) arose from a message posted to an email-based discussion forum, and resulted in a court finding that defamation had occurred (Supreme Court of Western Australia 1993).

This case was based on existing defamation law that has no specific reference to the Internet. The case did not involve the circulation of content that could be classified as journalism.

The user base of the Internet, and the amount of material it carried, have increased substantially since this case. It is interesting to observe that so few further successful legal cases have been completed in recent years. The case of The Chimes Web site will be examined elsewhere in this chapter.

Mayne stated that he regularly receives threats of legal action relating to the content he publishes, but at the time of this study, no court had imposed any sort of fines or other action on Mayne or Crikey.

12.4 Internet Culture

The relatively low level of actual legal cases relating to the Internet could be related to the overall sociology of the Internet. The very dynamics of the Internet make it easy for people who are offended by a published statement to react by publishing their own material. This can sometimes generate lengthy and turbulent arguments on Usenet newsgroups, which are known unofficially as "flame wars". The term is an extension of the word "flame", used on the Internet to describe an abusive message sent in an email or a newsgroup posting. Such arguments may be unpleasant to observe, but the opportunity to talk back instantly could serve to defuse tensions, and reduce the motivation to resort to legal action.

This tendency towards settling matters internally without resorting to legal remedies has a technological basis, as outlined, but it is also derived from the culture of the early user.
community. Australian journalist Sybil Nolan observed that “Before the Internet became a user-friendly information tool, it was the domain of academics and researchers. This has resulted in a free-speech, anti-regulation ethos among Web publishers which, arguably, is even more strongly articulated than the traditional commitment of the Western press to free speech” (Nolan 1999). This argument is based on a perceived emphasis on debate and free speech within the academic and research communities, which is tied to traditions of debate and experimentation in the pursuit of developing new knowledge.

12.5 The Chimes

*The Chimes* was an Australian Web site that hosted discussion forums on investment-related matters. In February 1999, the Federal Court of Australia ordered that this site should cease to publish information on this topic (Federal Court of Australia 1999a). The decision had been prompted by an investigation by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, which observed that the owner of the Web site was not a licensed investment adviser.

Further activity on *The Chimes* Web site that was judged to be in contempt of court ensued (Federal Court of Australia 1999b), and Stephen Matthews, owner of the site, was found guilty of a criminal charge.

A precise interpretation of the case relating to the prosecution of Matthews is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the incident is noteworthy for illustrating the fact that the owner of an online publishing venture was charged for activities that were related to the publication of information on his site.

12.6 Copyright

Copyright is a legal principle that recognises that the creators of media content hold ownership of that content. Generally, it would seem that copyright regulations have had little impact on the
overall development of journalism on the Internet in Australia. Users will sometimes copy articles from Web sites and place them on Usenet newsgroups. On other occasions, they will mention a certain article and advise people to visit the Web site that hosts it, adding that personal concerns over copyright prevent them from reproducing the article. Tony Vermeer at AAP explained that the organisation employs lawyers who investigate cases where AAP content is reproduced by groups that are not authorised to do so.

At the time of study, no legal cases involving allegations of copyright violations of journalism on the Internet had appeared. It is arguable that, at least in the short term, some online publishers would be happy to see their content distributed through various channels, as it could boost their profile and attract more visitors to their Web site. In a simple incident such as a private Internet user posting a single article to one newsgroup, the level of intellectual property violation could be seen as so trivial that it does not warrant legal action.

12.7 Hyperlinking and Framing

The World Wide Web would not really be a “Web” without the extensive use of hyperlinking between pages. Hyperlinking makes it possible to quickly navigate between material on the same topic that is located on different servers and sites.

News-related Web sites routinely place hyperlinks to sites outside of their own control. This can sometimes occur if an organisation appearing in a news story has a Web site. The placing of links can thus allow readers with an interest in the topic of a story to explore the issues it raises in greater detail.

Sending readers to a site outside of the control of a news organisation suggests that a certain element of legal risk could be present. A reader who discovers offensive, defamatory or objectionable content could feel hostility towards the news organisation that linked to it.
At the time of this study, concerns over hyperlinking had not generated any publicly voiced complaints or legal activity in Australia. It seems reasonable to accept that a news organisation cannot be held accountable for content appearing on a site outside of its own control.

Conversely, no site has sought legal remedies for the fact that another site has placed a hyperlink to it in Australia. It could reasonably be argued that anyone placing content on the Web is voluntarily exposing this content to an audience, and cannot object to links being generated by external parties.

A more complicated situation appears in cases where sites have linked to news content through the use of framing. In these cases, hyperlink to another Web site will cause content from that site to appear in a frame on the Web page that features the hyperlink. Hence, content from another site will appear on the same page, and a reader could easily believe that this content originated at the linking site.

This principle of linking within frames has caused legal action overseas. Breit (2000) cites the activities of two newspapers with Web sites that were based in the Shetland Islands off Scotland. "The Shetland News created hyperlinks using Shetland Times headlines, to Shetland Times stories. The hyperlinks by-passed the Times home page, where the bulk of its advertising material was located. The link created the impression that the stories were part of the News Web site".

An injunction against this form of frame-embedded hyperlinking was sought, on the basis that the linking infringed copyright, but "the matter was settled before the issues of copyright infringement could be heard" (Breit 2000).

At the time of this study, no legal cases relating to this form of hyperlinking had appeared in Australia.
12.8 Concerns over Censorship

Every mass communication medium has been subjected to forms of content control and censorship. Concerns have been raised over the fact that some forms of content available on the Internet would be subjected to censorship if it were published in conventional media. Such content includes pornography and racist material.

The Internet user community has been generally suspicious of attempts to impose regulation on the network. A media release by the activist organisation Electronic Frontiers Australia in 1998 revealed survey data that is supportive of this concept. According to a report on a survey carried out by a major commercial organisation, fewer than 8% of Australian Internet users wanted the government to censor the Internet (Electronic Frontiers Australia 1998).

Arguments that have been raised against censoring the Internet range from general opposition to the censorship of any medium, to concepts that relate specifically to the unique factors of the Internet outlined in Chapter 2. There is no single author or framework that serves as a point of origin for theoretical discussions on censorship, or censorship issues relating to the Internet. Discussion of censorship is arguably as old as mass communication itself. Hence, it is inappropriate to cite a particular academic paper or individual as a source of primary information.

Years of interaction with Internet users in Australia has provided me with insight into general trends and attitudes regarding censorship. The positions taken against censorship in Australia can be classified into distinct categories. The creation of these categories for classifying censorship arguments is an original model developed for this thesis.

12.8.1 Generalist Argument

This category is the most broad of all. Generalist arguments propose that censorship of almost anything, in any medium, is unacceptable. Generalist arguments have been used to defend the
circulation of radical journalism, pornography and extremist political writings. Some generalists would seem to be libertarian in their overall political stance, arguing that individuals should be given the freedom to make up their own minds about anything they read. However, generalist positions have also been advocated by groups with neo-fascist orientations, who would find it easier to circulate their literature under a generalist model. Hence, the generalist position cannot be ascribed to a specific social or political framework.

A variation of the basic generalist model points out that much of the Internet-based content that has caused so much controversy is already available in other media. This variation argues that if society is prepared to accept the circulation of this material off the Internet, then a specific campaign against publishing this material on the Internet is pointless.

12.8.2 Stealth Censorship

Much of the content on the Internet that has prompted calls for censorship has no relationship to news, journalism, politics, or activism. This includes pornography and formulas for making bombs. Some anti-censorship activists are not interested in preserving the circulation of such material on the Internet, but are concerned that if censorship regulations against the Internet were enacted in even a basic form, those regulations could be easily extrapolated to censor more than just offensive content. The "Stealth Censorship" argument raises concerns about the suppression of free speech on the Internet. A government could pass censorship laws with the ostensive motivation of protecting children from harmful content, but use this legislation to control the circulation of material that is critical of the government or other institutions. Censorship opponents suggest that such an action would erode human rights and make public institutions less accountable.

12.8.3 Technology-Related Defence

As Chapter 2 has documented, the Internet is a highly unique medium, with characteristics unlike traditional mass media. It is decentralised and global. The technology-related argument against censoring the Internet is specific to the medium, and has no ties to ideology or even
advocacy of free speech. This argument simply claims that censorship of the Internet is physically impossible, regardless or whether or not censorship would be desirable.

The amount of material circulating on the Internet is so large that monitoring and screening the multitudes of Web pages, newsgroup postings and emails that travel across the Internet is physically impossible, for logistical reasons. Content that is also deemed unacceptable in one part of the world could also be moved to servers located in a different nation, where it would theoretically be immune from prosecution, but still accessible to Internet users in any part of the world.

The technology-related defence has been invoked by anti-censorship advocates who support other positions outlined in this model, as another means of reinforcing their case.

12.8.4 Industry-Related Defence

The unique characteristics of the Internet that inform the creation of the Technology-Related Defence also inform the creation of the Industry-Related Defence. This argues that the imposition of censorship policies could place excessive burdens on companies acting as Internet Service Providers, and force these companies out of business. This, in turn, could render Internet access extremely difficult for most of its current users.

The defence arises from perceptions that responsibility for implementing some censorship policies could be placed on Internet Service Providers. The providers could be judged to be in violation of these policies if unacceptable content is hosted on their servers or carried across their networks.

Policing the content hosted on servers or carried across the network of a particular Internet Service Provider would be extremely difficult, owing to the sheer volume of the data and the technical challenges outlined in the Technology-Related Defence. A typical Internet Service Provider has many clients, and cannot be expected to hold responsibility for their actions.
Internet Service Providers usually consider themselves to be common carriers, meaning that they have responsibility for supplying infrastructure and connectivity to the Internet to their clients, but have no responsibility for the content that is actually carried. The situation could be compared to a telephone company that supplies telephone connections to millions of people, but cannot be expected to regulate every telephone conversation on that network.

Forcing Internet Service Providers to closely monitor information travelling across their networks would also represent a potential breach of other laws. Regulations governing privacy for individuals and restricting the monitoring of personal communications could be violated by the technical means that would be required to detect unacceptable content. Hence, depending on the precise legal environment of a given place at a given time, censorship laws could be incompatible with other laws!

Actual cases in Australia suggest that no Internet Service Provider has been subjected to legal action that failed to account for the “common carrier” principle. Breit (1998) observes in the aforementioned Rindos v Hardwick case, the Supreme Court of Western Australia found that the person actually posting material on the Internet was liable and no Internet Service Provider was prosecuted. Breit observes that, in a legal context, the general argument raised by the Industry-Related defence is called the “innocent disseminator” defence (Breit 1998).

12.8.5 Censor Software Flaws

Soon after the Internet became a mass medium, a variety of “filtering” software products appeared on the market. Filtering software is designed to prevent a computer that runs it from accessing certain forms of Internet-based content that are considered unacceptable by the software’s creators. It is thus a form of censorship that is implemented for a single terminal, and not for the Internet as a whole. Filtering software has been advocated as a means of preventing children from being exposed to pornography. It has sometimes been installed on Internet-connected computers in schools.
Filtering software holds a list of specific Web site addresses that have been discovered to hold content that is considered unacceptable by the creators of the software. It may also scan Web pages as they are downloaded to look for specific words or phrases that suggest that the content being examined is unacceptable. Attempts to download Web pages that have been judged unacceptable by the filtering software will not succeed, and the software will display a message to the user indicating that it has denied access to the content. The filtering software itself can only be disabled through the use of passwords or operations that are not accessible to most people using the computer, but would be accessible to the person who installed the software.

The merits of filtering software have been controversial in their own right. Some supporters of positions 2, 3 and 4 in this model who do not subscribe to the generalist model have strongly advocated the use of filtering software. They argue that if children can be protected from the forms of content that most alarm censorship advocates by using filters, then governments have no justification for introducing more legislation. Hence, the existence of filtering software is seen by some people as a useful means of generally keeping the Internet free of censorship.

Other anti-censorship advocates strongly disapprove of filtering software. Their arguments invoke principles from the Technology-Related Defence and the Stealth Censorship Defence.

The most generic argument derived from the Technology-Related Defence is that this software can never be totally successful, and should not be used. Content on the Internet is highly volatile. New Web sites are being created every day. Existing content moves to different locations, or is reorganised. It would be logistically impossible for the Web monitors who compile blacklists of content for these filters to keep up with all these changes. Furthermore, attempts to make filters that have enough internal capabilities to make precise judgements of unfamiliar content have not been successful. Sites containing unacceptable content could thus be accessed by computers running filtering software.

Another argument derived from the Technology-Related Defence is that filtering software can accidentally prevent access to content that contains no unacceptable material. This is normally a
result of unsophisticated methodologies within the software that do not approach the sophistication of a human censor. The somewhat crude use of searches for keywords such as “sex” in Web pages can result in the filtering of Web pages containing words such as “Wessex”.

The Stealth Censorship Defence has also been invoked against filtering software. Arguments have been raised that filtering software can be programmed to censor more than just pornography or recipes for dangerous explosives. Filters could be placed on sites dealing with political or social issues that may not be in accordance with the editorial policies of the software producers.

Some evidence that reinforces the Stealth Censorship Defence against filtering software has been generated by American researchers. As one observed, “Cybersitter, which has drawn the greatest wrath of Netizens, has in the past blocked the sites of the National Organization (sic) for Women, gay rights groups, animal rights groups and progressive political causes. It also filters words and phrases like ‘safe sex,’ ‘violence,’ ‘Sinn Fein,’ ‘lesbian,’ ‘fascism’ and ‘drugs’ from email messages and Web pages, including newspaper sites” (Lascia 1997).

The application of filtering software in Australia appears to be somewhat limited. Filtering software is commercially available to the general public at retail stores. There is no data on sales figures or usage levels. Filtering software does not seem to be popular at tertiary educational institutions, offices or cybercafes. Generally, marketing strategies for filtering software advocate its usage for the protection of minors. Its appeal to adults is hence somewhat limited, and even the parents or guardians of minors (such as teachers or librarians) may not wish to use it.

12.8.6 Classification System Flaws

Content in non-Internet media is often classified according to formal ratings schemes. These schemes are used to indicate the suitability of content for certain age groups, and could indicate
the level of sex or violence that is included. These ratings are usually applied in accordance with government departments concerned with censorship. Participation in the ratings system is often compulsory.

Attempts have been made to establish similar classifications systems for content on the Internet. Mostly, this involves the voluntary participation of Web sites who register themselves with one or more unofficial regulatory organisations, which are usually not linked to any government department. Some of these regulatory organisations have been created by major information technology companies.

Sites that agree to participate in the ratings system of a particular organisation are awarded ratings for their site according to the specific criteria of that system. They will usually display a logo on their Web site to indicate that they have been rated according to a specific ratings system.

Some filtering software uses data from these ratings organisations in the programming of filters.

Ratings systems for Internet sites can be potentially advantageous. A site that has been rated as having no unacceptable content could be easily identified as such by software filters. Conversely, sites containing unacceptable content can be blocked with an equal level of precision.

Ratings systems are viewed with suspicion by many anti-censorship advocates. They point to the lack of a unified standard for rating, and the fact that most content on the Web is not rated under any system. Some fear a future scenario where the world has vigorously embraced both filtering software and ratings schemes. In this scenario, content that had not been rated would simply not be accessible to most terminals.
Attempts to introduce ratings schemes of any form are also regarded as a violation of the
generally anarchic culture that governs the provision of content on the Internet at the present.

12.9 Australian Broadcasting Authority:
Australia’s Regulatory Body

For most of the history of the Internet in Australia, including more than a decade prior to it
becoming a mass medium, no regulatory body was tasked with monitoring its content. When
AARnet was this nation’s major Internet backbone, the Australian Vice Chancellors’
Committee (founders of AARnet) urged that this academic network should be used primarily
for academic purposes, but my own experiences with using AARnet suggest that direct
intervention in its usage was somewhat rare.

This changed in 1999 when the Federal Parliament passed an amendment to the Broadcasting

This amendment gave considerable power to the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA), an
existing government body, to regulate content on the Internet.

The Authority was given the power to issue “take-down” notices to Internet Service Providers
hosting content that was judged to be classified as prohibited content. This system of
classification was analogous to existing censorship principles governing motion pictures, and
seems to be largely concerned with regulating sex and violence. Members of the public were
invited to submit complaints to the Authority about material that they considered offensive, and
an online complaint form was even created on the ABA Web site. Instructions to prospective
complainants advise that content worthy of investigation includes various forms of content
relating to sex and violence, as well as “material containing detailed instruction in crime...or
drug use” and “material which deals with issues or contains depictions which require an adult
perspective” (Australian Broadcasting Authority 1999).
It is noteworthy that the Australian Broadcasting Authority has demonstrated some degree of concern for the operation of Internet Service Providers and their inability to police all content on their networks. Prudently, the Complaints section of their Web site also advises that “the ABA will not investigate a complaint about something a person disagrees with or simply does not like, if it is not otherwise prohibited content. Such complaints should be directed to the authors of the content”.

Complaint investigation procedures at the Australian Broadcasting Authority began on January 1, 2000. A statement issued by the ABA indicated that 124 complaints about Internet-based content had been received by March 31, 2000 (Australian Broadcasting Authority 2000). The Authority stated that it had finalised investigations into 99 of these complaints and was in the process of conducting investigations into another 23. According to this media release, two of the received complaints were not placed under investigation “as the ABA was of the view that they were not made in good faith”. It is theorised that these two instances were complaints that the Web sites for the Australian Parliament and for the Australian Broadcasting Authority itself were offensive! Registered complaints for both these sites were documented in an information release relating to ABA investigations (Electronic Frontiers Australia 2000a). Final “take-down” notices that legally required Internet Service Providers to remove content were issued for 31 items hosted in Australia.

Despite the open reportage of these statistics, the operations of the Australian Broadcasting Authority have not been entirely transparent. No data was published by the Authority on the precise identity of the sites that were the subject of complaints, or were issued with “take-down” notices. In February 2000, the activist group Electronic Frontiers Australia filed a Freedom of Information request to obtain clarification on these matters. A response from the Authority stated that the request would cost $4600 to process, an amount that Electronic Frontiers Australia considered excessive. In the following months, a series of exchanges between the two bodies occurred, as Electronic Frontiers Australia attempted to reduce the amount it would need to pay, and also reorganised its request.
By August 2000, some material had been released by the ABA, but representatives of
Electronic Frontiers Australia were dissatisfied with the quality of this information, as revealed
in a report on their Web site (Electronic Frontiers Australia 2000b). This report revealed that
within the documents supplied by the Australian Broadcasting Authority, "(Web site addresses)
and page titles and other information on the vast majority of documents has been blacked out".
This meant that it was essentially impossible to make precise judgements on all of the material
that was investigated or censored.

However, some information released to Electronic Frontiers Australia suggests that a Web page
hosted on the site for the *Sydney Morning Herald* was the subject of a complaint (Electronic
Frontiers Australia 2000a). According to the complaint published in this untitled Electronic
Frontiers Australia report, this page was alleged to include content of a sexual nature. It is not
clear if the ABA engaged in any dialogue with the *Herald* about this.

The lack of precise data means that it cannot be guaranteed that the ABA has investigated any
other forms of journalism, or has taken action against Web sites hosting journalism. However,
no open complaints about the suppression of journalistic content by the Australian Broadcasting
Authority were discovered in the course of researching this thesis.

### 12.10 Australian Press Council: Monitoring Web Sites

The Australian Press Council is a professional body created by representatives of the Australian
media. Its primary goal is to promote ethical and professional standards in Australia’s print
media. The Australian Press Council receives and investigates complaints raised by
organisations or individuals concerning content that has been published in the print media.
These complaints may vary from concerns over inaccurate reporting to vilification. It is not a
government organisation. The body is thus an example of self-regulation of the media.
The advent of the World Wide Web as a mass medium, coupled with the rise of journalistic content published on the Web, has prompted the Australian Press Council to investigate ways of addressing professional concerns over journalism published on the Web (Australian Press Council 2000).

The concept of this body involving itself in the Web is interesting, as the operations and the very title of the organisation imply a specific focus on the print medium. The Australian Press Council does not involve itself in other electronic media. However, the Council has involved itself in the Web due to a perception that much of the journalism published on the Web is produced by organisations that operate print journalism publications. Many of these organisations are already members of the Australian Press Council. Hence, the close tie between Web-based news and conventional content producers, especially print content producers, has influenced the development of this approach to regulating content.

Discussions between the Council, the Federal Minister for Communications (Senator Richard Alston) and the Australian Broadcasting Authority produced guidelines for the Council that were compatible with the previously drafted operations of the Australian Broadcasting Authority. The main consequence of this is an agreement that the Australian Press Council will not “infringe on the ABA’s prerogatives in the area of sexually explicit material on the Web” (Australian Press Council 2000).

The Australian Press Council instigated its own activities for investigating content on Web sites operated by existing members of the Australian Press Council on May 3, 2000. The procedures introduced for regulating content on the Web were similar to those created by the Council for dealing with print journalism. Complaints would be accepted from any party that wished to raise them, and these complaints would be investigated and addressed using existing guidelines. However, the execution of remedies allowed the Council to take advantage of the immediacy of updating a Web page.
As the Council explained: "When the Council makes a finding about material appearing on a Web site, a link will be included in the relevant (Web) site pointing to the adjudication as published on the Council's Web site. This link would appear on the front page of the online site published on the day requested by the council if the original article, the subject of the complaint, appeared on the front page; otherwise the link will appear on the news index of the day requested by the Council. Additionally, an annotation, with the appropriate link, will be placed in the on-line archive of the article which was the subject of the complaint" (Australian Press Council 2000).

This remedy is similar to the apologies or corrective messages that the Council can request that a print publication place in a subsequent issue. However, the dynamic nature of Web publishing also allows previously published material stores in archives to be corrected, an option that is not technically feasible with a conventional print publication. It is noteworthy that the Press Council has identified this possibility and used it to advantage.

The Press Council states that members have agreed that their Web sites would contain a statement pledging adherence to the standards of the Council, together with a hyperlink to the Australian Press Council's own Web site. However, the inspection of news-based Web sites carried out in Methodology 1 suggests that this has happened infrequently. The only site featuring a message and hyperlink in accordance with Council recommendations was that of the Bendigo Advertiser.

At the time of this study, the Australian Press Council had not resolved its approach for dealing with Web sites that were not created by members of the Council. These could include Web sites with ties to print publications that were not Council members, sites with ties to non-print media, or purely online ventures. The Council suggests that, in the future, some form of affiliate membership of the Council could be offered to these ventures.
The relative novelty of the Council’s activities in this area, coupled with an apparent reluctance by Council members to advertise this regulatory scheme on their sites, suggest that input would be relatively low. A personal inquiry made to the Council indicated that no complaints about Web sites had been received by the Council since the regulatory scheme had been enacted.

12.11 Censorship and Regulation of Australian News Sites

It would seem from the available evidence that regulation and censorship policies have had a generally minimal impact on Web sites dealing with news and journalism in Australia. Operation of the Internet in general is still relatively free and unencumbered by regulations. Where actions have been taken against content providers before the advent Australian Broadcasting Authority investigations, the underlying legal principles have been grounded in laws that have no specific reference to the Internet.

The Rindos case, involving defamatory allegations on an academic mailing list, did not involve the publication of content that could be classified as journalism. However, The Chimes dealt in financial information and corporate discussions that could be classified as journalism. This is possibly the most relevant case of all to generic considerations of journalism, but the sensitive nature of financial information, and the specifics of the case itself, makes aspects of this case difficult to extrapolate to most other forms of reporting.

The mandate and activities of the Australian Broadcasting Authority have raised general concerns among certain Internet activists, but there is no evidence that the Authority has attempted to censor any form of content that could be classified as journalism. It appears that the complaint issued against the Sydney Morning Herald did not result in any form of direct action by the Authority. The Australian Press Council has decided that, at the time of study, it will only investigate Web sites operated by its members. It appears that this decision has had only a minimal impact on the content of Web sites, with only one site even advertising the regulatory scheme.
There have been no specific reports of Australian news sites being rejected by filtering software.

One major Australian news-related Web site is registered with a major ratings organisation. The Ninemsn site is registered under the RSACI system. However, it appears that Ninemsn has not done this for the purposes of censoring its news content. Ninemsn hosts some content that is related to discussions of sexual issues, and the inclusion of this content on the site appears to have prompted this effort at self-regulation.

12.12 Transborder Dataflow

One argument raised against censorship policies is the worldwide geographic distribution of the Internet. Content that is illegal in one country can be hosted elsewhere, but still accessed by Internet users in the country where it is illegal.

Generally, Australian news content does not seem to have been relocated to other nations in an effort to avoid the control of Australian laws or regulations.

One exception has been aforementioned Web site The Chimes, which, at the time of this study, was physically hosted on a server located in New Zealand.

The Australian Broadcasting Authority notes that 17 Australian Web sites that prompted the issue of final “take-down” notices under its own regulatory powers in early 2000 were moved to locations overseas, where the ABA was not empowered to take action against them (Australian Broadcasting Authority 2000). However, there is no evidence to suggest that any of these sites were related to journalism.

The ABA also advises on the Complaints section of its Web site that complaints can only be lodged to the Authority from Australian residents, a “body corporate” that is active in Australia,
or an Australian state, territorial or federal government. Hence, overseas influence on
Australian regulation is limited.

Probably the most interesting example of transborder dataflow influencing regulatory activity in
Australia was a legal challenge brought against a Web site in New South Wales in 1999
(Macquarie Bank Limited & Anor v Berg [1999] NSWSC 526). In this case, a person who was
not a professional journalist created a Web site that was defamatory of the Macquarie Bank. An
injunction to remove this material from the Web site was sought. It should be noted that the
content of this site does not fit the presented definitions of journalism, in either a traditional or a
new sense.

The request for an injunction was rejected, with the judge citing the technical properties of the
Internet as factor in the decision. The judgement observed the difficulties of imposing local
laws on material that would be accessible in other regions: “It is not to be assumed that the law
of defamation in other countries is coextensive with that of NSW, and indeed, one knows that it
is not. It may very well be that, according to the law of the Bahamas.... or Mongolia, the
defendant has an unfettered right to publish the material. To make an order interfering with
such a right would exceed the proper limits of the use of the injunctive power of this court...For
this reason alone, I would refuse the order sought” (Supreme Court of New South Wales 1999).

12.13 Geocities: Drawing Attention to Intellectual Property

In 1999, controversy briefly erupted over the intellectual property rights of people supplying
content to the Web using the Geocities hosting service. Geocities, now owned by the major
Web portal Yahoo, is a free Web hosting service that gains its revenue through advertising.

As previously documented in this thesis, no Australian journalistic content was found to be
hosted on Geocities. However, the Geocities controversy is of interest for its potential
implications for ownership of content and intellectual property in the future. Geocities is
organisationally located in the United States of America, and is hence not subjected to Australian law.

Soon after Geocities was acquired by Yahoo, a revised version of the service was launched in 1999. Controversy quickly erupted when the terms of service for posting content to Geocities were found to have been revised (Junnarkar 1999a).

One part of these terms of service granted Yahoo "...the royalty-free, perpetual, irrevocable, nonexclusive and fully sublicensable right and license to use, reproduce, modify, adapt, publish, translate, create derivative works from, distribute, perform, and display such content (in whole or part) worldwide and/or to incorporate it in other works in any form, media, or technology now known or later developed" (Junnarkar 1999a).

It was perceived by some Geocities users that this language meant that content providers were essentially surrendering their intellectual property rights. This provoked a boycott of the Geocities service, as users threatened to entirely remove their content from the site.

Eventually, after two revisions of its terms of service, the boycott of the site was ended. New terms for Geocities granted users the right to withdraw the right of Yahoo or its Geocities subdivision to use content if they elected to discontinue their Web site (Junnarkar 1999b).

The precise rights that Geocities would have been able to exercise in the event of a dispute, and the motivations of Yahoo themselves in drafting the new terms of service, are both unclear, as they are based on scenarios that never manifested in practice. However, the incident draws attention to the sensitivity of the matter of intellectual property on free Web hosting services. This, in turn, could influence the willingness of some amateur journalists to place content on these services.

Geocities is only one of several free Web services. Each has a different, individually drafted set of conditions of use. It is inappropriate to explore these in precise detail from a legal...
perspective, as I am not a legal professional. Furthermore, the lack of case law would complicate this task for legal professionals.

12.14 Privacy

The highly interactive nature of the Internet means that publishers could, in theory, take action to document the patterns of access to their content by users. As this thesis has observed, this information is valuable for measuring overall readership levels and changes in readership at different times.

Web technology makes the tallying of page accesses a relatively straightforward process, assuming the site wishes to be honest with its reporting of this data. It is also normally possible to gain data relating to the network or access provider that is accessing the content. This, in turn, can provide evidence of the geographic area of a reader, or in some cases, a place of employment or study. The exact precision that can be generated is a function of the scope of the network itself, and its clientele. Thus, David Lovejoy at the Byron Shire Echo was able to report that his own site has attracted a surprisingly high level of attention from users on networks operated by the US military, and also by Telstra.

Beyond this, it is difficult for a Web site to precisely identify its user base with respect to specific individuals, assuming that a Web browser has not been configured to make such information readily available to Web servers. Such precision would require collaboration with the operators of individual networks used by these people. It is likely that attempts to procure such information would violate national or state laws protecting the privacy of the individual subscribers to an Internet Service Provider. Such collaboration has sometimes occurred in Australia at the request of law enforcement officers for the purpose of monitoring criminal activity such as the “hacking” of computers. However, this form of activity would be difficult to justify for the purposes of monitoring normal activities.
In general, it seems that the privacy of individual users for Web-based news and journalism is sound. Most publishers are not seeking this data, and are content to analyse the broad aggregated data that is supplied by existing systems.

Some sites place highly explicit statements on their sites that guarantee the privacy of their users. *Ninemsn* does collect information on some of its users who engage in interactive parts of the site such as registering for job searching services, but presents users with guarantees that this information will not be disclosed to other parties. Casual readers of news, however, would not be subjected to such data collection. *News.com.au* observes that information that could identify an individual will only be collected when it is actively submitted by a user.

Activist groups like Electronic Frontiers Australia continue to urge vigilance on the broad issue of privacy for Internet users, but it would seem that issues relating to privacy have produced few incidents of concern. The only example of privacy violation that was discovered was the accidental leakage of a sample of email addresses from the paid subscriber base for the *Crikey* Web site. This incident is documented elsewhere in this thesis. It is worth noting that the technical problems that caused this accident do not exist in the case of Internet users casually browsing Web sites without supplying registration or any other form of identification.

### 12.15 Conclusion

The perception of the Internet as an anarchic, unregulated medium espoused in 1997 by Cunningham and Flew is not a precise reflection of the state of the Internet in Australia at the time of study. In recent years, legislation and regulation that specifically relates to the Internet has been enacted, and more legal activity relating to content published on the Internet has appeared. However, it is accurate to say that the overall level of regulation and control remains extremely limited. In comparison to other forms of mass communication, the level of control is substantially less.
These factors influence the interpretation of the answer to research question R1 that has been built up over the course of this thesis. In previous chapters, a relative lack of change in overall models of journalism on the Internet was documented. Material in previous chapters suggests that internal organisational factors are a principal cause of this. This chapter has demonstrated that uncertainty over legal issues is also tempering innovation in some of the major Web sites. This has ranged from refusals to modify legacy content, to refusals to introduce unregulated chat forums.

The lack of licensing regulations also makes it possible for amateur publishers to create sites with no need to work through a bureaucratic process. However, amateur publishing is extremely rare. Hence, the previously documented explanations for the lack of amateur publishing seem to be the only ones that can be raised. The technological, economic and regulatory frameworks are suited to amateur publishing, but the difficulty in producing journalism, and the cultural perceptions of journalists as professional newsworkers, would seem to prevent this from happening.
Chapter Thirteen

Online Polling Study for Agenda-Setting

The creation of regular online polls on major Web sites is an interesting phenomenon. These polls are passive experiments that have generated substantial amounts of quantitative data on public opinion. This represents a unique opportunity for research into agenda-setting, and the potential of the Internet to influence research methodologies.

The significance of these polls lies in the fact that they are highly passive experiments. Participants elect to vote in online polls without direct prompting. They are also anonymous, and not instigated by academic researchers. This is a highly different scenario from most agenda-setting research, where data are mainly drawn from active interviews with members of the general public. In most cases, the active nature of the methodology could also give interview subjects the impression that they could be identifiable to a certain degree, owing to the fact that researchers have been able to contact them and interact with them. An example of this traditional form of agenda-setting research is the use of telephone polling, where researchers telephone large numbers of people and ask to interview them. This is sometimes carried out by professional polling companies, but it can also be done by the academics themselves.

It is possible that traditional methodologies could affect the quality of the data that is collected. The perceived lack of absolute anonymity and the interaction with another human that occurs during the traditional interview process could prompt some respondents to avoid expressing views that they sincerely hold, but consider to be unpopular. The “Spiral of Silence” model proposed by Noelle-Neumann (1994), documented in Chapter 2, outlines the results of a study that supports this proposition.
The traditional methodology is also highly active, in that people who are not actually contacted by the researchers will have no opportunity to contribute to the data. Data collection methodologies are limited by space and time constraints, in that people must be in a certain place and a certain time in order for the researchers to contact them. A typical methodology involves calling private homes in the early evening, when it is expected that people will be at home after a typical work routine.

By contrast, online polls can be answered at any time, and from any location with Internet access. If a passive experiment attracts large numbers of participants, it could be argued that it represents a more representative data set, as people with lifestyles that would have prevented them from being contacted under traditional methodologies can be included.

This chapter provides material in support of research question R4, which investigates the potential of the Internet to influence agenda-setting research. More material for this research question will be provided in another chapter. This chapter presents data from Methodology 6.

13.1 Theoretical Framework

The rationale for using data from an online poll is derived from the “Spiral of Silence” model of Noelle-Neumann. It is proposed that the mechanics of anonymity and voluntary participation in this poll would avoid the influence of the sociological factors outlined by Noelle-Neumann that would otherwise distort the data.

13.1.1 Variable Influence: Experience and Ethics Model

The analysis of the data will be informed by general perceptions of a variable influence of specific issues on public opinion. Zucker (1978) suggested that media influence on public agendas would vary for different issues, according to the “obtrusiveness” of an issue. Zucker argued that the media would have a greater influence on perceptions of issues that were not directly experienced by audiences, as the media would be their principal source of information.
on these issues. The general concept of certain issues holding variable levels of influence according to the personal perceptions of individuals is useful.

However, this thesis will not use the precise differentiation proposed by Zucker. Zucker does not account for the possibility that some issues that do not physically or organisationally affect the lives of people, and are not viewed or experienced in a direct sense, may be very important to them, as they are related to personal agendas or concepts that are broadly relevant to many issues.

Personal agendas are influenced by political orientations and personal views on morals and ethics. As a hypothetical example, a person’s own nation may not use the death penalty for criminals, and that person may not be a crime victim or involved in law enforcement. This person could still hold a strong interest in stories from overseas that relate to the death penalty, as it is an issue that involves politics, social codes and morals.

This concept of people developing such sophisticated internal agendas that influence their perceptions of media issues is not an element of Zucker’s own model. As documented in Chapter 2, Sless (1986) reveals that theoretical models of agenda-setting are highly asymmetric in their treatment of the audience, and do not ascribe as much power to audiences as they do to media producers.

These ideas have informed the creation of a new variable-effects model that will be used in the interpretation of data in this chapter. This model is titled the “Experience and Ethics” model, as it ascribes two principal streams of influence. It proposes that the prominence of specific issues in personal agendas will be influenced by direct experience with the stories or issues, as well as the relationship between stories and issues with general perceptions of social and moral codes. An issue that relates to social and moral principles is likely to be evaluated as important by individuals, even if the incident has not been experienced by a person, and has no direct influence on his or her lifestyle. Thus, social and moral issues are major elements of personal agendas.
Zucker’s model also assumes that the duration of coverage of an issue also influences its prominence. According to this model, once an issue has been covered extensively in the news, people make up their minds about it and are no longer susceptible to media influence if the topic is covered further. This may be a possibility in terms of specific orientations towards various “sides” within a specific issue (such as whether or not the death penalty should be enforced) but the decision by people to adopt a specific position on an issue does not reduce the importance of that issue in personal agendas. It could be argued that the formulation of a personal position on an issue could actually boost the prominence of that issue in a person’s personal agendas, as the person now feels interested in seeing that personal viewpoint advocated. This second criticism of Zucker is consistent with the “Experience and Ethics” model presented in this chapter.

Another factor that is believed to relate to personal agendas is the locality of a story. Galtung and Ruge have identified geographic proximity as a factor in newsworthiness. It is proposed that locality will also motivate personal agendas for similar reasons. An event that happens in Australia is likely to be considered relevant to personal agendas because people living in this country generally feel that they are involved in its image and activities. This is a product of factors such as nationhood and identity arguments where people in any nation generally feel a sense of identity with that nation, which in turn relates to feelings of wishing to see the nation operate in a prosperous and fair manner. Hence, there is a personal connection to anything affecting the nation. Hence, the argument behind locality has parallels to the Experience and Ethics model.

13.1.2 Agenda Resonance Theory

Sless (1986) criticised the traditional interpretative framework of agenda-setting research for its assumption that the media has a high level of power over audiences. Sless observed that the process ignored the potential for individuals or groups of individuals to generate their own agendas.
Sless made these observations prior to the debut of the Internet as a mass medium. His criticisms are aimed at media and audience relations in general. However, it is reasonable to believe that the ability of Internet users to self-publish and interact would make this level of empowerment even more apparent.

The need to develop a new theoretical model that would address the concerns raised by Sless led me to develop Agenda Resonance Theory. Under this model, both the media and audience members are capable of independently generating their own agendas. According to the classical agenda-setting model, relationships between discussions of issues by the general public, and issues discussed in the media, appear when the media has succeeded in setting agendas. According to Agenda Resonance Theory, this occurs when the two separate and independent agenda streams “resonate” when a common issue appears simultaneously in both.

Accordingly, Agenda Resonance Theory supplies an important theoretical link in the experimental methodology. It is assumed that participation in these online polls increases when the topic of the poll “resonates” with personal agendas. Hence, the level of voting is roughly proportional to the prominence of the topic in existing personal agendas. The development of these personal agendas will in turn be influenced by the “Experience and Ethics” model, which is consistent with Agenda Resonance Theory for its assumptions on the development of personal agendas.

13.1.3 Blood’s Criteria

Blood (1982) outlined a set of discrete criteria which mapped the general types of agenda-setting research that had been conducted to date. The type of study carried out for this chapter does not seem to match any of those outlined by Blood. Hence, it would seem that a new type of agenda-setting research has been developed.
13.2 Ninemsn Poll

The Ninemsn Web site has operated a highly successful poll for an extended period. Thousands of people have voted on public issues on an almost daily basis. This poll was used in a passive study that was informed by the variable-influence model outlined in the theoretical framework of this chapter and Agenda Resonance Theory between the agenda specified on the poll and the agendas of people responding to the poll.

A sample of 100 data points was used in this analysis. This data represented a continuous sampling of polls conducted between May 1, 2000 and August 13, 2000. Polls were conducted on most days of this period, although the site periodically omitted its daily poll.

The Ninemsn poll is easy for respondents to use. Users simply click a button on the home page of the Web site to vote “Yes” or “No” to a short question. Results from the daily poll are displayed and archived on the site. Representative questions from the poll include “Do you think you’ll be worse off under the GST?” and “Would Kim Beazley make a better prime minister than John Howard?”

Participation in these polls was high. The average number of responses to a single poll conducted during the sampling period was 5598, with a standard deviation of 1652. The large number of responses, along with a broad variance in the responses indicated by the large standard deviation, make this poll statistically useful.

The Ninemsn poll is self-selected, and thus does not have some of the advantages offered by a polling methodology employing random sampling. However, active polling involving random sampling can also be self-selecting, as people contacted by researchers can refuse to participate.

13.2.1 Processing of Data
The data was coded for processing in accordance with the theoretical model. The first element recorded for each sampled poll was the total number of votes. This was done by simply adding together the number of people who had voted “Yes” in a given poll with the number who had voted “No”. It is proposed that the degree of agenda resonance of the issue being explored in the poll should be roughly proportional to this figure, as agenda resonance would prompt people to vote. The number of people who voted for each side of the question is not relevant to this study, or to agenda-setting in general. The underlying principles of agenda-setting do not explore the viewpoints of audiences on specific issues, but perceptions of the issues that are important to audiences and news reports. Hence, the aggregated voting data is relevant, but the individual scores for each side are not.

The next element of coding was the classification of individual questions. Each question was ranked according to three criteria: Experience, Ethics, and Locality. Each criterion was scored as “Yes” or “No” for each question. A poll question was judged to have an “Experience” ranking if members of the general public could directly experience the issue under evaluation in the poll. Examples of this are smoking in restaurants and paying for car parking.

A question was judged to have an “Ethics” ranking if it was linked to broad personal concerns of ethical, social, moral and political codes. An example of this is the treatment of refugees in Australia.

Questions were ranked as having “Locality” if they were issues that had a specific Australian relevance, such as the performance of Australian athletes. These criteria are derived from the “Experience and Ethics” model, complemented with the category of “Locality”, which addresses the potential for issues to resonate owing to the interest of Australians in local issues.

Under the theoretical model, it was expected that issues would resonate more strongly as they fulfilled more of the coding criteria. It was predicted that there would be a rough quantitative relationship between total voting scores and the score out of three on these categories.
13.3 Results

Coded data was entered into a spreadsheet for analysis. The most dramatic difference in scores, and hence perceived agenda resonance, was found between questions that did not meet any of the coding criteria, and those that met all three. Nine questions were found to meet none of the criteria. The response levels to these questions had an average value of 3857 with a standard deviation of 1473, a comparatively low score.

Eighteen questions were found to meet all three criteria. For these questions, the average response level was 7302 votes, with a standard deviation of 1450. This score is considerably higher than the average value for the entire sample of 5598 votes, and even higher than the score listed for questions with no criteria.

Questions with intermediate levels of criteria produced intermediate levels of votes, and hence agenda resonance.

Five entries were found to score under "Ethics" and no other criterion. The average of these was 3681 with a standard deviation of 662. This number is lower than the value listed for questions with no criteria at all, but mechanical factors are believed to have interfered with this data. All of the questions with "Ethics only" scores were staged on weekends, when response levels to the online poll generally fall. All the other categories documented in this chapter were found to have an even mix of questions conducted on weekdays and weekends or public holidays, and the influence on the voting levels has thus been consistent.

Twenty four questions scored under "Local" only. The average number of votes for these questions was 4940 with a standard deviation of 1170. This response level is considerably higher than that for questions that did not fulfil any of the scoring criteria, but it is still significantly below the average result for the entire study.
Only three entries were scored as "Experience" only. The average vote level was 3355 with a standard deviation of 1254. This is a low result, but it is still lower than questions dealing with no criteria at all. It is believed that this is a result of the issues being discussed being somewhat generic and not as easy to experience as single, clearly defined events. The questions asked concerned general perceptions about changes in the quality of life, stress in the workplace and general airline safety.

Voting levels increased for questions that fulfilled two of the three criteria.

Eighteen questions were judged to score as "Ethics" and "Local" issues. For these, the average number of votes was 6865 with a standard deviation of 1484. This result is clearly higher than any question with one or no criteria, but still lower than the average score of questions meeting three criteria.

Twenty questions scored under "Experience" and "Local". These questions had an average response of 5396 votes with a standard deviation of 1114. Again, the result is higher than for questions with fewer criteria, and less than the score for those with more criteria. The result is less than the voting levels for questions dealing with "Ethics" and "Local" by a substantial margin. This is noteworthy, as it reinforces the proposition of the theoretical model that broad ethical and social viewpoints strongly influence the agenda resonance of issues.

No questions in the study were found to rank exclusively under the criteria of "Ethics" and "Experience", and hence no data for this permutation can be presented.

This numerical data is hence consistent with the proposed theoretical model, as a rough quantitative relationship between the ranking of stories under the variable influence model and their voting scores has been identified.
13.4 Assessment of a New Methodology

This research has used a methodology that is somewhat different from traditional agenda-setting research. It is worth exploring these differences in greater detail.

The most broad difference is the fact that this study used the Internet, and specifically the Web, as a means of collecting data. As with the online media survey conducted to study user motivations, this represented a breakthrough in terms of logistics. One of the greatest problems in agenda-setting research is its dependence on the collection of many points of data. Simply getting this information is normally a logistically cumbersome process for traditional agenda-setting research, as many people must be interviewed on several points. A Web site can make this data collection cheap and less time-consuming. The fact that this poll was conducted by another body, who bore all the expenses involved, made the logistics of this study even easier.

Another significant issue is the fact that response levels to the poll were so high. This was important, as it made the results statistically relevant.

Furthermore, the study uses data from a poll that was not the product of an academic body, and not ostensibly intended for the conduct of academic research. This could lead respondents to feel more open about their replies, as they do not feel pressured to conform to any perceived expectations of the academy in the style of their responses.

An important factor of this polling system is the anonymity of participants, coupled with their atomisation when replying. Each respondent gave his or her answers without interacting with other participants. It is also noteworthy that the use of automation could also be an advantage. Every user of the poll would see and experience the same user interface. This would remove the influence of human factors such as the perceived sex, age appearance or personality of an interviewer. Traditional agenda-setting research often involves the use of several research workers interviewing people in shifts or in different locations simultaneously. Differences in
their appearances and mannerisms could influence the data returned by different workers, even within the context of the same study. The Internet removes the potential influence of these human variables.

Some aspects of this study were independent of the medium used. The idea of tracking a single issue on different days, and changing that issue with each sampling, does not match any of the categories outlined by Blood. However, it would be possible to conduct a study such as this using traditional methods such as telephone polling. The fact that this sort of study has not been carried out by previous agenda-setting researchers is probably grounded in the fact that a unique theoretical framework is needed to support it.

Differences in response levels are based on the concept of the variable influence of specific stories, and the principles of experience, ethics and locality that categorise this variance. It is also expected that these personal agendas are sustained independently of media agendas, and can manifest themselves when they are activated through agenda resonance with a news story, or a poll that touches on these issues. This theoretical model grants more power to audiences than traditional agenda-setting concepts, and also suggests that people are less fickle at changing personal agendas than the rapidly changing agendas that appear in news stories. Hence, a poll like this that samples a single topic per day can still perceive these strongly-held, slower-changing personal issues.

The theoretical framework generated for this study, the carrying out of the study itself, the data generated and the conclusions drawn all complement each other, reinforcing the concept that this relatively new methodology is valid.

13.5 Agenda Resonance and The Classic Paradigm

Agenda Resonance is an idea that does not appear in previous agenda-setting research. It challenges the assumptions of agenda-setting by suggesting that the media itself does not really
"set" agendas with the public, and that perceived examples of agenda-setting in action have sometimes been misinterpreted, when what is really observed is agenda resonance between media agendas and public agendas.

In light of these challenges, it is appropriate to consider the relationship of Agenda Resonance to the classic paradigm of agenda-setting. Kuhn (1962) observes that research paradigms tend to either modify themselves slightly to accommodate new data or new suggestions, or are overturned in favour of a new paradigm. Agenda Resonance should be considered to be a new paradigm of research in the overall field of media effects research, but its enunciation does not mean that the classic agenda-setting paradigm has been replaced, or should be.

Agenda Resonance is a new idea, and this thesis represents its first publication in a public document. It remains to be seen if Agenda Resonance will be accepted by the academic community, tested, rejected, or simply ignored.

It is possible that Agenda Resonance could be absorbed into the overall spectrum of media effects, to be used in tandem with classic agenda-setting principles. Combinations of the two paradigms could be used to explain observed phenomena. Some researchers may conclude that evidence in support of both paradigms can be found.

Media effects could eventually be viewed as being influenced by classic agenda-setting and agenda resonance, with a new paradigm emerging that incorporates them both.

Hence, it is inappropriate at this stage to state exactly how Agenda Resonance will influence the overall state of media effects research.
13.6 Conclusion

This has been a successful study in establishing a theoretical framework, selecting an appropriate methodology and drawing conclusions from data. It has established that the Internet can be used as an effective tool for Internet research.

The concept of variable influence, which holds potential for breaking the controversy surrounding agenda-setting research in any context, has been strengthened by the results of this study. Furthermore, the specific model of variable influence developed for this thesis seems to be supported by the data from the Ninemsn poll.

Part of this success would seem to be a result of the quality of the data collection methodology, where large numbers of people regularly vote on dozens of issues that are presented in a consistent format. The elimination of other factors that could influence public responses through the use of a standardised, automatic methodology also contributes to the quality of the data.

Despite the success of this study, it would be irresponsible to suggest that simply using the Internet as a research tool will always guarantee success in agenda-setting research. This study used a data set that was the product of a qualified sampling methodology, and addressed this using an appropriate methodology. The data collection pattern and methodology were complementary and suited to utilising the specific advantages of the Internet.

It is thus possible that other agenda-setting research conducted on the Internet would not be as successful if its methodology or theoretical framework did not account for the specific conditions that are experienced in an online environment. Different Web sites, different styles of operation, or different Internet applications could potentially produce vastly different results.
Chapter Fourteen

Usenet Study for Agenda-Setting

This chapter presents the results of a second study designed to evaluate the potential influence of the Internet on agenda-setting research. This research is closer in its overall design to a classic agenda-setting investigation, but draws upon a unique method of passive data collection, and a theoretical framework that accounts for this methodology. This is the final chapter in support of research question R4, using data from Methodology 7.

14.1 Theoretical Framework

Blood (1982) identifies four basic methodologies for conducting research in agenda-setting. The methodology for a Type 2 study in Blood’s documentation was used in the design of this study.

Under this methodology, a list of principal agendas covered by the media is determined through media monitoring. A set of personal agendas from members of the general public is determined in parallel for the same time period. In both cases, no prior list of agendas or stories is prepared or presented to data collectors. This differs from a Type 1 analysis, where a pre-determined set of issues is examined in both data collection streams.

Under a traditional theoretical framework for agenda-setting, the relationship between these two sets of data would be used as evidence of a specific degree of agenda-setting by the media on the general public.

This research uses a new theoretical model in its treatment of the data. Sless (1986) criticised the traditional interpretative framework of agenda-setting research for its assumption that the
media has a high level of power over audiences. Sless observed that the process ignored the potential for individuals or groups of individuals to generate their own agendas.

Sless made these observations prior to the debut of the Internet as a mass medium. His criticisms are aimed at media and audience relations in any form. However, it is proposed that the ability of Internet users to self-publish and interact would make this level of empowerment even more apparent.

This led to the development of the “Agenda Resonance Theory”, which is documented in the theoretical framework in Chapter 3, and reviewed in Chapter 12 for the first agenda-setting study carried out for this thesis.

In this study, it is proposed that agenda resonance theory means that the media will not generally affect the topics that are discussed on these newsgroups. However, discussion on specific topics could escalate when media agendas resonate with agendas on the newsgroups.

14.2 Collection of Data

Two discrete and highly different sources were used for the data streams for this Type 2 experiment. The newspaper *The Australian*, in its printed version, was used as a reference for general media agendas. This was selected as the media reference point due to its nation-wide distribution, its editorial focus on serious news stories, its near-daily publication schedule and the ease of documenting the newspaper from library archives. It was suggested in the initial statement of research question R4, which this methodology informs, that the delivery of more news stories on the Internet than could be found in traditional media could influence the overall course of agenda-setting, as there would be more agendas generated by the media. This thesis has documented that Internet-based news is essentially dominated by the supply of legacy content, and the overall quantity of news supplied on the Internet is substantially less than
appears in non-Internet media. Hence, this potential area of inquiry has been nullified, and it is not appropriate to explore Internet-based news products for their influence on agenda-setting.

Traffic in the Usenet newsgroups *aus.general* and *aus.politics* was used as a reference source for personal media agendas. The selection of these newsgroups was appropriate, as both are well-known among Internet users and have high levels of postings. They are also nation-wide forums with the same geographic focus as the newspaper *The Australian*. These newsgroups are also unmoderated (meaning that there is no editorial control) and are not presented under the masthead of a particular media publication or organisation. Hence, they are the closest environment to an open discussion forum that the Internet can supply. Archived postings to both these newsgroups are also readily available using the *deja.com* search engine.

The sampling for the experiment was divided into four blocks of approximately one month each. These sample blocks were selected at random, and were distributed over two separate calendar years.

Samples were observed for the months of January 1998, April 1998 and March 1999, as well as for a period from mid-October to mid-November 1999.

A period of one month for each sample period was believed to be long enough to generate data to reveal specific agendas. Dearing and Rogers (1996: 35) note that blocks of one month are traditionally used in agenda-setting research, providing another connection between this methodology and previous ones.

The identification of specific agendas in the newspaper and Usenet was achieved through quantitative means. In the case of *The Australian*, counts were made of the number of stories appearing on a particular topic or issue. For Usenet, counts were made of the number of postings appearing on topics or issues of public interest. The adoption of essentially identical methodologies for assessing content in both channels allows straightforward comparisons of the
data. Dearing and Rogers (1996: 36) also note the use of the number of reports about a particular issue, without analysis of the content, as a previous methodology.

A newspaper publishes dozens of stories in a given month. Filtering was introduced to produce a set of issues that had achieved prominent coverage in *The Australian*. An issue was judged to be prominent if it was covered by ten stories or more in a given sampling period.

It was proposed that news issues covered with prominence by *The Australian* would be reflective of overall media agendas in Australia. This is due to the adoption of relatively similar news values by newspapers in general, although there would be minor variations due to geographical scope. Dearing and Rogers (1996: 90) observe that “in general, the media tend to agree in the number of or the proportion of news stories that they devote to a specific issue”.

Postings to Usenet were also filtered to ensure that postings that were not relevant to the study were not counted. The unregulated nature of Usenet means that many postings appear that are not related to the intended topics of specific newsgroups. Postings that were rejected for analysis include unsolicited advertising messages, personal conversations on non-public issues conducted between newsgroup participants, requests for help or information, and postings containing insults or expletives.

### 14.3 Presentation of Data

The relatively low level of processed data generated by this experiment makes it possible and appropriate to present it in a comparative format.

January 1998
Discussion on Usenet for this period was somewhat haphazard. Most messages simply failed to deal with public issues that could be analysed in this study. Hence, the overall number of messages that espoused agendas was relatively small. January includes holiday seasons for schools, tertiary institutions and many workers. It is believed that this has influenced the low level of serious messages.

The following agenda topics, together with score tabulations, were observed.

One Nation Party/Pauline Hanson: 20
Optus and Telecommunications: 5
Homosexuality: 10
New Years Eve Fireworks: 5
Australian nuclear power: 5
Wik/Aboriginal autonomy: 15
Australian Republic: 1

The following agendas were observed in *The Australian* for the same period.

Constitutional Convention/ Australian Republic: 31
Antarctic Trek: 13
Asian/Indonesian Currency Crisis: 114
Swimming Championships/Chinese Swimming Drug Scandal: 37
Rural Floods: 12
Wik Debate: 10
Work For Dole: 10
Clinton scandals: Paula Jones/Monica Lewinsky: 49
Waterfront Dispute: 14

The Asian/Indonesian Currency Crisis was the most prominent media story for this period. It is interesting to note that only one issue, namely the Wik debate and its broader implications for aboriginal policies, was common to both agenda sets. The Waterfront Dispute occurred late in the month (less than five days before the end of the month), and presumably did not have enough time to generate agenda resonance with Usenet in the sampling period.

April 1998
Traffic in these groups had increased substantially from the holiday season. Curiously, news agendas were highly concentrated on just two issues.

Waterfront Dispute: 80
Police shootings in Victoria: 5

Issues in the newspaper were more diverse.

Clinton sex allegations: 14
Native Title/Wik: 19
Japanese Economic Slump: 18
Waterfront Dispute: 156
Ireland Peace Talks: 11
Asian Economies (besides Japan): 24

Of these, the Waterfront Dispute was easily the most heavily covered story.

Again, only one issue was common to both agenda sets. The Waterfront Dispute, which first appeared in newspapers in late January 1998, was very prominent on Usenet and the newspaper. The newspaper continued to explore the Wik case, yet discussions on Wik were no longer prominent on the Usenet newsgroups.

March 1999

More discussion appeared on Usenet in this month that was related to newsworthy events.

Nuclear Waste: 70
Hurricane Vance: 5
Pedestrian harassment in Victoria Square, South Australia: 7
Heroin Abuse: 6
Gun Buyback Scheme: 15
Arrival of New Millennium: 30
One Nation Party/Pauline Hanson: 30
World Trade Federation: 6
Australian Republic/Constitutional Changes: 8
Paul Keating's Piggery: 2

Agendas in the newspaper were also very prolific.

Phil Coles/IOC inquiry: 36
During this period, New South Wales experienced the lead-up to a state election. It was decided not to cover this in the methodology, as it was not a nationwide issue. The bombing of Yugoslavia began late in the month, and presumably did not have enough time to generate agenda resonance with Usenet in the sampling period.

Mid-October to Mid-November 1999

Discussions on Usenet escalated to high levels for reasons that are difficult to understand. The newsgroups generated discussions on many agendas at very high levels. The Victorian State election, also held in this period, was not examined as it was a state-based issue.

The newspaper generated a substantial number of agendas itself.
Despite the heavy number of identifiable agendas pursued on Usenet and in the newspaper, few issues were found to be common.

14.4 Interpretation of the Data

In general, it would seem that the relationship between agendas discussed on these two Australian newsgroups, and agendas in Australia's major nationwide newspaper, was somewhat tenuous. Both were active in terms of generating individual agendas, yet each sample period generated only one or two examples of common agendas.

This lack of similarities, and the wide diversity of issues that achieved prominence in either channel, is informative. It suggests that agenda-setting studies that use a limited and predetermined set of topics would fail to accommodate the wide spectrum of topics that could exist. Hence, the Type 1 methodology in Blood's classification system would seem to hold deficiencies.

There was no consistent trend in the agenda resonance of an issue between the two data sets and the number of postings for a particular topic, even when agenda resonance appeared.

The results of this study have failed to generate much evidence of agenda resonance under the proposed theoretical model. However, the classic agenda-setting model would also fail to ascribe much agenda-setting influence by the media on these discussions.

14.5 Assessing the Results: Agenda Models
The overall nature of this study is curious. It has addressed general issues of agenda-setting in a public forum that have not been investigated by other agenda-setting research, and is unlike any forums that have been used for previous studies, Internet or non-Internet. This suggests that any conclusions that could be drawn from this experiment must be tentative.

It could be suggested that most people privately hold personal agenda sets that are as complex and diverse as the discussions on these newsgroups. The fact that such diversity has not been identified in the past could be an artefact of the methodologies used, caused by the staging of active interviews for research purposes. Interview subjects could modify their answers to make them more relevant to the perceived expectations of researchers.

It is possible that the use of these Usenet discussion groups is not a suitable forum for investigations into news agendas. Discussions on these groups is highly generic: almost any topic can be presented. There is no definitive motivation for people to confine their discussions to news-related public events. Unfortunately, no Usenet forum aimed at the discussion of news-related events in Australia could be found.

The passive nature of Usenet participation could itself be a complication. There is no way to control who contributes to these discussions, or how often. It could be argued that the people sending messages to these groups are not a representative sample of the general public. No demographic data on newsgroup participants could be obtained under the methodology used.

One idea that has emerged from these considerations is the possibility that the discussion forums have generated their own “group agendas” which are different from those of the general public, and may also be different from the personal agendas of people who interact with the groups.
These "group agendas" essentially constitute a set of agendas that the group has collectively adopted as relevant topics. It is postulated that certain newsgroup participants may develop these agendas through debate and argument. Under an application of the "Spiral of Silence" model of Noelle-Neumann, people who are not happy with these agendas, and who find themselves alienated in discussions, will either adopt the group agendas or leave the newsgroups.

Some of these agendas have been identified by previous analysis. An academic study of the overall characteristics of Australian newsgroups (Jones 1998) noted that "(the newsgroup) prominently discusses many issues that...are clearly not given much regular coverage by the media. Gun control, foreign policy and international affairs are prime examples".

General readings of postings suggest that the newsgroups seem preoccupied with general questions of freedom, individual rights, technology and broader global issues. These issues are reflected in the topics that appeared prominent in some of the postings. The most popular topic of all was the Microsoft Anti-Trust Case, which is clearly relevant to computer and Internet users. Internet censorship issues and media controls were also prominent, reflecting similar concerns. Elsewhere, abortion, a significant issue at any time, also attracted a large number of postings when discussion on this topic was provoked.

However, precise relationships between overall group agendas and the topics covered in a given sampling period appears somewhat dubious.

The "Experience and Ethics" model postulated for the variable influence of certain issues also seems to be relevant to topics raised on these newsgroups. The only issue documented which does not have a connection to this model was the France/Australia rugby match, but in this case, locality issues would seem to be prominent as it is an Australian issue. It is suggested that this theoretical model is thus relevant.
14.6 Methodological Issues

Traditional agenda-setting research, such as a Type 2 study under Blood’s criteria using active interviewing, offers a certain balance in the structuring of responses. Subjects are free to nominate any issues that they wish, but they are still informed by experimenters of the sort of information that is required. They are aware that they are taking part in a structured interview process for a specific goal.

This is not true for this Usenet study. It was expected that the absence of any prompting, and the highly passive nature of the observational process, would allow people to express issues more openly. This has sometimes happened, but the result of a completely unregulated and unstructured forum such as these Usenet newsgroups more often resembles chaos. Anything can be discussed, even if it is trivial or of no relevance to other people participating in the group.

Interviews with Web site operators presented earlier in this thesis revealed a general level of suspicion for unregulated chat. The quality of material they generated was questioned. This intensive study of Usenet has reinforced this suspicion.

The intensive, and often intrusive process of traditional agenda-setting research has been criticised for the way that it could influence the outcome of answers. Mechanisms such as Noelle-Neumann’s “Spiral of Silence” model could take effect. However, the results of this study suggest that the structured nature of this methodology does have certain advantages. By placing people within a formal, experimental context, they will at least respond with answers that should be relevant to the topic of study.

An ideal combination of these principles would be a methodology that is structured but non-intrusive. People would supply relevant answers with sincerity, oblivious to societal pressures. The previous agenda-setting study dealt with the results of a structured, anonymous poll. This
was highly successful in supporting the theoretical framework that informed the study, as the previous chapter demonstrated.

The lack of this structural framework on the Usenet study, coupled with its relative lack of anonymity, suggest that there are two major problems with the methodology. People would be afraid of expressing unpopular opinions for fear of being ostracised (again, another potential manifestation of the “Spiral of Silence” model), but would also feel free to make statements on anything that they wished, whether or not it was relevant to public agendas.

Hence, methodological issues appear to have strongly influenced the outcome of this study, and the almost haphazard nature of the results. The fact that results from the previous structured but anonymous study were so consistent (when examined with an appropriate theoretical framework) serves as an interesting comparison.

14.7 Conclusion

The most obvious conclusion that can be drawn is that Usenet newsgroups appear almost chaotic when studied with traditional agenda-setting research approaches. It has been suggested that this could be a result of the interplay of a complex set of competing agendas, such as media agendas, personal agendas, public agendas, and agendas held on a specific newsgroup. Tracking this many variables simultaneously would be extremely difficult. However, as the discussion of methodological issues has demonstrated, it is also possible that the newsgroup is not really influenced by any models of behaviour or discussion that could be precisely documented. Where there are no rules, disorder reigns. Internet users who do not like what they see on these newsgroups simply cease to participate, a concept that is consistent with the Noelle-Neumann model. The result could be a discussion forum that simply reflects the personal whimsy of a relatively small number of dedicated users, whose private interests are not indicative of broader community trends.
The study suggests that while traditional active methodologies such as polling could introduce methodological bias to some studies, some form of filtering or control over the sampling of data is essential. Otherwise, a data set will be generated that is biased by the influence of several complex factors, or factors could not even be properly understood.

Hence, it appears that the passive observation of unstructured discussion forums on the Internet is a methodology that is difficult to apply successfully.
Chapter Fifteen

Conclusions of the Thesis

This thesis has explored a diverse range of issues relating to the use of the Internet as a delivery system for journalism. It is appropriate to review the results of these studies in order to gain an overall understanding of this area of study.

15.1 Little General Change

The most significant issue of the thesis is that in general, there has been little change to established models of news delivery as outlined by Tuchman (1978). News on the Internet mostly originates from the same organisations that produce news for non-Internet delivery systems. The content that is supplied on the Internet is mostly identical to content appearing in other media. This has led to the use of the term "legacy content" to describe this. There does not seem to have been much adoption of the unique technical features that are offered by the Internet such as interactivity, and when such adoption has taken place, the operators of Web sites have often been sceptical of the results.

Interviews revealed that the operators of news Web sites were generally aware of the possibility for changing models of delivery. These changes include amateur publishing and interactive content influencing the journalistic process. However, these site operators have deliberately and unashamedly preserved the same systematic and conservative model behind non-Internet journalism. If Web site operators are sceptical of new Internet features in general, their attitude to these features influencing the journalistic process is even more hostile. The conventional model of journalistic delivery is perceived as a means of preserving credibility and professionalism. Conversely, these editors perceive that allowing the unique features of the Internet to influence the journalistic process would seriously degrade the quality of journalism.
15.2 Poor Planning, Impulse Motivations

Interviews conducted for this thesis suggest that Web site operators have entered this new medium with little in the way of planning or precise expectations. Having gone online, it also seems that many of them have no strategies for evaluating the response to their Web sites or the specific interests of their readers. These legacy content producers are simply “on the Net”, without knowing why they should be there.

The interviews suggest that news organisations have often gone online due to a herd mentality. They have seen other companies and news producers create Web sites. If others are doing it, they should follow this trend. Once a news organisation has decided to create a Web site, it usually adopts a similar format to everyone else. A typical news-based Web site reproduces a certain proportion of the stories appearing in a legacy print version or broadcast, and offers little else. Innovations beyond this most basic content model usually only occur in larger companies that have invested more time and resources in planning their online ventures.

The factors that seem to have motivated specific publications to go online are often influenced by personal idiosyncrasies as much as the herd mentality. A specific person who works for a news organisation often instigates the Web site due to personal interests or knowledge of the Web. This form of idiosyncratic influence seems to be most prominent in small publications, where staff often multi-task, and hence have fewer organisational parameters to upset.

Motivational factors generally seem to be based on emotional factors instead of a precise model of how the Web can be used to generate specific advantages. Interviews have documented evidence of fear of losing out, even if site operators are not clear about what exactly they will lose. This motivation of fear dovetails with the previously documented herd mentality. Another significant emotional factor was prestige. Large newspapers felt that they needed to go online to preserve their image as market leaders, but even a small newspaper such as the *Kiama Independent* can feel pride at being one of the first online newspapers in the country.
15.3 Minimal Impact on Existing Organisational Structures

Research for this thesis prompted the formulation of the “minimal impact” model of creating Web sites. Essentially, this states that an existing media company producing non-Internet journalism faces a challenge to its organisational structure when it creates a Web site. An organisation will wish to avoid creating too much change to its structure. Hence, a Web site will be created and operated in such a way that it reduces the impact on previously established organisational structures.

The “minimal impact” model is consistent across all the legacy content sites examined in this thesis, but the actual organisational approach to creating a minimal impact is varied. It relates to the size of the organisation. A small organisation will sometimes allocate a single staff member (such as an editor) to handle the transfer of legacy content. The use of a stylised design that can be easily updated through the use of templates minimises the amount of disruption that this task produces on existing work routines. The outsourcing of Web site hosting to an Internet Service Provider will further minimise this impact.

Larger organisations wishing to produce more complex Web sites will respond by forming entirely new divisions that isolate most of the operations of operating the Web site from existing staff and structures. Staff who have not been specifically assigned to the Web site do not usually experience any change in their work patterns or organisational positions.

The minimal impact model does not suggest that this form of isolation of Web teams is absolute. At the Sydney Morning Herald and Illawarra Mercury, personal visits to the premises revealed Web staff working in the same buildings and work spaces as legacy journalists. Interview subjects at these publications spoke of interacting with journalists from the legacy publications, and finding that legacy journalists were generally enthusiastic about the existence of Web sites for their publications. Web staff at the Sydney Morning Herald would even sit in on editorial meetings with legacy journalists. But this form of interaction does nothing to
change the actual operations of the legacy staff. Web teams merely received enthusiastic feedback and gossip from their print colleagues, such as when their stories were reproduced online. In editorial meetings, Web staff normally just listen in to story assignments for legacy journalists, to help them plan their own routines.

Minimal impact effects are mostly observed in the internal organisational structures of news organisations, but they also influence the appearance of Web sites to external observers. The easiest way to minimise impact is to rely primarily on legacy content. The use of template-driven layout systems means that legacy staff can update simple Web sites quickly.

Problems have been documented when the minimal impact model has been upset. At the *Sydney Morning Herald*, an experiment in trying to prompt legacy print journalists to file stories quickly for the Web site was experiencing a few problems, as Carlos Monterio and the rest of the Web team had discovered that these journalists did not fully understand the concept of changing their work routines for the new medium. Similarly, the organisational structure of content on the *news.com.au* Web site had produced concerns among editors from the legacy newspapers it represents, as content was aggregated in a way that transcended the organisational hierarchies of the newspapers.

15.4 News Values

This thesis explored the concept that changes in temporal routines or geographic reach on the Internet could produce changes in news values. Both of these were significant factors in determining newsworthiness that were identified by Galtung and Ruge (1965). These two parameters are also the ones that could potentially experience the most change on the Internet.

It has been shown that there has been no change in newsworthiness on the Internet due to these two specific parameters. Content on the Internet can be updated at any frequency that could be proposed, but sites are normally updated at the same frequency as their non-Internet sources.
Breaking news on sites linked to publications that publish only once a day represent a change in news delivery routines, but again, updated news on these sections incorporates no change in news values from breaking news in a broadcast organisation.

A Web site is also potentially accessible to a global audience. However, sites with legacy ties to specific geographical regions do not seem to modify their content to make it more intelligible to people in other geographical areas.

The principal causative factor in this lack of change of newsworthiness seems to be the dependence on legacy content. If the same content that appears in a non-Internet product is transferred to the Web, then the same news values behind the legacy content are imported onto the Internet.

In some cases, Web production teams generate special content exclusively for the Web site. In these cases, it is impossible to detect any change in news values due to time or geographical factors. Special content is often feature-based, and lacks the link to specific temporal events that is characteristic of hard news. Hence, it could be said that this content is not strictly journalism. In cases where temporal news is reported, Web teams seem to use the same news values as legacy producers.

Examination of Web sites was the principal source of information for these conclusions, but interviews with Web teams revealed that the Galtung/Ruge principles did not influence their selection of content for Web sites.

The changes that did occur were for organisational reasons that had nothing to do with anything predicted by Galtung and Ruge. Problems with the software at the Illawarra Mercury meant that some stories were easier to transfer to the Web site than others, and this sometimes influenced the selection of stories. The Web team of the Sydney Morning Herald has implemented an editorial policy that seems to favour tabloid-style journalism and celebrity gossip. This has nothing to do with space or time.
15.5 Amateur Publishing

The Web is filled with text and other forms of content produced by amateurs, but essentially none of it can be classified as journalism. No amateur was found to be operating a Web site providing a regular and continuous supply of news. The people who do post messages to Usenet newsgroups about newsworthy events do not act as amateur reporters on a regular basis, and some may only do it once. Nevertheless, such incidents could be considered examples of one-off journalism, if one were prepared to extend the definition of journalism.

The most striking and interesting example of one-off amateur journalism, and the only story that was discovered on a Web site, was a person who was experiencing a high level of fear during a hailstorm. It is possible that this report would not have been written if the event had not made such a dramatic impact on the author.

The overall lack of amateur journalism is consistent with the propositions advanced in Chapter 1. News requires effort to produce, and many people will not expend that effort unless there are rewards, such as income. Most people are also not in a position to experience newsworthy events. There is also a perception that news production is an occupation in its own right, a perception that is tied to the industrial model of news production. If one is not employed as a professional journalist, one should not really practice journalism.

Content that resembles amateur journalism is also plagued with misreporting and hoaxes, as the kidney story demonstrates. Editors of Web sites interviewed for this thesis expressed concerns over the quality of amateur journalism, and rationalised their suspicions with anecdotes about strange messages they had received in emails from some readers.

The Internet offers great potential as a delivery system for amateur journalism. It is cheap to use, requires only a moderate level of skills, and potentially allows people to reach a worldwide audience. Although production of amateur journalism is no easier, it is still surprising that the
level of amateur journalism that could be detected is small, even when an extended definition of journalism is used. This extended definition accounts for one-off reporting and commentaries on Usenet newsgroups. If a conventional definition of journalism is applied, it would seem that there is no amateur journalism at all.

15.6 Specialised Web Publishing

This thesis has noted the existence of a certain amount of specialised news publishing on the Web, such as *Crikey* and *Space Daily*. It is interesting to observe that these purely online publications have been the most innovative in their use of the Internet, adopting publication routines that are sometimes irregular, or providing plenty of interactivity with their readers through the publication of emailed letters to the editor. The lack of legacy ties provides more freedom to allow this. The editors do not need to be constrained by the need to adapt legacy content, and the minimal impact model does not apply to these ventures.

15.7 Legal and Economic Factors

It is fair to say that the Internet in Australia is no longer an unregulated and anarchic medium, but the legal constraints on publishing any form of journalism on the Internet are minimal. The regulatory environment that has been applied shows legacy influences of regulations for non-Internet media. Neither the government nor the legacy publishers of Internet-based content have produced specialised bodies to regulate the Internet. Instead, regulation is handled at a government level by the Australian Broadcasting Authority, a body dealing mainly with non-Internet media. The regulatory environment that the Authority has produced is reminiscent of the classification schemes for film and television. It also deals primarily with regulating sex and violence. Similarly, the Australian Press Council, a legacy body in name and objectives, has enacted a policy of regulating Web sites using similar principles to text publications. So far,
neither body seems to have been particularly active in regulating Internet content that could be
classified as journalism.

The greatest influence on the legal environment of the Internet would seem to be existing
legislation that was created before the Internet became a mass medium, and does not
differentiate between specific media. These are laws dealing with defamation.

From an economic perspective, the Internet is attractive as a delivery system. However, the
maintenance of Web sites still requires the allocation of resources. Some Web sites may offer
means of generating revenue through features such as advertising or transactions, but a Web
site that generates no income can still be justified, if it satisfies other perceived objectives such
as building up the prestige of an organisation. At this stage in the evolution of news on the Web
in Australia, it seems that there is insufficient evidence to make a reasonable judgement about
the precise nature of the economic influences on the Web. Web site operators interviewed for
this thesis frequently confessed ignorance on the subject, while others were unwilling to discuss
the matter. The only significant influence of economics that could be documented was the
demise of The Zeitgeist Gazette, which failed to generate a sustainable level of revenue through
its subscription-based revenue model.

Every revenue model proposed by Mings and White in Chapter 2 was documented in practice.
However, it is not clear how many models, or sites, are suffering from unsustainable
economics.

15.8 Multimedia Musical Chairs

Multimedia is relatively uncommon on news Web sites, but the most curious aspect of the use
of multimedia is its relationship to legacy multimedia products. Sites with no legacy ties to
multimedia producers are among the most prolific users of multimedia on the Web. Conversely,
sites with legacy ties to multimedia producers either struggle to include it on their Web sites, or
don’t feature it at all. One factor influencing this appears to be licensing arrangements for the use of multimedia. A company that has rights to use certain multimedia content in its broadcast outlets may not have the right to use this content on a Web site. When it appears on the Web, multimedia is often produced independently by Web teams, and appears nowhere else. This phenomenon is partially tied to the aforementioned problems of licensing, but also relates to the minimal impact model.

15.9 News as Fast Food

The main finding of this thesis was the “Fast Food” model of news consumption on the Internet. Consumers of Web-based news have shunned most of the potential new elements of Web-based news, and elected to read news on the Web for its convenience. In this regard, their indifference to new developments parallels the operations of the Web sites themselves. The interest in breaking news is probably the only significant consumer motivation that corresponds to a specialised advantage of the Web. Again, it is also the only significant advantage of the Web that has been implemented for general news. This could raise suggestions that a “chicken and egg” problem has appeared. If the proposed advantages of the Internet have not generally appeared, how can people take advantage of them? It is proposed that the introduction of more new features would generally fail to inspire people to use them. There has been some innovation on major sites in areas such as archives, multimedia and interactivity. The online media survey revealed that these features were generally unpopular with users.

This advantage of convenience also has a certain degree of parallels to legacy content. Frequently updated news is a feature of radio. News producers and consumers are both used to it. Furthermore, this feature is easily implemented on a Web site, if a site is prepared to pay for a news feed from an organisation such as AAP. Hence, cultural familiarity and ease of production would seem to have caused the success of this specific innovation.
15.10 Agenda Resonance Theory

The perceived imbalance of power between the media and audiences in traditional agenda-setting studies as suggested by Sless (1982) and Burd (1991) has been addressed through the development of agenda resonance theory, which allows both parties to independently generate agendas. The perception of an agenda developing in the public sphere is not necessarily the result of an agenda imposed by the media, but the result of resonance between these two groups on a specific issue.

Agenda resonance theory has informed the design of two research methodologies for this thesis. Agenda resonance theory would seem to be consistent with the results of the study performed on the Ninemsn online poll. This research was highly successful. It was more difficult to detect evidence of agenda resonance in the study made of Usenet, but the unstructured nature of Usenet is presumably a causative factor. People are free to say whatever they like on Usenet, and discussions stray in all manner of directions.

15.11 Experience, Ethics, Locality

The concept of variable influence of news stories, adopted from Zucker, seems reasonable. The three criteria of variable influence generated in this thesis also seem convincing. Data from the Ninemsn study was consistent with this model. Hence, agenda-setting research on the Internet would seem to be useful, and the results of these studies could lead to the development of more new theories relating to agenda-setting.
15.12 Limitations of the Research

The specific limitations of individual research methodologies were documented in Chapter 4. However, it is worthwhile examining some overall issues that limit the scope of this research.

The research has relied on active suggestion, with Web site operators and survey participants stating their reasons for selecting the Web as a delivery system for news. It is possible that some of this data could be deficient, not through dishonesty, but a failure of research subjects to consciously grasp the reasons for their own activities. Some may have simply participated in reading Web news for reasons that were more connected to their overall physical and social interactions, or the recommendation of a specific person, or the appeal of a specific Web site for reasons that are idiosyncratic. Exploring these matters is difficult, as it would involve disciplines such as psychology and anthropology.

The research has also been conducted from a framework that is primarily concerned with the technical specifications of the Internet as a delivery system, classic sociological paradigms of news production and delivery, and the interaction of these two factors to produce a set of expectations of the form of Internet news. The success or failure of Internet news has been presented with regard to this framework. It is possible that the use of other research frameworks incorporating broader sociological issues such as generic gratification issues would produce a different perspective. Has Internet news succeeded in fulfilling other needs that are not measured by the traditional news framework, or even traditional gratification theory?

The thesis has distanced itself from gratification theory by assuming (with some justification) that the Internet is an active medium that requires users to actively log on to a site and browse. It cannot be effectively used as a “background” medium like radio. Hence, it assumed that people reading Internet news have made a decision to consume news, and then sought out the Web as the medium. It would be interesting to explore alternatives to this model. Do people elect to use the Web, and then select news as a secondary choice? Again, this is an issue that
would require input from psychology and possibly other disciplines in order to be addressed properly.

The thesis is also limited by its timing, given the fact that the Web is still a relatively new medium. Usage patterns may change with time as people become more skilled in using the Web, and the novelty value wears off.
Chapter Sixteen

The Future

Attempts to predict the future of any avenue of sociological inquiry have always been difficult. In the case of Internet-based news delivery, predicting events in even the short term is complex. The Internet itself grows and evolves at a rate that is difficult to compare to any other form of technology. Its usage base has grown rapidly, the amount of content it contains is enormous, and companies concerned with Internet-related activity have often demonstrated turbulent behaviour.

This final chapter of the thesis will attempt to document some of the factors that could influence the future of Internet-based news and make some educated guesses about the future of this medium.

16.1 Usage Levels

One of the most significant factors that will influence online news is clearly the future of the Internet’s usage base. It should be reiterated that access to the Internet generally requires a person to first have access to a personal computer. Other forms of access such as WebTV consoles exist, but their adoption rates in Australia have been extremely limited. Hence, an environment with no usage of personal computers can be reliably considered to have no access to the Internet. Internet access levels should, by definition, be smaller than or at the very most, equal to, the level of usage of personal computers.

Reliable statistical evidence of the growth of Internet usage in workplace and educational environments is difficult to obtain, as the Australian Bureau of Statistics seems more concerned with monitoring usage trends in the home, and in the nation as a whole. Growth in usage levels
in both of the aforementioned environments will not increase substantially in the future.

According to one study (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1998) 63% of all businesses in
Australia were using personal computers in June 1998, and 29% of all businesses were
connected to the Internet. Evidence from this survey suggests that growth beyond this figure
will be conservative.

Almost two thirds of businesses that did not use personal computers reported that computers
were not needed or suited to the "nature of the business". 60 percent of businesses with
personal computers but no Internet access at the time of the survey claimed that the Internet
itself was not suited to their needs. The Australian Bureau of Statistics seems to publish such
surveys of corporate IT usage at intervals of roughly four years, and no more recent data than
this had been published at the time of study.

Internet access is essentially guaranteed to most students in accredited tertiary colleges and
universities in Australia, a result of policies implemented by these institutions. Indeed, it is
impossible to study at some institutions without using these facilities. There is really no case to
be made for a vast, untapped pool of tertiary students who would like to read online news at
college, but have no opportunity to do so. Students who study part-time or from remote
locations do not enjoy the same access opportunities at college, but their numbers are likely to
remain relatively constant in the future.

Similarly, the penetration of personal computers into the work environment is essentially
complete, and Internet access is not far behind. The adoption of personal computers into offices
and other workplace environments was an established trend by the mid-1990s. Companies that
have not adopted information technology by now either have no need for it, or will not do so in
the future. Not every work environment offers access to personal computers, but in some cases
where workers are either itinerant or not involved in the processing of information, there is no
motivation for adoption.
Internet access in workplace environments that use personal computers is slowly growing, but not every office worker with access to a personal computer will be given Internet access. Industry trends suggest that companies are instigating usage policies for the Internet in an attempt to restrict access for non-essential purposes. It is difficult to locate statistics on this, but the sociological conditions for a massive jump in workplace Internet access in the future do not exist. As with the revolution in personal computers, this is a revolution that has almost been completed.

Growth of Internet usage in home environments, however, seems poised to increase at a healthy rate in the near future. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics supports this model. A recent report (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000c) supplies the following data for the application of both Personal Computers and Internet accounts in Australian households, as shown in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABS Survey Month</th>
<th>PC ownership (%)</th>
<th>Internet application (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 1998</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1999</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2000</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 3 shows, over the course of the three sampling months, the number of homes with connectivity to the Internet increased substantially.

16.2 Literacy Levels

Even in a hypothetical future environment, where access to the Internet is supplied free of charge, on information appliances that could be easier to use and more widespread than personal computers, many people will still have no interest in using the Internet, or reading online news. Some people will profess no interest in the technology or the information it
supplies. However, there is a sociological factor that is likely to have a major influence on
growth of the Internet in the near future. Surprisingly, neither the academic nor the popular
literature I reviewed has addressed this.

Literacy levels in the general community are likely to impede the future growth rate of the
Internet and limit its long-term adoption level. ABS data supports this conclusion.

An ABS study (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997) revealed the results of a survey of literacy
skills among Australians between 15 and 74. 9302 individuals were tested on a variety of print
literacy tasks, such as understanding the information on a medicine label, using a bus timetable,
and filling in forms. The survey also addressed prose literacy, which covers more sophisticated
forms of text.

Literacy levels were classified according to a Likert scale. Level 1 respondents had very poor
literacy skills and could be expected to have considerable difficulties in accomplishing normal
literacy tasks. Level 2 respondents had poor literacy levels and would experience some
difficulties with normal tasks. Level 3 respondents were able to cope with normal literacy
demands, but not always at high level of proficiency. Level 4 respondents had a higher level of
proficiency, while Level 5 respondents had a very high level of literacy.

Using data related to the comprehension of prose text similar to newspaper content, the survey
revealed that approximately 19.7% of respondents had Level 1 literacy, while approximately
27.5% had Level 2 literacy. 35.3% of respondents were at Level 3, while 15.5% of respondents
were classified as Level 4. Only 2% of all respondents were literate at Level 5.

According to this data approximately 47% of the Australian public have literacy skills that
would be classified as poor or very poor for the comprehension of continuous text.

Individuals with very poor literacy levels will have difficulty in using personal computers,
owing to the need to read, comprehend and react to text on a screen and keyboard. The use of
the technology, in this case, is more complex than the use of the news product, but people with very poor literacy skills would have problems with both.

Under such circumstances, these individuals will be unwilling to use Internet-delivered news products. News consumption is a voluntary process, and even if a person with poor literacy skills can understand a print-based news report if forced to, such a person is unlikely to do so if there is no pressing need. It is reasonable to propose that the complexities that online news would pose to such individuals will prompt them to avoid it.

No subsequent studies have been performed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to supplement this 1997 study.

In the long-term, however, it would seem likely that literacy skills will improve substantially. The study found that older people generally have poorer skills than younger people. Roughly three quarters of those aged 65 to 74 have Level 1 or 2 skills. This suggests that younger generations will, hopefully, enjoy higher literacy standards than the survey averages. As these age cohorts grow older, overall community literacy levels will improve, although there is no way of proposing precise numbers.

The short-term future is less sanguine. A substantial proportion of the Australian population would be unable or unwilling to use online news or personal computers. It is impossible to precisely compare household penetration of the Internet and personal computers to the literacy levels of the individuals in a household, as there could be a vast spectrum of ages and abilities within a single household. However, the data suggests an overall trend that will limit the growth of personal computer and Internet usage.

In turn, the availability of Internet access in a household, and the ability to use it, does not imply that a user will be interested in online news. This will further reduce the growth in the online news audience. Economic models for online news sites that rely on substantial increases in online audience levels could be seriously affected by these predictions.
16.3 User Demographics

Revenue models of all forms, whether they are advertiser-based, subscription-based or commerce-based, ultimately depend on the spending power of the audience. As a broad trend, it is true that the more people there are reading online news, the more potential revenue there will be. However, it is also appropriate to consider that as the Internet user base grows, much of its new user base will come from individuals with lower income levels than the current user base.

An ABS study in 2000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000c) observes that adults with incomes of $40,000 or more were far more likely to be Internet users than those adults with incomes under $40,000 (66% compared to 37%). A general relationship between high incomes and the early adoption of new consumer products and technologies is a well-understood phenomenon of marketing. As the Internet leaves its “early adoption” phase, the average spending power of its user base is likely to decrease. This, in turn, will make general news sites less attractive for advertising targeted at elite audiences. These factors will certainly influence future revenue patterns.

16.4 Reduction of Internet Expenditure

As technology improves and management practices for handling the Internet are established, it is likely that many Web sites will experience serious reductions in the expenditure they can tap from their parent organisations. If expenditures on some sites are reduced substantially, it is possible that existing revenue models will be enough to sustain them financially.

Although Web sites are usually maintained by very small work teams, it is possible that the average number of people working on a Web site within an organisation will be reduced even further. Staff reductions are a traditional management response to the need to reduce expenditure in any organisation, and these practices will probably be replicated.
The availability of improved software for transferring "legacy content" onto a Web site and maintaining its normal operation will enable small or single-person teams to work efficiently. However, this reduction in expenditure will probably quell much of the potential innovation that could be demonstrated with the capabilities of the Web.

16.5 Elimination of Some Sites, Creation of Others

As this thesis has documented, the adoption of Web publishing by some news publications seems to be something of a haphazard process. Some have gone online without really understanding why they are doing so. Other publications have stayed offline. In due course, many of the nation's smaller newspapers that do not publish on the Internet may elect to do so. Others that deal with small markets may find that online publishing offers no real advantages or benefits, and is economically unsustainable. As with the current adoption patterns of the Internet, there is no effective means of predicting how these changes will take place.

16.6 Adoption of Broadband Technology and Multimedia

Although subscription rates to broadband Internet connections are growing, the average home Internet connection is still narrowband. This type of connection is not generally suitable for multimedia applications such as audio and video. In time, technology and pricing regimes will promote the wider adoption of broadband connectivity to the Internet in all locations. This will prompt some Web sites to add more multimedia content to their sites, and prompt others that currently feature no such content to include it.

The inclusion of more multimedia content on Web sites will also be prompted by better technologies for producing it. Systems for recording, editing and publishing digital audio and
video are increasing in their capabilities and decreasing in their cost, a pattern that is typical of any new technology.

Some sites will simply refuse to add non-legacy content for policy reasons, depending on the objectives of the site. However, some sites that won't add multimedia content on a regular basis could elect to produce a small pool of multimedia files that serve as permanent fixtures on the site.

Regional newspapers that could find themselves doubling as general information portals about a region could produce video footage of local attractions, or welcoming messages from the editor. This content would be produced once, then left on the site without additions.

Improvements in broadband connectivity and production technology will also lead to improvements in the quality of this multimedia content. At the present, online audio and video usually compares poorly to the delivery quality of radio or television. This gap will probably close. The sheer improvement in quality will be another factor that will prompt a greater adoption of multimedia content.

16.7 Increases in One-Off Multimedia Publishing

The aforementioned improvements in technology for both the collection and publication of multimedia content will probably lead to an increase in personal instances of the one-off reporting of news events. Individuals with personal video cameras who attend newsworthy events or accidentally find themselves at one will record footage and transfer it to their home pages. Alternatively, they may also record events using still-image digital cameras, which are becoming commonplace. The result will be that the Web becomes a patchwork of records of events in various times and places. Other individuals, in turn, will probably take on the task of cataloguing this content into indexes of newsworthy events, similar to the way that existing indexes of Web pages are structured.
I believe that this is more likely to grow than personal text-based journalism, as the effort required is less (assuming a person’s technical skills are adequate), and cultural acceptance of amateur video in personal presentations and the mainstream media is already established. Digital still photography would be even easier to integrate. The acquisition and publication of this content could be as easy as simply tuning on a camera, then activating a few download functions. For a technically competent person, this could be easier than structuring a written report.

A cultural perception could also exist that while video is accepted as an amateur medium, print is still perceived as an elite product of professional journalists by some people. The lack of amateur print journalism on the Web at the present supports this conclusion.

The growth in amateur multimedia publishing will not be without its problems. Multimedia content requires large amounts of server space to store. Many free hosting services will probably not accept it, and the modest amounts of server space that some Internet Service Providers offer to their subscribers for simple home pages will not be sufficient to hold it.

A site hosting a large multimedia file of great interest to the general public, such as footage of a newsworthy event, could easily find itself subjected to a barrage of download requests. This could lead to the server hosting the content crashing, and all manner of problems for the individual who published it. An example of this phenomenon was created by George Goble, an American computer systems engineer who recorded multimedia footage of pouring liquid oxygen onto a barbecue in 1994. Goble placed an MPEG-format video of this event on his personal home page on a server at Purdue University, his place of work (Goble 2000), where it enjoyed modest and sustainable levels of attention for several months. Eventually, information on Goble’s dangerous experiment in high-temperature cooking was published in American newspapers by the syndicated columnist Dave Barry on June 26, 1995 (Goble 2000). Instantly, attempts to access Goble’s home page and his barbecue video increased to unsustainable levels,
causing technical problems with the University's computers and incapacitating the campus Internet link for a period of roughly one week (Goble 2000).

One way of avoiding similar scenarios in the future could be to submit amateur-collected multimedia content to a large news organisation with the infrastructure to deal with a barrage of requests. The model would not be unlike existing scenarios where amateur video footage is occasionally sourced by television networks. Presumably, revenue and copyright issues would be negotiated along similar channels. Ironically, this would be a most unrevolutionary process, as the ability of people to self-publish multimedia content would be reduced by hardware limitations.

16.8 Conclusion

The technological, economic and social factors that are likely to influence the near-term future of Internet-based news delivery have been outlined. If their influence follows the predictions of this chapter, then the future of the Internet as a delivery system for news will not be substantially better than its current status. It could actually be worse. There could be some innovation in the supply of more multimedia content, both from professional and amateur sources, but this will not substantially change either the format of news on the Internet, or its quality. It is possible that much of the professionally produced content that is currently on the Web will disappear entirely if its creators are unwilling to sustain the costs involved. Consequently, the overall quantity of professionally produced news and journalism on the Web could actually decrease. Amateur news reporting is unlikely to be any more prominent in the future than it is at the time of research.

It is likely that content from Australia's major sources of legacy news will continue to appear on the Internet, although some of these organisations could shrink their specialised Web production teams in order to save costs. This could lead to a serious reduction in the already
modest levels of content that is specially prepared for the Web. Breaking news, however, will probably continue to appear, as it can be sourced from reliable suppliers, and audiences seem to enjoy it.

This thesis has documented that the predicted advantages of the Internet as a delivery system for journalism have either failed to appear or have appeared at only modest levels. On the basis of the concepts provided in this chapter, it is probable that any application that has not appeared at the time of study will not appear in the future. News and journalism will still exist on the Web, but there will be few, if any, advantages over the material that appears in non-Internet media.

16.9 Future Areas for Research

The subject of news delivery on the Internet is broad, leaving plenty of scope for future study. The following issues are proposed as areas for future research, as they build on the research conducted for this thesis.

16.9.1 Motivational Patterns in Other Areas

The motivations for producing and consuming online news, together with the variable influence of experience, ethics and locality, have only been examined in Australia in this thesis. It would be useful to examine the relevance of these theories and conclusions in other nations. It would be interesting to see if different usage patterns, motivations and concepts of agenda resonance appear in nations with different social structures, different media systems and different usage patterns of the Internet. These studies could address the effects of the cost of access to the Internet and the style of access, including the deployment of the Internet on portable wireless devices, which has not had a major influence on Internet usage in Australia at the time of study.

This thesis has identified the convenience of access as a major influence on the use of the Internet for reading news, and it would be interesting to see if motivations and usage patterns for online news change as the convenience factor is increased or diminished.
16.9.2 More Studies in Australia

Research into the Internet in Australia is highly active within the academic community, but the novelty of the Internet as a mass medium, and its continuing evolution, suggests that research should continue. It would be appropriate to examine the changes in content and usage patterns as usage patterns stabilise. It would also be interesting to see further investigations of the theories explored in this thesis.

16.9.3 Evolution of Economic Strategies

This thesis has observed that the influence of economic factors on news delivery on the Internet is an unresolved issue at the time of study. It is expected that economic factors will have a stronger influence on news delivery on the Internet in the near future, as revenue pressures affect the operations of Web sites. These issues hold important implications for not only news on the Internet, but almost any form of content.

16.9.4 Internal Dynamics of Web Teams

This thesis provided insight into the internal operations of Web teams through interviews with representatives of Web teams. However, this research did not involve intensive observations of internal dynamics. Researchers such as Tuchman (1978) have produced interesting research by immersing themselves in newsrooms, making passive observations of the day-to-day activities of personnel. It would be interesting to replicate this methodology for a Web team.

16.9.5 Impact of Broadband Technology

At the time of study, broadband connectivity, and news-related content suitable for broadband connections, are relatively uncommon. As broadband technology achieves a greater penetration with the general public, it will be interesting to see if it influences the style of presentation of news on the Internet, or usage patterns.
References

Note on style: In some cases, a single source or author has produced more than one reference in the same year. In these cases, references are differentiated with alphabetical designations after their year of publication, such as 2000 (a) when quoted in the text. The alphabetical designation is governed by the order in which these references are first quoted in the thesis.


Australian Broadcasting Authority 1996, *Investigation into the Content of Online Services*, Australian Broadcasting Authority


Bagdikian, Ben 1971, *The Information Machines*, Harper/Colophon


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Brooks, Brian 1996, *Journalism in the Information Age*, Allyn and Bacon


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Mathews, Iola 1991, How to Use the Media in Australia, Penguin


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Rheingold, Howard 1994, *The Virtual Community*, Secker & Warburg


Severin, Werner, and Tankard, James 1997, *Communications Theories*, Longman

Shenk, David 1997, *Data Smog*, Abacus


Siebert, Fred (ed) 1963, *Four Theories of the Press*, University of Illinois Press


Smith, Anthony 1993, *Books to Bytes*, British Film Institute


Supreme Court of Western Australia 1993, Rindos v Hardwick, no. 1994, delivered March 31 1993.


Weaver, David 1983, *Videotex Journalism*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates


**Web Sites**

Note: Content on the Internet is highly dynamic. The addresses of Web sites listed, together with descriptions of their contents provided in this thesis, were correct at the time of study.

ABC Online  
Ninemsn  
The Sydney Morning Herald  
The Age Online  
News.com.au  
Yahoo Australia  
The Canberra Times  
The Newcastle Herald  
The Illawarra Mercury  
The Wollongong Advertiser  
Network Ten  
The Warrnambool Standard  
The Examiner  
Rural Press Limited: Localnews  
McPherson Group Web Site  
Independent News Group  
The South East News Group  
The West Online/West Australian  
Post Newspapers  
Alice Springs News  
Border Mail  
Bundeena Village Noise  
Dunoon and District Gazette  
The Murray Pioneer  
The Riverine Grazier  
Green Left Weekly  
Bendigo Advertiser  
Kiama Independent  
Lake Times  
Margaret River Online  
The Advocate  
Border Watch Online  
The Bunyip  
Byron Bay Echo  
Lower Clarence Review  
The Plains Producer  
The Queensland Times  

www.abc.net.au  
www.ninemsn.com.au  
www.smh.com.au  
www.theage.com.au  
www.news.com.au  
www.yahoo.com.au  
www.canberratimes.com.au  
www.nnp.com.au  
www.illnews.com.au  
www.illnews.com.au  
www.ten.com.au  
www.standard.net.au  
www.examiner.com.au  
www.localnews.com.au  
news.mcmedia.com.au  
www.inews.net.au  
www.senews.com.au  
www.thewest.com.au  
www.postnewspapers.com.au  
www.bordermail.com.au  
www.villagenoise.org.au  
main.nrg.com.au/~village/dg  
www.murray-pioneer.com.au  
www.greenleft.org.au  
www.bendigoaddy.com.au  
www.margaret-river-online.com.au  
www.theadvocate.com.au  
www.adelaide.net.au/~tbwprod  
www.bunyippress.com.au  
www.echo.net.au  
www.rbe.net.au/~producer  
www.qt.com.au
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website/Domain</th>
<th>URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shoalhaven Independent</td>
<td><a href="http://www.shoalhaven-independent.com.au">www.shoalhaven-independent.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Weekly Times</td>
<td><a href="http://www.weeklytimes.com.au">www.weeklytimes.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitsunday Times</td>
<td><a href="http://www.whitsundaytimes.com.au">www.whitsundaytimes.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Voice</td>
<td><a href="http://www.villagevoice.com.au">www.villagevoice.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toowoomba Chronicle</td>
<td>thechronicle.toowoomba.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrandyte Diary</td>
<td>home.vicnet.toowoomba.com/~warrandy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Echo</td>
<td><a href="http://www.powerup.com.au/~hotmetal">www.powerup.com.au/~hotmetal</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Herald</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nvo.com/westernherald">www.nvo.com/westernherald</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPCT Online</td>
<td>kadina.yp-connect.net/~ypct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mercury, Mackay</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dailymercury.com.au">www.dailymercury.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2GB.com</td>
<td><a href="http://www.2gb.com">www.2gb.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2UE.com</td>
<td><a href="http://www.2ue.com">www.2ue.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Zeitgeist Gazette</td>
<td>host.zeitgaz.com.au</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crikey</td>
<td><a href="http://www.crikey.com.au">www.crikey.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shareowner</td>
<td><a href="http://www.shareowner.com.au">www.shareowner.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space Daily</td>
<td><a href="http://www.spacedaily.com">www.spacedaily.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slashdot.org</td>
<td><a href="http://www.slashdot.org">www.slashdot.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cnn.com">www.cnn.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk">www.bbc.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAP Australia</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aap.com.au">www.aap.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuters</td>
<td><a href="http://www.reuters.com">www.reuters.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7am</td>
<td><a href="http://www.7am.com">www.7am.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td><a href="http://www.f2.com.au">www.f2.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Goble Home Page</td>
<td>ghg.ecn.purdue.edu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfax F2 network</td>
<td><a href="http://www.f2.com.au">www.f2.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
<td><a href="http://www.abs.gov.au">www.abs.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 100.com.au</td>
<td><a href="http://www.top100.com.au">www.top100.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Authority</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aba.gov.au">www.aba.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Frontiers Australia</td>
<td><a href="http://www.efa.org.au">www.efa.org.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Press Council</td>
<td><a href="http://www.presscouncil.org.au">www.presscouncil.org.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geocities</td>
<td><a href="http://www.geocities.com">www.geocities.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSACI Ratings System</td>
<td><a href="http://www.rsaci.org">www.rsaci.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drudge Report</td>
<td><a href="http://www.drudgereport.com">www.drudgereport.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsoft Network</td>
<td><a href="http://www.msn.com">www.msn.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deja.com</td>
<td><a href="http://www.deja.com">www.deja.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Newsgroups

Note: Newsgroup traffic is regularly and frequently refreshed. Furthermore, content on newsgroups varies with different access points. The following newsgroups were used in researching this thesis, and content was accessed via the deja.com Web site.

- Aus.general
- Aus.politics
- Aus.rail
Interviews

Tony Vermeer, AAP Information Services    23 June 2000
Robert Johnson, Editor, ABC Online       27 June 2000
Erwin Chandla, Editor, Alice Springs News 6 March 2000
Mick Ticehurst, Editor, Blue Mountains Gazette 4 May 2000
David Lovejoy, Editor, Byron Shire Echo  6 March 2000
Stephen Mayne, Editor, Crikey            23 May 2000
Julian Burgess, Editor, The Examiner     18 May 2000
Terry Townsend, Webmaster, Green Left Weekly 16 June 2000
Barry Wilson: Kiama Independent, Lake Times 22 June 2000
Melissa Lutton, Editor, Lower Clarence Review 19 May 2000
Noel Sharrock, Webmaster, Macpherson Media 17 April 2000
Simon Mansfield, Editor, Space Daily      9 March 2000
Padma Iyer, Online News Producer, Illawarra Mercury 16 August 2000
Nic Burrows, Manager, NetX Advertising Agency 9 August 2000
Jane O'Connell, News Director, Ninemsn    14 August 2000
Brian Hurst, Editor, Redland Times and Bayside Bulletin 24 May 2000
Paul Morgan, Manager, Reuters             29 June 2000
Carlos Monterio, Deputy Night Editor, Sydney Morning Herald site 14 August 2000
Rick Ferguson, Internet Development Officer, The Advocate 31 March 2000
Angela Cole, Webmaster, Network Ten       19 June 2000
Sandy Burgoyne, Internet Editor, Warrandyte Diary 15 March 2000
Ulrike Eichmeyer, Office Manager, Weekly Times 18 May 2000
Anna Featherstone, Web Manager, Yahoo Australia 6 June 2000
Richard Walsh, Editor, Zeitgeist Gazette  21 March 2000
Appendix A

Web Site Overview

The following tables present raw data from Methodology 1. This data was presented in a processed form in chapters throughout this thesis, beginning with Chapter 5. All data was correct at the time of study. It should be noted that the Web is a highly dynamic medium, and the contents and nature of specific Web sites could have changed since the time of study.

Due to page layout limitations, it is necessary to present this data in several tables, each of which contains only a limited proportion of the variables relating to a selection of sites. The entire data set is reproduced over the course of several tables.

Table 4: Web Site Overview Data 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Circulation</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Legacy Tie</th>
<th>Design Score</th>
<th>Stories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Photos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>L. Cong.</td>
<td>TV, Rad</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Cont.</td>
<td>Many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninemsn</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>L. Cong.</td>
<td>TV</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Cont.</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMH</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>L. Cong.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Cont.</td>
<td>Many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Age</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>L. Cong.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Cont.</td>
<td>Many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahoo</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C'berra Times</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>M. Cong.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N'castle Herald</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>L. Cong.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'warra Merc.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>L. Cong.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W'gong Adver.</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>L. Cong.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net. Ten</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>M. Cong.</td>
<td>TV</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examiner</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>M. Cong.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W'bool Stand.</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>L. Cong.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Press</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>M. Cong.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: In the Ownership column, L. Cong means Large Conglomerate, M. Cong means Medium Conglomerate and S. Cong means Small Conglomerate. Ind means Independently owned. In the Frequency column, Cont. means continuous, while Regular means the site is updated more often than once per day. In the Legacy Tie column, Rad means Radio.
Table 5: Web Site Overview Data 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Circulation</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Legacy</th>
<th>Design Score</th>
<th>Stories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Photos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McPherson</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>M. Cong.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ING</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>M. Cong.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun Coast</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>M. Cong.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Aust.</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>M. Cong.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE News</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>S. Cong.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post News.</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Ind.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Spr.</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Ind.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border Mail</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Ind.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Many</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Web Site Overview Data 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Archives</th>
<th>Multimedia</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Chat</th>
<th>Special Content</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>V,A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninemsn</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>V,A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ad,Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMH</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>V,A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ad,Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Age</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>V,A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ad,Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News.co.m.au</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>V,A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ad,Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahoo</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Bundled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C'berra Times</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N'castle Herald</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'warra Merc.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W'gong Adver.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net. Ten Examiner</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W'bool Stand.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Press</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Bundled</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: In the Multimedia column, V means Video, and A means Audio. In the Revenue Column, Ad means advertising and Subs means subscriptions.
### Table 7: Web Site Overview Data 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
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<th>Chat</th>
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<td>Print</td>
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<td>Riverine Gra.</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Ind.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
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<td>Green Left</td>
<td>Small</td>
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<td>Print</td>
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<td>Bunyip</td>
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<td>Ind.</td>
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<th>Frequency</th>
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<td>Print</td>
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End of Appendix A
Appendix B

Papers Versus Internet Study

This appendix documents the raw data from a precise study of the adaptation of "legacy" content from print newspapers for the Internet. The goal was to determine if changes of any form had been made in the adaptation of this content. Conclusions reached from this study were presented in Chapter 6. This appendix merely presents the data used to reach these conclusions.

Sydney Morning Herald, Friday May 26, 2000

Web story "China Joins Global Economy" discovered in print version without any modifications.
Web story "Crime records Web site: entrepreneur is defiant" discovered in print version with a different headline. This was "Net site owner defiant over listing crimes". A single, short paragraph that appeared in the print version was not reproduced in the Web story. The paragraph was somewhat tautologous. (p9)
Web story "Health cover change worry for well-off" discovered in print version with a different headline. This was "Health funds forced on the well-off". No change was made to the text of the story (p10).
Web story "If this brings home the bacon, Taiwan may get the sizzle" discovered in print version without any modifications.
Web story "It's a poor business serving up 49c meals" discovered in print version with a different headline. This was "It's a thriving industry, serving up 49c meals". No change was made to the text of the story (p2).
Web story "It's stranger than faction" discovered in print version with same headline. However, editorial changes had been made. The second paragraph of the Web version beginning "Barry Jones is a mild-mannered man" appeared as "Barry Jones is an idiosyncratic man" in the print version. Text in parentheses at the end of the sixth paragraph "(Yesterday, Beazley's spokesman was more circumspect.)", was missing from the Web version. Extra text, also in parentheses was added to the end of the third last paragraph of the Web version (Della Bosca critics counter this by saying he could be put into the "kitchen Cabinet" of the party's national campaign committee, of which he is a member.) (p21)
Web story "Wheel of fortune spins furiously, if erratically", discovered in print version without any modifications. (p2).

Sydney Morning Herald, Monday 29th May 2000

Web story "Hostage-takers demand $840,000" discovered in print version without any modifications. (p11).
Web story "Independence meeting to defy Jakarta's warnings" discovered in print version without any modifications. (p11).
Web story "Poll likely after MP arrested" discovered in print version without any modifications. (p3).
Web story "Prospering farms belie city-bush divide" discovered in print version with a different headline. This was "Prospering farms cross city-bush divide". No change was made to the text of the story (p3).
Sydney Morning Herald, Tuesday 30th May 2000

Web story "Army Takes Control" discovered in print version with same headline. However, editorial changes had been made. The third paragraph of the Web story read: "Unconfirmed local radio reports last night said that the President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, had earlier resigned. He and his family were also said to have been placed on a submarine in Suva Harbour." The print version read: "Reports that the President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, had resigned after ceding power to the military could not be confirmed."

The final paragraph of the print version referred to the "crucial cane-crushing season". This had been corrected to the "crucial cane-crushing season" on the Web.

Web story "Big business pays top dollar to support Libs" discovered in print version with no changes. (p2).

Web story "Hospital workers strike over knife attack on guards" discovered in print version with no changes. (p7).

Web story "Roads turn deadly as the Big Freeze sets in" discovered in print version with the same headline. However, editorial changes had been made. The fourth paragraph of the Web story read: "Snow dumps have also been forecast." The print version read: "Big dumps are forecast."

Afterwards, a weather forecast that had been included in the print version was deleted from the Web version. The Web version also contained two additional paragraphs at the end, quoting a Department of Community Service worker. (p1).

Sydney Morning Herald, Wednesday 31st May 2000

Web story "Timber mill is still working in a winter wonderland" discovered in print version with no changes (p3).

Web story "Fare go at last in City Rail free-for-all" discovered in print version with a different headline. This was "City Rail's free tickets offer runs off the track." In paragraph two, the Web version read: "...the problem, created so that weekly..." appeared as "...problem, which had been created so that weekly..." in the print version. In the same sentence, "...and buy tickets..." on the Web appeared as "...buying tickets..." in the print version. The Web version also contained an additional commentary from a City Rail spokesman at the end.

Web story "Haven may be given to those under threat" discovered in print version with a different headline. This was "Ruddock flags safe haven for refugees". No change was made to the text of the story (p13).

Web story "I want Speight's men forgiven" discovered in print version with no changes (p12).

Web story "Sleepless in Suva proves a big hit on the Internet" discovered in print version with no changes (p12).

Web story "One-way traffic as locals flee and tourists go home" discovered in print version with no changes (p13).

Web story "The great beer smear: Costello helps MPs" discovered in print version with same headline. However, an editorial change had been made. The print version's sixth paragraph began as: "Coalition backbenchers..." This had been shortened to "Backbenchers..." on the Web. (p1).

Web story "Taiwan woos Canberra with a $20bn carrot" discovered in print version with no changes (p1).

Web story "Australians 'provoking violence'" discovered in print version with a different headline. This was "Australians blamed for violence". No change was made to the text of the story (p11).

Sydney Morning Herald, Wednesday 20th December 2000

Web story "Australia denies UN its secret files of Timor terror" discovered in print version with no changes.
The Australian, Friday 26th May 2000

Web story "Crime website proving a trial for attorneys-general" discovered in print version with a different headline. This was "Crime site a trial for law officers". No change was made to the text of the story (p7).
Web story "Downer to get tough in retaliation" discovered in print version with same headline. However, an editorial change had been made. The end of the first paragraph read "...seven-day long civil coup" on the Web and "week-long civil coup" in print. (p4).

The Australian, Friday 26th May 2000

Web story "Sorry: the people's apology" discovered in print version with no changes. (p1).
Web story "May freeze snaps us into winter" discovered in print version with no changes. (p5).
Web story "Brewers sing bush with no pub" discovered in print version with no changes. (p2).
Web story "Showmen bribed knight, court told" discovered in print version with no changes. (p3).
Web story "Two die as freeze sweeps south-west" discovered in print version with no changes. (p5).

The Australian, Wednesday 20th December 2000

Web story "Deportation case judged 'curious'" discovered in print version with no changes.
Web story "Volcano awakens" discovered in print version with no changes.

The Daily Telegraph, Monday 29th May 2000

Web story "United steps bridge race divide" discovered in print version with no changes. (p4).
Web story "Blowhole victim serious" discovered in print version with no changes. (p7)
Web story "Drivers miss out on $36m fuel fund" discovered in print version with no changes. (p2).

The Daily Telegraph, Tuesday 30th May 2000

Web story "Carl Scully’s ticket to ride" discovered in print version with a different headline. This was "Save $90 on free rail trip". No change was made to the text of the story (p5).
Web story "Impossibly beautiful: Cruise’s new movie shows city’s charms to the world" discovered in print version with no changes. (p7)

The Daily Telegraph, Wednesday 30th December 2000

Web story "Girls on top in most HSC subjects" discovered in print version with a different headline. This was "HSC 2000: The Results". An editorial change had been made. The end of the first paragraph read "... Mr Aquilina said" on the Web, and "...he said" in print.
Web story "A step closer to killer" discovered in print version with no changes.
Web story "Call for inquiry into migrant centres" discovered in print version with no changes.

End of Appendix B
Appendix C

Interview Transcripts

The following transcripts are edited versions of material obtained in face-to-face interviews and email exchanges. Material from these interviews has been quoted throughout the main text of this thesis. This appendix presents additional material. In every case, transcripts have been modified slightly for reasons of clarity and the correction of syntax and grammar.

The methodology employed to conduct these interviews was fairly standard. Requests for interviews were made to every Australian news-based Web site documented in this thesis, and the American site slashdot.org. An advertising agency was also contacted and interviewed. When sites did not reply to requests, follow-up inquiries were made several weeks later. In some cases, particularly those where the headquarters of the site was geographically remote from Sydney, questions were emailed to the interview subjects. These questions were modified from a standard template documented in Methodology 3. In some cases, it was appropriate to add special questions to deal with the characteristics of specific sites. Responses were then received by email. In cases where the headquarters of the site was close to Sydney, in-person interviews were conducted. These were recorded on a small tape recorder and transcribed. The basic question template remained the same. In two cases, in-person interviews were conducted with sites based in geographically distant areas when staff from these sites visited Sydney. In-person interviews were usually conducted on the premises of the Web site’s operators, but in some cases, the interview was conducted in a café or restaurant to avoid interference by the work environment (noise and disruptions from other staff). Only the author of the thesis, and the interview subject, were participants in each interview. No group discussions were held. A typical in-person interview lasted 40 minutes.

Tony Vermeer, AAP Information Services

Q: Describe AAP Information Services.

A: AAP is a broad-based information supplier that started as a cooperative in 1935 and developed its own means of collecting information. It’s a wholesaler. It supplies news and information and other data services such as share prices.

Q: How many Web sites do you feed?

A: This is a new part of the business. We supply around 20 to 30 clients with news stories or data in some form. Clients include ninemsn, Fairfax and news.com.au.

ABC Online is a client to a lesser extent. Their charter prohibits them from taking domestic news from a domestic news agency. But they are happy to take international news. We produce an international news service with lots of resources, including our own people overseas.

Q: What are the conditions of using an AAP feed?
A: We supply our news as a product. There are no rules for the use of stories. Each person controls their own Web site. If a story carries AAP attribution, it should not be modified. People can change stories, but then it becomes theirs.

Q: How often is the material updated?

A: Different contracts require different update times. The more you pay, the more you get, and it's updated more often. I won't discuss conditions for individual sites. The larger the site, probably the more they get.

Q: So what does a high-end user get?

A: There's nothing on a real-time basis. Most of our clients want the information in bulletin form. They don't want a continuous feed of single stories. They want the stories arranged. To do that, you must build a bulletin, which takes time. You rearrange and re-write the stories. They come out roughly every 90 minutes to an hour. This is the most that most people want with their news.

The bulletins are divided into areas of special interest, like international news and sports.

Q: Does this division by area govern the way news sections are presented on the Web sites?

A: No, I think it's a natural approach. It may well mirror the old media. This format seems to be useful.

Q: Does information for the Web sites come out in a different form?

A: Not for general news. The exception is the sports ticker service, which is continuous. But the same principles of journalism appear everywhere else.

We do HTML or XML for some sites. The content is pretty much the same. Agencies are well set up to produce news for the Internet, because they generate content continuously.

Major Web sites take it by FTP. The major ones want it in XML. We have programs to do this, and deliver it in a way that is easiest for them to use.

Q: Is piracy of content a problem?

A: It happens. We have two lawyers in house who look at this. We write nasty letters to people and seek legal redress when we have to.

Q: How does AAP generate content?

A: We buy international news sources, combine them with our own, and produce a local news feed. We have 160 full-time journalists in Australia, 3 overseas bureaus, and stringers overseas.

Q: Are there special instructions for preparing Web stories?

A: No. We just instil the idea that stories have to be useable instantly. Reporters don’t wait until the last minute to file. They update constantly.
Q: You could go direct to consumers on the Web. Is this prevented by your media company shareholders?

A: No, we are authorised to make money independently, but we take the view that as a wholesaler, we should not also be a retailer. We would not be able to do both jobs well, and there would be a conflict of interest.

Q: In terms of updated news, all major Web sites in Australia seem to use AAP. What does this say about news diversity?

A: You need to take the Web and compare it to the old media. We provide the same role for both. It’s a basic news service that people can use on its own, or supplement it with other material. The large sites also bring other material that’s exclusive to them. That’s how they distinguish themselves.

Q: When a news story breaks, some major Web sites update quickly, but some don’t. There’s no pattern to how this happens. Do you have any comments on the way the feed is used?

A: It’s hard to guarantee that a given site will be the most instantaneous. Some sites combine our product with their own material, and that takes time. I would hesitate to tell customers how to use our material.

Q: Most Web stores are text, but you supply all sorts of formats. Why do sites concentrate on text?

A: It’s easier on bandwidth, but it’s also easier for the reader to digest. You can convey more information with text, in terms of information. You can re-read it and look at it. There is an idea that people like their news told to them and like pictures, though. The regular feeds don’t contain video and photos as much as updated text. Video is not updated as often as text by AAP.

Q: Is there anything about the overall state of online news that surprises you?

A: I thought that people would start to distinguish quality news on the Web, and want well-written news. I think people are still getting used to the technology. People are still too fixated with the possibilities of the Web instead of the value of the content.

We produce wonderful analysis pieces and fact boxes, but they don’t get play on the Web. Our clients don’t want them. They want updated news. It supports (Morris Jones’s model) of news as fast food.

Q: When does AAP run its update services?

A: News supply and updates appear 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Some sites don’t update their content throughout the day, but this has nothing to do with AAP.

Robert Johnson, Editor, ABC Online

Q: Describe the composition of the online team, and the work routine for running the site.
A: The ABC's online newsroom employs 18 journalists. With the exception of an administrative assistant and a technical co-ordinator, we deliberately chose to recruit an all-journalist team. My feeling at the time we began the online operation was that we wanted an editorial "underpinning" of everything we did. The reality is that some of the journalists in Online have now moved on to a position where the bulk of their work is related to Web development. Nevertheless, they approach these tasks with an editorial awareness which is what we wanted to achieve. Because there is a high level of multi skilling in Online News, we did not want to create artificial demarcation between what might be regarded as the journalism production streams and the Web development streams. The technical co-ordinator employed by Online News has specific responsibility for developing our video production options which will be a major focus for us over the next 12 months. However, even he was recruited from the mainstream news television operation.

The newsroom operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We operate as a production house, repurposing material gathered by reporters in ABC radio and television news. In other words, there is virtually no primary newsgathering undertaken by Online News.

We operate a production hub which ensures that all content elements on the page are updated constantly across the day. Obviously the frequency of updates declines during the overnight shift when there is very little domestic newsgathering going on in radio and television. Like most newsrooms we have morning and afternoon editorial conferences to decide on the news agenda and site performance. We have weekly meetings of the Web development team to discuss project management and site maintenance issues.

Q: How exactly do you integrate with the rest of the ABC world in terms of content generation? Is there any original reporting?

A: ABC News Online basically plugs into the news computer system (Basys) and we comb the various news files looking for material suitable for publication on the Web site. A large amount of our material is drawn from a service known as ABCWire, which is the vehicle by which news stories from reporters around the country and overseas are moved around the states. In the case of our regional news service, the regional journalists actually file to us a selection of their best stories for inclusion on the regional pages. This usually means no fewer than three stories per day, but in some particularly active regions this can means as many seven or eight stories a day. To the best of my knowledge we are still the only news site in Australia and one of the few in the world which actual integrates coverage of international, national and states news with a specific local news presentation. The overnight shift operated by Online News actually provides the ABC's overnight emergency services coverage. That is, we call the major police, fire and ambulance service around the country and feed this material back to the Basys computer system. This shift has the responsibility for mobilising ABC coverage for radio and television in the event of major overnight developments.

Q: ABC reporters are all over the country, generating regional news. How do you decide what goes into the site from these distant teams? Do they ever involve themselves in the Web site?

A: The extent to which regional journalists involve themselves in the Web site is really defined by the individual journalist. Because of the workload in many of our regional newsrooms (many are one person operations) we have deliberately embarked on a strategy to ensure that Online is not an impost on them. I have to say that engagement at the regional level to this point has been minimal, although I have noticed an increasing awareness among some regional journalists over the past 4 to 6 months. This is all part of the cultural change and evolution which will occur as younger, more Web-aware journalists join the organisation. We now find some regional journalists are phoning and asking if they can do "something extra" for us. But it's still only minimal. At the State level, Online News has recently embarked on a trial project to devolve responsibility for the production of the State news sites back to the states concerned. This is occurring in Victoria, Tasmania, Queensland and South Australia. We are still evaluating the success of this exercise but it has identified some resourcing and quality-control
issues which will need to be resolved. However our feeling is that devolving responsibility back to the states is still a desirable goal because it gives the state newsrooms some engagement with Online production, and the states are much better placed to make an editorial judgment about the relative merits of a story, since they’re closer to the issue.

Q: ABC has no print publications, but the Web is text. How do you go about transferring stories into this format?

A: While the ABC has no print outlet, stories for radio and television still need to be written down as the basis for scripts, voice-overs and links. When we started the news Web site we were concerned that we might struggle to find sufficient text in comparison with say, the print-based sites. The reality is that we have sufficient text for our service. Some of the radio stories are a little light on for our requirements from time to time and we are working to overcome that aspect of our coverage. On the other hand, our sense is that the average Web user does not want to sit down and read large wads of text online.

Another important consideration is that while we might be a little light on for text, we are very well placed to deliver increasing amounts of audio and video for obvious reasons. My feeling is that the print-based sites will find it harder to deliver increasing audio-visual content than we do in delivering text. They will, of course, forge strategic alliances with electronic outlets to overcome any shortcomings in this area.

However the major issue for us, as a non-print based site is the question of quality control. Obviously radio and television scripts were not intended for public consumption and one of the significant issues we are attempting to address is the level of quality control in the source material we receive from our colleagues.

The ABC uses a combination of in-house production systems. WebNews, developed by ABC IT, allows us to transfer stories straight from the Basys computer system into HTML with virtually no requirement for coding skills. WebNews, because it is a largely automated process, is used to publish the high-rotation services such as Breaking Stories. We also use a separate production system developed by ABC Multi Media, nicknamed Kenny, which we use to produce value-added components of the site. Kenny allows us to include pictures and other multimedia elements to add value to stories. In this process stories from Basys are transferred into Kenny which allows us to build enhancements into the story. Kenny requires slightly more knowledge of HTML to be used effectively, but can used quite effectively by someone with few coding skills.

Q: How do you deal with breaking stories?

A: WebNews allows us to transfer breaking stories onto the Web site within minutes of them arriving in the news system from the reporter in the field. Occasionally we have written our stories off a live broadcast of a media conference if it involves a significant national event.

Q: The site has hosted interactive discussion forums. How do you decide what to nominate as topics, and how to control the forums? Do the forums ever feed back into the journalistic process?

A: Our forums process is a little ad hoc at the moment and the subject of a review which is currently underway. At the present time the news site does host any forums and we regard this an area requiring urgent attention. The fact that we do not provide any interactive elements is a factor of resourcing rather than any lack of desire on our part to provide forums. We are planning to provide a range of interactive elements including forums and polling on the news site within the next few months. The question of forum control and moderation is actually the subject of a discussion paper I have just completed. The paper will be discussed with the program Executive Producers and News executive management in the next months or so.
However, clearly it will be a major issue for us. Our legal advice is that the forums should be moderated because of the potential for defamatory material to be "published" during a forum. However the extent to which forums are moderated is also an issue for Web users. Many participants value the open and free exchange of views engendered by the Web and resent the act of moderating. Many regard it as a form of censorship. The challenge for us is to find some sort of balance between minimising our legal exposure while acknowledging that forums provide an exciting (and perhaps slightly chaotic) means for the audience to engage with program-makers and talent. To this point the forums have not fed back into the journalistic process but we recognise their potential to do so, subject to the need to cross-check sources and validate information.

Q: Discuss traffic trends on the site.

A: Traffic on the news site is one of the major drivers of traffic on the ABC Web site overall. News regularly accounts for between 30 and 40 per cent of all traffic on the Web site. We receive about 800,000 to 900,000 accesses per week, up from about 70,000 a week when we launched the site three and a half years ago. We peak regularly at over 1 million accesses per week during major stories and, in fact, we have just recorded our best week ever: 1.23 million accesses for the week ending June 25, 2000. In fact we have hovered above the 1 million mark for four of the past five weeks. News Online is largely an event-driven site. The peaks in activity, predictably, coincide with major developing events in the news. Most recently, the Fiji and Solomon Islands crises, and the Childers backpackers fire, would have been the big drivers over the past few weeks. Access activity on the site is growing at about 19 per cent per year. Most activity occurs during business hours, presumably as people log onto their PCs at work. The peaks for News occur about 8.30 AM, about 11.30 AM, 4.30 PM and a small peak occurs about 9 PM. However, access activity and the reliability of Web measuring tools is very unreliable, and as an organisation we are still attempting to determine the best way of obtaining reliable data and analysing it to best effect. You should also note that we measure "accesses" (page impressions) rather than hits, which can generate enormously inflated figures for what is happening on a site.

Q: How does ABC set up and manage the re-use of its contents by other sites, such as Yahoo?

A: The ABC has entered into a number of licensing arrangements with external portal sites and Web providers. We have taken the view that it is strategically important for the ABC's content to be represented on as many sites as possible, otherwise we run the risk of becoming marginalised in the new media environment. The licensing deals are subject to strict editorial supervision and approval processes which mean that third party providers do not have the right to edit or omit material we send to them. The content packages have to be used in full.

Erwin Chandla, Editor, Alice Springs News

Q: What was your original motivation for creating your online service?

A: We started in early 1997. The motivation was prestige.

Q: What specific advantages did you perceive in going online?

A: It was unclear at the time but it made sense to get in on the ground floor with a medium destined to grow rapidly.

Q: How is your online service integrated into your overall organisation?

A: The news staff do it. It takes about two to three hours on Wednesdays to update the site.
Q: How does the format and style of online content differ from offline content?

A: There is no advertising, yet!

Q: Do you have any demographic data on your Web site readers? Are there any specific times of the day when the site is more popular?

A: No data.

Q: What do you think the Web user wants? Have you done any market research?

A: No, but the many emails we're getting reveal a keen interest in news from our region, especially its rich ethnic and artistic features, as well as the mystique of the outback. We also get lots of comments on our complex political situation.

Q: Some pundits predict that the Net could challenge traditional news structures. How do you feel about this?

A: I'm sure in a few years the Alice News will be on a wide screen on the wall, no newsprint, accessible at the flick of a remote control device, and updated as we go, rather appearing once a week. That suits me fine, provided the revenue question can be resolved. Apart from that, at least in our operation, it won't change the "structure": News judgement, adherence to the journalistic code of ethics, the use of clear and simple language - none of that will change, neither will the newsroom hierarchy. We're a free circulation paper, so the trick will be to convince advertisers that putting them on the Web on a site that gets lots of hits works for them as well as putting them on a paper page. Net publishing will become feasible when the Net becomes as widely accessible as a newspaper.

Q: How do you feel about interactivity?

A: The letters to the editor are the main device.

Q: Have there been any interesting incidents or surprises in running your site?

A: The interest in this region, especially in the USA, is even greater than I thought.

Q: How can publishers best generate revenue for their sites?

A: That is still the big question. When we know how to effectively publish advertising, and we get access to a wide local audience via the Net, we'll drop newsprint.

Mick Ticehurst, Editor, Blue Mountains Gazette

Q: You are a member of the Rural Press Group, with Localnews site. A lot of the sites are done by an ISP called Murchison. How does it all fit together?

A: Rural press probably felt the need for it 5 years ago, but the Blue Mountains Gazette got into it before others. We have had some changes since Rural Press purchased the Canberra Times, which had their own in-house Internet department. Rural Press was able to use them. I don't think they're doing this as much with Murchison any more.

Q: When did your site first appear?
A: I don’t remember. But it was different from the current one. It was just a promotional site.

Q: When did it go comprehensive?
A: About 12 months ago, with the involvement of Rural Press.

Q: How much work is done at your end?
A: We put 3 to 4 local stories on there each week. You may see a bigger coverage in the future. We pick the stories that go in.

Q: What is the mechanics of site composition like?
A: We load it onto the server from here using templates. We also upload data to a common Rural Press job guide and auto guide. We have technical problems in uploading these advertisements. The pagination program used for the paper does not allow things to be uploaded. Ads must be re-typed. The editorial content is not changed when it is uploaded. It’s a cut and paste. There are no special Web staff at their end.

Q: What was your motivation for getting on the net?
A: Everyone is aware of it. We must follow everyone. I think every publication realises that they should be in this.

Q: Do you have a target audience in mind?
A: It’s locals only. We are not interested in an international audience. But we have had international and interstate tourist inquiries.

Q: What information do you have on the traffic levels?
A: No information.

Q: Anyone can be a publisher on the Net. How do you feel about this?
A: I don’t think it will overthrow traditional journalism. The Net in general won’t destroy papers. Television didn’t.

David Lovejoy, Editor, Byron Shire Echo

Q: What was your original motivation for creating your online service?
A: The presence of a Web-savvy employee who persuaded us it was the wave of the future.

Q: What specific advantages did you perceive in going online?
A: It was more that everyone else would do it so we couldn’t afford to be left out.
Q: How is your online service integrated into your overall organisation?

A: It's not well integrated. One person creates a HTML version using selections from the paper (no ads, very few photos) and one person creates PDF files of the whole of the edition for those who use Adobe Acrobat. Both versions are available at our site. There is no change to the editorial content.

Q: Do you have any demographic data on your Web site readers?

A: Whenever I've examined our statistics it seems that the US military is the most interested in us, followed by Australian Telstra. In both cases I think the interest is hostile.

Q: What do you think the Web user wants? Have you done any market research?

A: Don't know. No.

Q: Some pundits predict that the Net could challenge traditional news structures. How do you feel about alternative news sources publishing online?

A: It's fine by me.

Q: What do you think of citizen reporting without the mediation of journalists?

A: This happens already and it's OK. Print journalists are controlled (often so subtly they are not consciously aware of it) by their proprietors' commercial and political interests, but citizen reporting can be entirely fictitious. In both cases the reader needs a healthy dose of scepticism.

Q: How can publishers best generate revenue for their sites?

A: If you find out, let me know.

Stephen Mayne, Editor, Crikey

Q: How did Crikey begin?

A: It started with a belief that the press was failing to report the dark side of Jeff Kennett. So I started a Web site called jeffed.com. The site was very popular, and I decided that there was the possibility of creating an independent news site, which became Crikey. I also had the view that small shareholders were not well represented, so I created shareowner.com.au for that.

I'm highly interactive in operating the site, responding to several tens of emails per day. I constantly checks my emails. Replies are always sent within a day. This leads to threads.

The site is run very leanly, like a cottage industry. One room in his apartment serves as an office. Content is emailed to the Webmaster, who posts it to the site. The server is located with a major ISP. Every time Crikey is mentioned in the mainstream media, the site traffic peaks.

Q: You have stated that you are out to challenge conventional news paradigms. How did this influence your choice of the Net?

A: I did not consider anything else. If you are frustrated with the lack of freedom of conventional media, the Internet is the obvious choice because it is cheap, you can control it yourself, and you can publish vast quantities of information.
Q: Were there any other advantages of the Net?

A: I guess it was also a case of embracing the same medium that Jeff Kennett had used. Once the response was strong, we stuck with that medium.

Q: Describe the dynamics of running Crikey.

A: We have a “community as journalist” approach where we encourage readers to contribute material. I am the filter of the site who decides what is worth running. I also commission stories from people. I set up the lineup of stories and send it to the Webmaster, who places it on the site each week. We are going to move to a more automated publishing system soon. I just send the content through as raw text.

Q: Is there a regular routine, as in conventional journalism?

A: There is, and in that respect, we are old-world. The Internet should publish as and when things happen.

Q: Why didn’t you do this from the start?

A: We had the view that there was a gap in the market on Sundays, because there was no good national Sunday paper. The Monday papers were also looking for material then, and if we could break a story, it could make the Monday papers. This led to a weekly format on the slowest news day.

Q: Crikey is very interactive. How much content do you get this way?

A: Content is managed on an ad-hoc basis. Some people contribute for nothing, like Hilary Bray, who is a regular who has never been paid. Others have been paid over a thousand dollars. Some people have to be supported.

Q: Are these stringers regular with contributions?

A: Some are, some aren’t. I have run pieces from 20 different people over the past few months. Sometimes I give them 50 dollars.

Q: Where does the legal accountability for content lie?

A: It’s actually untested in Australia. There has only been the Rindos case that went to a judgement. I am taking responsibility as the publisher, but I do not know if it would spread to other people if a case appeared.

Q: What do you think of real-time chat forums?

A: I haven’t looked at a lot of them. On the shareholder sites forums, some of them suffer from a lack of editorial control. There is swearing, flaming, and a lack of quality. I would never do it unsupervised. Your Say (emails to the editor) on Crikey is popular with our readers, but it is still as conventional as a letters to the editor column. We are getting lively letters, and we give feedback to each letter.

Q: Both Zeitgeist and Crikey are counter-mainstream, Web-based subscriber publications. Are these aspects co-dependent?
A: I think we are trying to achieve the same thing, and to get attention on the Web, you have to do something different. You need to produce interesting content. The Internet has a culture that is itself anti-establishment and you can be a free spirit.

Q: What is the best economic model to adopt?

A: The culture that everything is free makes it difficult to develop a revenue model. We are trying to use a mainstream approach, but our bigger approach is to create a brand name and use it for other ventures, such as Crikey Investments. If you are using a conventional revenue model, I am not convinced that you will produce a seriously profitable business.

Q: What is the hit pattern like?

A: It peaks on Mondays and tracks down less and less. We average 25,000 page views throughout the week. Monday mornings are strongest, with 7,000 hits on Monday. I don't know how it varies by the hour, or the average visit length.

Q: How do you feel about citizen reporting without mastheads?

A: It has completely broken down news structures. Barriers to entry should be low. Politicians have their own Web sites. In some ways, it has devalued the traditional image of a journalist, because anyone can be a Web journalist. If you are good enough, you will rise above the pack.

Q: Have you experienced any interesting incidents?

A: We get a legal threat roughly every two weeks. The quality of the people interacting with us is high. The response to the lists of journalists and their connections has been very good.

Q: Is there a typical time interval for the story process?

A: It's a weekly publication. There is no regular daily routine. Different tasks happen on various days.

Q: How much content should be published on a server?

A: We probably put too much on, it would take an hour to read the entire site each week. I disagree with the idea of 300-word short stories. Sometimes stories need more words, and people will read it. This happened with jeffed. It was 18,000 words long and could not be published in a newspaper. We have a culture that emphasises text, so we don't run pictures. I agree that people do like bite-sized chunks so we try to do little columns with a few stories, but we still run big stories.

Q: How do you feel about multimedia elsewhere on the Net?

A: The biggest problem is that connectivity is slow, and graphics slows the site down. I won't go for pictures.

Julian Burgess, Editor, The Examiner

Q: The Examiner has recently taken the interesting step of charging for its content. Most online newspapers in Australia have not adopted this revenue model. Please explain the rationale behind this, and what you think of the revenue models adopted by Australian online publications in general.
A: We currently charge for our newspaper. We cannot afford to see a transfer of our readers to a free electronic delivery method. The cover price of our paper and the advertising allows to employ 60 journalists. That is probably more journalists than the total employed by the rest of the electronic media in Tasmania. Our strategy is about being able to provide a quality local news service to Tasmania and beyond. I'm not up with what other people are doing although I believe some are charging and others are subsidising their online news with advertising or operating ISP services.

Q: What are the motivations for creating your Web site? What advantages do you perceive in going online?

A: There is a perception that every newspaper should be online (and free) and we have yielded to that perception. However, it could well be a case of publish online or perish. Two things make a Web site - the technology and the content. We have lots of content and a good understanding of the technology. The advantage is the opportunity of leveraging your hardcopy readers into Web readers and getting Web users into your newspaper.

Q: How is production of the Web site integrated into your news organisation? Is there a separate Web division? How much of the work do you leave to Murchison?

A: Our system is almost totally automated using custom programming from Murchison and our IT people and stock programming from Cybergraphics. Our editorial and production people hit some buttons and do some cleaning up and library people refine the archive system (which is replacing our hardcopy library system). It's an integrated system. I'm the only person in our Internet Services section at this stage but I get help from our Electronic Services section (two people).

Q: You have a section for breaking news that seems to be updated quite frequently. How do you obtain and handle breaking news on your Web site, given the fact that the Web can be updated more frequently than a paper?

A: Each shift news editor is asked to provide an update with up to eight a day. The sources of this news is reporters returning from jobs, radio and TV news bulletins on stories we know we will have. This is proving difficult to build into our systems but I'm hoping it will become second nature for breaking news to be put up, a bit like radio used to be.

Q: How do you feel about feedback and interactivity on the Internet. Does it affect the journalistic process?

A: This adds to the process. And should make our reporters and editors more conscience of the public mind on issues.

Q: What do you know about your online readership? Are they local or nationwide/international? Are there any times of the day or week when the site is more popular?

A: We know that about 45% of readers are from the US, 10% other overseas users and the rest Australian. Tasmania has a high level of expatriates. The most popular time for domestic users is weekdays between 10 and noon and then the evening.

Q: Some pundits predict that the Net could challenge traditional news structures, like citizen reporting. How do you feel about this?

A: News gathering and reporting are professions. Anyone can do it if they want but the principals are the key to retaining credibility. We already do it. If our move to the Web is successful we will retain our readership. If we provide the venue we can also incorporate a level of citizen reporting. The Net will not be free of defamation and contempt issues so the principles of good and fair reporting will still apply. That makes citizen reporting a fairly dangerous occupation.
Q: Have there been any interesting incidents or surprises in running your site?

A: The high level of US interest. However, the readership is so low compared to the hardcopy it’s not a fair test so far. Quite a few people criticise us for not providing a service similar to the Sydney Morning Herald or The Australian. I tell them we are just a small newspaper and we can't compete with the these papers.

Q: Are there any other comments or observations you would like to make on running a news Web site?

A: The rules in newspapers is that it’s almost impossible to turn a “free” into a “paid”. Plenty have tried and not may have succeeded. We are putting just about all our editorial content onto our site now. If we provide it free now why would you pay later? What do we do when 20,000 of our 40,000 daily paying customers are using the free version? We will still have to run the press. We do have the potential to reach expatriate Tasmanians with the Web and increase our readership. Why would you give that opportunity for free? Providing a free news service on the Web only makes sense if you can leverage the traffic by charging for advertising to cover your costs. We don’t think we will be able to do this in the short to medium term. The only option for us is to continue the culture of charging for our news.

Terry Townsend, Webmaster, Green Left Weekly

Q: Why did you go online?

A: We have used the Web for roughly five years. Before that, we posted to mailing lists by sending every article as a text file, and we still do that, but not many people are on these lists any more.

Q: What was the motivation?

A: We are not a commercial publication, so we were not concerned about losing money. We didn’t want to miss out on a new medium, and we wanted to reach an overseas audience. Roughly half of all hits come from overseas.

Q: This is unusual for an Australian publication.

A: Yes, but being a left wing newspaper, we attract left wing readers from around the world. We have an international news section, and the left has a culture of reading left material in general. A lot of these people don’t have much left-wing media in their own countries, and want to read around.

Q: What does the site hold?

A: The entire paper. It takes about 4 hours per week for one person. There are macros on the computer that process each article into HTML and it gets posted, along with pictures. Stories are word for word. In fact, it’s the pre-production version, with less sub-editing.

Q: Would you scoop yourself on the Net?

A: The way I do it is that if I can put the site up early, I do it. It’s not that rigorous. It’s generally done on Sunday, our last production day, when the paper’s being processed, and it’s on the Web Sunday night. The paper comes out Monday morning. I generally don’t publicise that it’s online until Wednesday, when I post to certain mailing lists.
Q: Do you ever publish content on the Web that does not appear in print?

A: Only once or twice. We re-ran an article that we wanted to keep alive as a topic. We do provide links to other sites or similar stories elsewhere.

Q: What is the hit data like?

A: Thursdays and Sundays, there’s often a big spike. Monday and Tuesday are low. This could be tied to the fact that content goes up on Sunday, and the fact that there is publicity on Wednesday for Thursday’s peak.

Q: How do you feel about the Web’s potential as an alternative news delivery system?

A: It’s important, but it’s only a supplement to us. We are not a passive newspaper. The way we distribute it on street corners and meet people is important. Face to face interaction is more important than the Web. We want to draw people into activism.

Q: The site isn’t very interactive. Why?

A: People can email us, but we really think online chat is pointless and trivial. If people write proper articles, the quality will be better.

Q: What do you think of mainstream news sites?

A: I use them a lot in my research for my own stories. They are the gatekeepers of the world. They are easy to use, but I try to read many to get a balance.

Tony Murrell, Editorial Director, The Independent News Group

Q: What was the motivation for creating your Web site?

A: The more computers there are, the more Internet. We’re in the communication business, so we decided to start developing a site, hoping that in time it would become self-funding, or even turn a profit. A natural evolution, given that communication is our core business.

Q: What specific advantages did you perceive?

A: A substantial site can add prestige, and even value, to the company. We were seen as embracing new technology. This can widen our scope of influence, widen our market, and provide opportunity for further sales (or, at least, value adding). There are also issues of quicker news and information delivery to a growing (computer and Internet literate) market.

Q: How is the site integrated into the rest of the company?

A: It’s a part of the company’s normal operation. A director (the managing editor) liaises with the off-site Webmaster to change the site daily. News stories are sometimes shortened for online consumption. Each head reporter is responsible for the feel and (mostly) the look of the papers. We have some lay-out rules that would indicate to someone in the business that they emanate from the same stable. However, I doubt readers would pick up on this. Ours certainly are not sausage machine publications. Each head reporter selects the leads and decides on story and picture placement, so from that point of view they indirectly choose what goes on the Web. In fact, in all but one case reporters in charge of publications also produce their own news pages, spending a day a week in production. I find this very quickly teaches them responsibility as well as extra skills.
When each paper is published, I take the leads and pictures from the first few pages (plus sport and some quirky bits) and send them to our Webmaster. The reporters are encouraged to take an interest in the Web site and, if they want, can exercise the same control over web pages as over their printed pages. Mostly, they plead “too busy” but in coming months, they will all be pulled into the process.

Q: What are traffic patterns like on the site?

A: Hits are fairly constant with slight peaks on Tuesdays and Thursdays, when the main body of news is updated, and on weekends. Daily peaks are after dinner from 7 PM to 9 PM, and also straight after school.

Q: What do you think the Web user wants?

A: Our regional online users want community links, which we are developing, such as where to find a group or organisation. Our statistics show us that an increasing number of people are using us as their home page and most people are accessing Tattslotto results.

Q: How do you feel about the Internet’s potential to challenge traditional news structures?

A: Everything challenges traditional news structures. Radio did, as did television, and so will the Internet. It will become a medium for news as did the other media. Publishing any information in any form is OK. You won’t be able to stop it. This is the maverick nature of the Internet: everyone is a publisher and everyone is the audience. Interactivity between (traditional) publishers and audiences is to be encouraged.

Q: Have there been any interesting incidents in running the site?

A: We had confirmation of the number of oddballs tilting at all sorts of windmills all over the world. We are surprised by the number of overseas news services, such as Finland national television, and China national television, which take our tinpot operation for a national daily news chain.

Q: What do you think of revenue generation on the Web?

A: Revenue generation is a dream until our sales force as a unit understand the Net and the benefits it can bring to their clients. Until then, we’ll sell the odd banner and keep on building the site. We have several marketing ideas that we are keeping to ourselves at the moment. Most of these ideas involve selling outside our traditional marketplace. Publishers (traditional publishers) are generating little revenue from their sites despite substantial investments.

**Barry Wilson: Kiama Independent, Lake Times**

Q: What was your original motivation for going online?

A: It started in 1997. We moved very early onto the Net. That’s typical of the organisation. It keeps at the forefront of technology. At this moment, we have become the first newspaper in Australia to introduce a new form of computer plate technology. We wanted to find out if the Internet would have any impact on the industry. It’s an experiment. Ego also plays a role. It’s
nice to be one of the first newspapers online, along with being one of the oldest. We did not expect to generate revenue.

Q: How is the Web site integrated into the organisation?

A: We have a small staff contingent. It's integrated through the editorial department, not the production department. The text is marked up manually, in a cut and paste operation. There was no attempt to create something different to paper. The top four stories in each category are included as a teaser. We designed the site ourselves. Global Presence is just our ISP for hosting the site. One person manages the sites for both papers. Editors from each paper select the stories to go online. Stories for the Web are generally the major stories in the paper. There is no special selection process.

Q: Why not put the whole paper online?

A: Revenue! The idea is to tease people into buying the paper.

Q: What do you think of revenue models?

A: At most of the trade functions, people talk. Nobody is making money from the Web. I see a lot of frustration from people who are accessing the Internet. Ads take so long to load before you get the data.

Q: What is the timing of publication like?

A: Because we are a weekly paper, we are not time critical. Our paper is produced on Wednesdays. It is finished on Tuesday afternoons, then the Web site is created. It appears on the Net shortly before or after the print version. We don't update the site generally with breaking news. The one time we did it was to save ourselves the time of waiting to put something fresh into the paper later on. The site is designed to load very fast. There are no graphics.

Q: What are traffic patterns like?

A: We monitor this. Being a weekly paper, our most hits occur on Wednesday when it's released through to Friday. We get a very consistent following from people who are travelling around the world. We will see a series of hits for a few weeks from Denmark, then it will stop. I would assume it's from an exchange student.

Q: How do you feel about citizen reporting and alternative media?

A: It scares me because there is no gatekeeper with credentials. People can misinterpret things. Mastheads are important. This is why the masthead appears on our Web site in a conventional form.

Q: How do you feel about interactivity?

A: We get letters to the editor by email.

Q: What do you think of interactivity elsewhere?

A: I am cautious about it, because on chat forums there is no gatekeeper.

Melissa Lutton, Editor, Lower Clarence Review
Q: When did you go online?

A: We have been online since November 1997.

Q: What specific advantages did you perceive in going online?

A: A higher profile leading to potential sales. I believe it is important to embrace technology and thus wanted a presence on the Internet despite my own belief that at this time there are no real advantages to this.

Q: How is your online service integrated into your overall news organisation?

A: We contract a person to update our web information weekly. Existing staff supply the data from the newspaper. We run about 12 news stories and 6 sports stories on the Web. This is only a fraction of the information appearing in the newspaper. There is never Web content that isn't in the paper.

Q: What do you know about your online audience?

A: Our paper is very localised. As a consequence usually only people interested in the local news will have a look at the site. They are mainly people from this area who are travelling or who have family overseas.

Q: What do you think the user wants?

A: No market research has been done. We have a long way to go in developing our site. At the moment it is secondary to our newspaper and is treated as such. There are many things we could do to develop the site but most of our energy is focused on our core business. Really we only have a presence on the Net rather than an interactive site. The type of information on our Web site is really only relevant to a small cross section of local people.

Q: Some pundits predict that the Net could challenge traditional news structures, like citizen reporting. How do you feel about this?

A: In fifty to a hundred years there may be such an impact. Certainly in our area the Net is something people are still experimenting with for enjoyment, and mostly these are the kids through to late teens. Older people still enjoy reading the newspaper in a paper format. I feel it has more to do with the situations in which you read and use computers. Generally a paper is read in a leisure setting with family and is quite sociable. The Net is not as sociable.

Q: You publish letters to the editor on your site. Are these exactly the same ones that appear in the print version? Do you get much feedback sent to you across the Net?

A: They are the same letters as in the newspapers. We only get a little feedback by email, mostly from locals overseas.

Q: How can publishers best generate revenue for their sites?

A: Through classified advertising and bookings, through banner sales. I am still trying to work out a way of generating sales through my site. If someone has a definitive answer I would like to know!

Noel Sharrock, Webmaster, Macpherson Media
Q: Your site features news filtering and custom news. These are advanced features that are not found on many Australian news sites. What sort of a reaction have you experienced to these features? Are they popular?

A: The reaction is somewhat muted. About 5% of users use the daily news filtering system. These users want their special interests catered for.

Q: I note that the various McPherson newspapers are presented in a similar format, on the same Web site, and much of their content is blended together. This is understandable when they are all owned by the same company. How is the site administered with regard to the operations of the individual papers?

A: Content is under the control of the editor, journalists and sub-editors of each paper. If they choose to exercise their ability to control content, that control is exercised via their normal story editing and markup. There is an online editor appointed to review each issue.

Q: You have also introduced a lot of interactivity on the site, with a public discussion forum that seems popular. I would also like to know if you ever censor or edit these discussions.

A: Very occasionally someone posts messages containing bad language or defamatory statements. We have deleted one posting for bad language and one defamatory postings in the past two years.

Q: What do you know about users who visit the site?

A: Around 50% are local and 25% are former residents. The rest of the traffic is research-related or tied to specific interests. Weekdays are the most popular.

Simon Mansfield, Editor, Space Daily

Q: Why did you go online?

A: It’s cheaper. Also, it’s immediate.

Q: You recently added mail to the site. Why?

A: It boosts page views. I don’t care whether my customers read the news at Space Daily or not. It generates page views whenever people read their mail. I have a network that supplies me with advertisements. I act as an agent for someone else’s advertisements, but I also have my own affiliates downstream. There’s a bit of cross-fertilisation, but it’s a stand-alone revenue stream. I will also shove in an Amazon booklist where available. I get commissions on book bought. This is the way everyone else works with Amazon. Also, the email revenue model is typical.

Q: The Web is instant and asynchronous. Is there a regular schedule?

A: It’s updated every day.

Q: How do the stories come together?

A: It’s standard journalistic practice. I use a private network of people who distribute data.

Q: How much traffic do you receive?
A: Our readers are worldwide, predominantly USA. Total spacer group Web pages is 1.5 million page requests per month. That’s not Space Daily exclusively. Several modules, such as views of the solar system. On Space Daily, we have 35,000 regular readers. Some are daily, some are weekly.

Q: Is there a time peak?

A: 8 AM to 9 AM New York time is when it peaks. People start their work day by logging on. The pattern of usage is basically Monday to Friday. We have a lot of traffic from universities and schools. You also get a peak with US kids getting off school, and after dinner. I think 40% of my visitors log in from home. Corporate America is wired, and also people at home.

Q: The NEAR-miss incident generated news on an almost hourly basis. Discuss this.

A: I did it this way (one page with periodic additions) because it’s a good way of covering an evolving story. I will only do that with certain important stories. It’s done by sitting continuously at the keyboard, calling people up on the phone. I called DSN (Deep Space Network) in Canberra, who said they had locked on to it. Then I called the NEAR team in USA. The next day they established that they would be able to do a flyby. I had the first NEAR image of Eros on the Net. I was in contact with the NEAR team who sent me material before it appeared on their own site, as soon as they had it. A similar approach was also done with Mars Pathfinder.

Q: Is archiving a good idea?

A: It should be done. Any new site has to be database-driven, though. This also leads to personalisation.

Q: Will there be other economic models?

A: I hope that we will be able to charge for high-quality information in the future.

Q: This is a small organisation. Does that affect things?

A: It’s critical to being successful.

Padma Iyer, Online News Producer, Illawarra Mercury

Q: How did the Illawarra Mercury first go online?

A: It was about 2 years ago. I was not a part of it. I think it was motivated by a wish to do what everyone else was doing. The local Mercury office has a lot of autonomy within Fairfax. It approved the whole proposal for the Web site. The site was changed recently to keep pace with industry standards.

Q: Are there any principles that should govern the design of a Web site?

A: Our Web site provides content in a form that is easy to navigate. You can add whizz-bang things, but people get tired of looking at it every day. You want repeat visitors. Popular Web sites like Hotmail have simple designs so people won’t get jaded by things like javascript.

Q: Should journalism be handled differently on the Web?

A: There could be points of divergence, but they have not emerged yet. At the moment, newspaper Web sites begin their production where the production of the print version ends. Their typical shift is late evenings, taking edited copy from the paper. They don’t want to edit
it, so they can keep their costs down. Many newspaper Web sites are exploring the idea of Web-specific content but the Mercury is all legacy content. We could introduce Web-specific content in the future.

Q: How is production handled?

A: I am essentially responsible for the design and content of the entire Web site. I work from the same premises as the rest of the newspaper, and used to work as an editor on the paper. The Web site is run on a day-to-day basis exclusively by me. I can call on technical staff for assistance in technical matters. Most work on the Web site is done at night. Around 50-70% of the Mercury content appears on the Web. 80-100 stories a day go online.

It would not be appropriate to put the entire paper online. There is no point in putting supplements online, if no advertising has been sold to support it.

Most of the rest of the content is put online. Another reason why material is left out is if the software cannot import the content properly without significant intervention.

I can tap the WYSIWYG production software CyberPage, and see material that has been fully edited by colour-coding of sections of the page. Sometimes, this system does not import content from CyberPage due to layout topology.

The site does not have breaking news, because of a lack of human resources.

There is no multimedia content, owing to lack of resources, and it's a family newspaper, our masthead is there, and we don't want to do anything that is uncharacteristic of the brand. I can change a headline if it is too brief. Two-word headlines can be expanded because we have the space to do it. I also shrink headlines if they are eight words long. I liaise with people at the Sydney Morning Herald Web team.

Q: Discuss traffic patterns on the site.

A: There is a pattern between 9 AM and 3 PM. Content goes up around 1 AM, two to three hours after the print version is edited.

Q: How do you feel about chat forums?

A: People are experimenting to see what attracts traffic. It's exploration.

Q: Is the site meant to pay its own way?

A: It is possible with the way we are running it, but we have just started. It's easier to make it pay its own way with a small operation like this.

I gather from taking to people that their online versions are nothing like their print versions in terms of audience. Traffic is only a small proportion of circulation figures for the papers. Trying to attract 10 to 25% of the audience they have for the print version. Their expectations are low. For a small paper, you can always justify the site as a promotional vehicle that attracts readers who don't buy the paper. It's audience capture. There is no motivation for the site to create its own brand. I think the rush to generate original brands is generating some Web sites crazy. Sites with large work teams have to justify this by coming up with something special.

Q: What is the perceptions of the print journalists who work with the paper?

A: I talk to them every day. They look at their stories on the Web and sometimes point out that their stories have not been marked up.

Q: Are you interested in attracting readers from outside the Illawarra?
A: Yes. We don’t know if this is happening because our data collection does not identify this.

Mark Bruer, Director, News.com.au

Q: Discuss the origins of news.com.au.

A: News Limited started down a forked road with separate strategies for editorial and other content. First it built a Web site for the classifieds from all of the papers called News Classifieds, run by News Interactive. This was 1996. The strategy was to defend our position in the market. Classifieds are important to the papers. Early on, we knew the Internet offered potential for classifieds, and also a threat. We felt we needed to occupy a space there. We perceived that start-up costs were low and there were opportunities for new players to enter the market. In the Sydney and Melbourne markets, Fairfax has the strongest position for classifieds, and we perceived an opportunity to challenge them. Fairfax followed this very quickly.

The Australian went online first. The Australian decided to establish a Web site because it is valued for its computer section. It felt that it needed to be seen as keen on a new medium. It was not seen as a revenue opportunity, but an opportunity to extend our brand to the new medium and upholding the core values of The Australian being concerned with technology.

It was a general news site from the start. While the technology section was the driving force in establishing the site, we thought that users would expect other content.

This all happened at the same time as the classifieds. But the sites were operated from different locations. The Australian Web site was run by The Australian out of its budget, but News Classifieds was run by a new division, News Interactive.

Q: How did it evolve?

A: The Australian built up a reasonable presence which was attracting a small but growing audience. Other papers in the News Ltd group started to ask how they should address the Web. The News Ltd management took the view that the best course was to establish a central operation that would manage all these online newspapers. That central entity was News Interactive, which had been running the classifieds. Control of editorial content also came under News Interactive. This was late 1997.

The view of News Ltd was that there were different routes that could have been taken. The Australian Web site was purely for that paper. We could have built a Web site for every paper on the same basis or aggregate content under a single brand, as we did. It was thought that more capital could be made this way. At first, it was the Australian News Network. It later became news.com.au. The thinking behind that decision was that there were a lot of newspaper Web sites, and we thought we could offer something different by aggregating the best content.

Q: The site is not a mirror of the papers. What is the relationship between you and the papers?

A: It’s different to almost any other company in the world. Our relationship with the papers has sometimes produced tensions over our role and theirs, over whether we are a distinctive new business that capitalises on content or a mirror of the papers. The view of what the role of the site is has fluctuated over time. At the moment, we feel that each paper needs a distinctive online presence of their own, and that has happened. But the site still runs itself and has its own costs and revenue stream. At the moment, you will find home pages for each newspaper. Those are the beginnings of what will evolve into separate sites for each paper. We will eventually have a network of separate sites, as well as aggregated content.
Q: The site classifies news according to geographical regions (world, national, states) that roughly correspond to News Ltd papers, but not precisely. How is content selected from papers for each category?

A: There is no automatic pathway for all NSW content to come from The Telegraph. No one paper exclusively occupies any category, but in some areas such as Finance, you can get more content from the Australian. We see our role as selecting the best content from each paper.

Q: How many workers are there?

A: News Interactive has around 160 staff. That includes Career One, Go Fish, etc. The news.com.au site runs on 19 staff, of whom 13 are journalists. It’s a large number, but not for a 24 X 7 operation. At night, we have 2 people working after 8 PM. From 5 AM onwards, we scale up. During the day at peak time, we would have 5 to 6 staff. We also have journalists for the IT section and sport.

Q: When does content appear online?

A: We generally publish content from the newspapers at 2am, which is before they hit the streets. While we have access to the material before that time, we made a policy decision some time ago that all stories from the newspapers should be allowed to go through the full legal and subediting process before we use them. This is to protect us from error and lawsuit. It would be potentially dangerous for us to second-guess or ignore all the considerations that the newspapers have undergone in deciding what to publish. Sometimes headlines will be changed.

Q: Does the Net have its own news values?

A: No, a good news story is a good news story. The Net is just another means of delivery, and delivery systems are agnostic of news values. However in terms of how content is presented, there are significant differences with the Net. We struggle with this like everyone else. Newspaper content is too verbose. It’s not timely enough. Similarly television content is not ideal, nor is radio. The only way to produce ideal content for this medium is to generate it independently. Thafs expensive, though. We do create our own content, because we update the site throughout the day on a 24 X 7 basis. Thafs incompatible with newspaper routines.

We will aggregate content from wherever we can get it: news feeds, papers. But we will also make audio or video files ourselves. We don’t natively have access to multimedia content and have to make it ourselves. We probably do 2 to 3 files each day. We would go to functions that other News journalists wouldn’t attend, but we are limited by time, resources and the fact that we are in Sydney. We do a lot of audio files across the telephone. A good example was we called Parliament House in Fiji during the coup and got George Speight on the phone. We interviewed him for the site and broke some news that hadn’t been reported. It was a simple piece that didn’t require editing, and it was on the site within 20 minutes. We often break news on the site. The day before yesterday, we broke the story that the ACCC was investigating four oil companies, as a text story we wrote. We heard stories that the ACCC was doing this, we called people up, and broke the story.

We do use video files, but not a lot. It is difficult in terms of time pressures. We need to find the most efficient ways to do this and possibly establish content partnerships. I can’t see us setting up large facilities for producing multimedia in the short term because it’s expensive.

Q: The Breaking News section depends heavily on news feeds like AAP. Is this mediated?

A: Yes. We monitor the wire services all the time and would never simply pump the material out. We filter it and select important stories. This functions 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, but attention slows in the early hours of the morning. But if a big story breaks in the middle of the night, we will follow it up.
Q: Do the editors of each paper have any say over the online content?

A: Yes. There is a site for each newspaper, and the editors of each paper decide what goes there. Within the aggregated news major sections, it is our decision. We will look at what is available from the newspapers, the wires, our own sources, and use whatever we think is the best.

Q: Do you ever worry about being too Sydney-centric?

A: Yes we do. There’s probably not much we can do except to pay attention. We are thinking of devolving the state sections of the site to the papers in those states because the editors would understand the most topical issues in those states.

Q: Where are revenue models heading?

A: For the industry overall, the main revenue model will be transactions. In five years, most money will come from this. For news, transactions are irrelevant. So what we need to do with a news product is advertising. People are sceptical about the value of online advertising, but I don’t share this. Advertising support could become considerable. But it won’t generate as much money as transactions. So the other thread to our existence is to direct people from news into transaction opportunities.

Q: What about chat?

A: We have experimented with chat and found it disappointing. We tried hosting moderated chat with guests. Not a lot of people will come, unless you have a celebrity, and then people get frustrated because they don’t get their questions answered. We are happy to expend resources on this if it provides a good experience, but people are not prepared to spend a lot of time online in a chat unless it is someone famous. We feel challenged by unmoderated chat. The law is uncertain. It has not been established where the liability lies.

Q: Discuss traffic patterns.

A: We are most popular between 8 AM and 6 PM on weekdays. Spikes come first thing in the morning and lunchtime. But that overall pattern is not as pronounced as it was 12 months ago. The graphs are starting to level out. There is more traffic now on weekends and outside office hours. I think this reflects a greater penetration of usage in homes.

Q: Does news.com.au want international traffic?

A: It does attract a lot of viewers overseas, and the information we get tends to suggest that they are expatriate Australians. We get a lot of feedback from them about our site. We don’t want to become an international site, but we could become part of an international network of content sharing with other News Corp sites.

Nic Burrows, Manager, NetX Advertising Agency

Q: What is the state of advertising on Web sites?

A: I think that you can talk about portal sites versus content sites. All are heavily dependent on advertising. Advertising on content sites, as opposed to portals, is not going to pay their way in its current format. Portal sites apparently have a greater dependency on advertising, because it could make them profitable. Content sites still depend on advertising, but advertising alone will not make content sites profitable. The humble banner is an awesome tool.
Q: Do you think that the amount of revenue generated from these sites will increase?

A: It will. We find that commitments to advertising are growing, not shrinking. On traditional news content sites, they are far more open-minded with their layout online than in the print version. I have interrupted the overall look of the Sydney Morning Herald home page to place an advertisement. Who is genuinely providing news content? I think it's only Fairfax and News. Ninemsn and others just suck content from wire services. What is generally found, especially with portals, is that news content provides plenty of page impressions, but you don't get a lot of sell-through. This means lots of people look at the content, but only so many page views are actually paid for by advertisers. They could have a million page impressions, but only sell 10% of that. Yahoo has an ABC news feed. It gives them credibility, but they are not allowed to sell ad space with it because it's the ABC. The lack of advertising isn't a problem, because they use news as a way to generate traffic for the rest of the portal.

Q: Are news sites perceived as upmarket, with rates?

A: Advertisements are sold according to views, not effects. The cost per impression changes with different publications, though. News readers on the Net are very Web-savvy people, and access the Web frequently. Will this command a premium price? Maybe, maybe not.

Q: How do you perceive advertiser's interactions with these news sites?

A: A lot of them wouldn't have a clue about where the best content is. But certain brand names are trusted, such as The Australian.

Q: When will things begin to solidify in more precise terms?

A: The Web is an immature medium. It's still so formative. It won't formulate itself for a while.

Jane O’Connell, News Director, Ninemsn

Q: How is the design of the site controlled by Microsoft?

A: Obviously, the two main partners are Microsoft and PBL. There's an element of stylising across all the international sites. It gives continuity. But each country with MSN has the option of creating its own input.

Q: Where is news production handled?

A: Most of the content and production for everything is based in Sydney. News is totally based here. I have one news producer, who manages news content, but connected with this are the current affairs sites. The producers all work with each other. There is a dedicated producer for each site, like 60 Minutes. Some producers do more than one sites.

Q: To what extent are producers of the television shows represented here?

A: All of the staff here in Paddington are Ninemsn employees, but they work closely with producers of the shows. They deal with them on a daily basis.

Q: There is video of Brian Henderson, but mostly the news is print. How do you adapt content?

A: We have increased the video and audio in the last six months, as people get better connectivity. If a big story breaks, people want video.

Q: You use a lot of AAP content. How do you do it?
A: The main source of our news is a feed from AAP which is a combination of world, business and sport news. We also leverage channel 9 content. We can use clips from them. AAP send us 60 to 70 stories every 90 minutes. It’s published on our site every 90 minutes as an automated system. It’s hands free from our end. If there’s a breaking story, we can go and obtain footage from Nine.

Q: Is the site updated constantly?

A: The news desk is unstaffed mostly at night. We would respond to a big story by about 7 AM. The AAP feed is constant, though.

Q: Discuss traffic patterns.

A: Monday to Friday, we have higher usage than on weekends. The peak comes at lunchtime, around 12:00 to 1:00 PM. A lot of people will look at the front page, but a lot will then go to the headline page, scan it, then click through to the stories they want. Take the Concorde crash. We see a peak when we have an important story. Then we will get video to go with it. We have to be careful to ensure we have the rights to use footage, because it may only be licensed for television. We tend to be careful with international footage, thus. We can use any domestic footage from Channel 9.

Q: Are these people logging in from work?

A: We think so, but don’t know from a research perspective because of the way firewalls are set up.

Q: Do you ever censor chat forums?

A: The news department doesn’t do this. There are monitors who do this. If someone asks questions with legal implications, we may not run them. We set up a poll question every day, and let people vote yes/no, and if people want more, they can join a chat forum. Chat forums with celebrities are done via a moderator reading questions across a telephone link. The questions are taken live.

Q: Do you ever get news feedback across the Net, or influences on the journalistic process?

A: There is no influence on the journalistic process.

Q: How does news fit into the overall portal strategy?

A: It’s a big priority. It’s right there on the home page. It’s a big traffic driver on a daily basis, and is the most frequently updated content. The image on the page is updated 3 times per day.

Brian Hurst, Editor, Redland Times and Bayside Bulletin

Q: Discuss operations of your Web site.

A: We are part of the Rural Press group. Our newspapers upload listings from our advertising pages to each site. The sites are designed and operated by Rural Press Interactive, out of the Canberra Times. We simply upload the data to a database that displays the material according to a template. We our news site comes on line, we will select our news stories and upload them to the site, which once again will be a standard design by RPL Interactive.

Paul Morgan, Manager, Reuters
Q: Describe how Reuters operates in Australia.

A: We are different from Reuters elsewhere, where there are full-service news agencies. Here we specialise in the political, business and finance sectors. We don’t offer a general news service here because historically we work here in partnership with AAP.

Q: How many Web sites do you feed?

A: In Australia, about 10. It’s not more because we don’t have sport or general news. We want to sign up another 30 or 40 soon.

Q: Are there specific conditions for using a feed?

A: Lots. Attribution and branding is important. No story, photo, video can appear on a site without it being branded. We offer customers a URL to our logo, and when customers click our stories, it serves up the logo. We have rules governing translations, but we give commonsense editorial freedom to edit stories.

Q: How much material goes out?

A: We generate around 150 stories per day. We have two main ways of providing stories. In most parts of the world we produce online reports, packaged news. The company remains nervous about giving away all of its content to the Internet when we have revenue at stake. We try to limit the amount of content people have access to. We give lists of stories and control how it is let out. We can also restrict the amount of material people are allowed to run from a feed. In Australia, we have no real online report yet. No content is developed specially for the Web. Content goes out by FTP, as NewsML, a variant of XML. We can also deliver ASCII files.

Q: How much material gets published?

A: The sites that have a right to use 48 run 12 to 20 stories per day. The majority of our customers are business-related. The ABC are able to use Reuters. We had problems with our lack of domestic coverage in the past, but we now have a requirement for it. We are getting into a partnership to supply this content.

Q: The AAP site has no story content but Reuters does. How does this affect the food chain of keeping your stories in the hand of agency subscribers?

A: It’s hard to know how you would collect your money if you went direct to consumers. Some sites pump out a lot of news. We wouldn’t give news away. We would probably prefer our site to be a brochure, and I think there is too much free content on it already. When you read a story on a subscriber’s site, we get money when it appears. On our own site, we don’t.

Q: You can document when people are reading your stories. Does this give you any data?

A: Yes, but not much happens with this in Australia. We feed Yahoo. On a daily basis, Yahoo are generating statistics for us. When someone opens up a Reuters headline, the revenue from that advertising is split between the site hosting it and us. It’s pay per view. In the USA, we know breaking news is the most popular thing we supply.

Q: Do you have any data on traffic?

A: Not much for Australia. Peak times for our content are 9 to 11 AM and then 5 to 7 PM, but this is financial news. People check the markets starting and finishing.

We don’t cover many stories from Australia. It’s mostly sport, or politics.
Q: What does the concentration of news feeds say about news diversity on the Internet?

A: It highlights how expensive it is to produce news. There would be more news out there if News Ltd and Fairfax saw themselves as wholesalers as well. Sites here do not have an enormous choice. There is not a clear business model among some of the people who use these feeds. Most people who contact Reuters to request news feeds do not proceed because they don’t want to pay for it, or have no business plan.

Carlos Monterio, Deputy Night Editor, Sydney Morning Herald site

PERSONAL NOTES: SMH Web team is entirely located on the same floor of the Sussex St offices of Fairfax as the normal journalistic team of the SMH print version. This produces synergy and close interaction between the teams. It allows them to be on top of stories, update their news. “The online media has grown from the newspaper environment. It is not an external thing”.

Other sites on the F2 network are located in the former Sydney casino site. This includes classified advertising.

The news production crew for the Sydney Morning Herald elected to stay in the same premises as the regular journalists. Team is reasonably large. Approximately a dozen people on duty at the site at any given moment. News production crew is highly focused on news production, and nothing else. Does not deal with advertising, F2, or business models. Suggests a possible immunity in “editorial corruption” in support of revenue models. News will be integrated into overall business models as a black box unit, instead of being internally readjusted. Nevertheless, Monterio claims news is tailored to appeal to the audience and provide a distinct service from the newspaper. Gossipy stories such as “Madonna has had a baby” are emphasised. “The sort of thing that people like to discuss when they are standing around the water cooler.” Monterio claims that this is different from tabloid journalism, but the difference is arguably rather thin. It is not clear if this truly reflects the audience’s wishes.

Around 40% of the news stories that appear in the paper apparently are published on the Web site.

“We have editors for the site that start in the early morning, examining news feed stories that happen outside of the newspaper’s production schedule. Events happen overseas when Australia is sleeping. Example: Concorde crash happened at 2 AM Australian time (July 26 in Australia). It was on the SMH site by 6 AM. Agencies put out the story by around 4 AM. Running updates were provided on the site throughout the morning, but the print version of the paper had no news on the crash.”

Q: Tell me about the video and audio people.

A: When they have a video or audio that’s newsworthy, they call the news editor, and he puts it up. Deployment of the crews is done in coordination with the main news editors for the paper, who plan the deployment of reporters. It’s a routine thing. Every now and then, the Web team thinks up stories that would not be suitable for the paper because they are audiovisual, such as
Q: Do these stories have text with them?

A: Sometimes, it depends on the subject. It depends on if we think the story lends itself to it, and how much resources you can get. We add our own material, but the paper is still the main source of our content. We look for stories that the paper may not be covering or may be treating only briefly. We do a lot of sub-sites on news happenings such as continuing stories.

About 70% of the site is legacy content, 30% is new. A year ago it was 90% legacy content. Original content will continue to grow in the future. The online editor, Tom Burton, sets the framework for the Web site independent of the paper. Web site reports to the board independently of the paper.

Q: How do you decide what to include from the paper?

A: We look for fresh content every night for the different news sections, and also for content that can be generated on our own. We have two full-time content reporters.

Q: How is breaking news handled?

A: We started an experiment three months ago, called a news trial, that involves our editors sitting at the paper’s news desk and interacting right through the morning, so we can put out breaking news as flashes on the site. Sometimes, breaking news is very small and local, and it does not go up on the site.

Most print journalists are not aware of how the Web can be used for breaking news. This is the whole idea of the trial. But we have had reporters filing 6-8 paragraphs straight away on other stories. This generally happens once per day.

The Age handles breaking stories differently to us. There is no common style with the different Fairfax papers. Stories from news feeds must be manually transferred to the site. A breaking news editor selects the stories and runs them. It is supposed to be updated every half hour, but sometimes it can take two hours for new stories to appear if there is nothing much happening. Stories are updated 7 AM to 8 PM on weekdays.

Q: Discuss traffic patterns on the site.

A: The major peak is at daytime. Office workers access it more than home users. 8 AM to 5 PM is the peak. This is why we have gone into breaking news.

Q: Discuss archives.

A: They are free for 3 months. Some stories are free for longer than this when they are on sub-sites such as the US election or the GM foods controversy, or NRMA float. If you go to the US election site, you get stories going back more than a year.

Q: Discuss working on the night shift.

A: Stories appear on the Web site before in print. Main goal of night shift is to put out the print version online. It is updated in the morning. First paper edition fixed at 9 PM. Goes up on the Web at 12:30 AM that night, or sometimes a bit later such as 1:30 or 2:00. If anything happens between 9 and 12:30, it will still be included in the Web site. This doesn’t always happen, but sometimes the site is immediately updated with overseas news, such as sports.
Q: Does putting the content up early harm sales of the newspaper?

A: If we have a very exclusive story to the SMH, we won’t put it on the Web. But if it’s a major story that everyone else has, we can run it. If the online team has an exclusive, we will run it online. We have our own reporters.

Q: Does the Web team ever feed content to the news team?

A: Yes, it happens in sport, and will happen during the Olympics, when we have people in places where print reporters aren’t. Stories from the Rugby site Rugby Heaven, also feed back.

There’s a lot of cross-promotion in the SMH for the Web site. Sometimes the extra content is multimedia, sometimes it’s content put together from news feeds and other publications. We have agreements with overseas publications to reprint content. There is an overall wish to move away from reliance on AAP and create original content for the site.

Rick Ferguson, Internet Development Officer, The Advocate

Q: What was the motivation for going online?

A: Our original motivation came through the recognition of the Internet as a future information and news resource. Our involvement began as early as 1996 when we commissioned a web development company to create an online presence. There are three tangible attractions for us: a) incremental revenue - through running additional ads to our print edition (value adding); b) cost saving - future online payment of accounts etc and c) protection of market.

Q: How is the site integrated into the organisation?

A: After initially creating our site through an agency we revisited the situation in 1999 and decided it would be better if we controlled our site onsite. The creation, maintenance and development is carried out by myself, a member of the newspaper’s IT section. I am also responsible for the company’s Intranet. The daily updates to our Internet site is carried out by the Editorial department.

Q: Are any changes made to the content when it is adapted for the Web?

A: The format is different of course and the style is adapted to the site’s visual style. The actual writing style is maintained as all articles are lifted from the printed edition.

Q: Discuss traffic patterns.

A: Our site is most popular during the morning hours 9 AM to 12 noon and early evening. Days vary but seem more concentrated around Thursdays and the weekend.

Q: What do you think the user wants?

A: I believe the web surfer wants more content. Online classifieds especially. More detailed weather reports etc. We have done no market research. We base most of our opinions on the feedback we receive through the site.

Q: How do you feel about the Internet challenging traditional news structures?

A: The Internet is a medium without limitation. I believe the market will dictate the acceptable and successful news structures. Interactivity is the key word: Inviting your reader to participate is expected far more on the Web than in traditional print.

Q: Discuss the online poll on your site.
A: The poll topic is derived from articles, themes or "crusades" we publish in our printed edition. It is very popular. Encouraged, we are just about to introduce a moderated discussion site on local issues as an evolution to our Letters to The Editor print feature.

Q: Have there been any surprises in running the Web site?

A: The number of emails from international readers. We are running a comment forum about a local issue concerning renaming a local footy ground. We have had a broad section of replies including well known local identities.

Q: How can publishers best generate revenue for their sites?

A: I'm not sure but I'd be very happy to find out what others think on this issue!

Angela Cole, Webmaster, Network Ten

Q: How is the Web site produced?

A: It's a small operation. I am the only person who works on the news during the week. On the weekend, one of the news producers updates the site. My background is as a television news producer. The program I was working on was cancelled, so I moved into Internet news. Apart from the news, I maintain other content on the site.

Q: What is your routine like?

A: In the mornings, around 8:30, I will delete yesterday's stories. I work off the newsroom's computer system. As Ten has a bulletin at 11:30, I use the scripts for that as a basis. I could set the computer to delete stories at midnight, but that would leave it without content for a few hours. I also have to select content for the email bulletin. All the stories go out on the email service. People can select the categories they want. I have at least one story in each category. The email has the first paragraph of the story and a hyperlink to the full story on the Web site. I will work on other parts of the site during the day, then update it later with material from the 5:00 news.

Q: How do you adapt the content?

A: Some stories are all right, but television news is written for the ear. They are sometimes like shorthand. I have to correct spelling, grammar, add pronouns. Also, in our computer system, I have to write out the sound grabs fully. I have to add people's names because there's no super titles. I haven't worked for print journalism, but I don't think a print article works as well on the Net as it could because the screen is so different to a newspaper. Stories should be shorter and have more impact. Our stories are longer than television stories. I often go into AAP and bolster our stories with information from that. This is a television site, and I don't think people want print-style articles. I also think people want quick stories on the Net.

Q: When is the site more popular?

A: There is a peak when the news email goes out, at roughly 10:45, which comes out before the news broadcast. We have more than 7,500 subscribers. Once a week, I send out an e-newsletter.

Q: Tell me about the Meet the Press discussion board.

A: We didn't get much traffic. It isn't mentioned in the programs. But we got some intelligent comments. Most message boards need to be cleared of filth.
Q: What was the motivation for starting the site?

A: We only went online in April 1999, which was way behind every other station. This didn’t make sense when Ten is a youth-oriented station. We needed to catch up. We’re in flux right now because there is a joint venture with Village Roadshow in the works. We don’t know what the site will look like, but they don’t want the news on the joint venture.

Q: Do you ever interact with other journalists in this big, open office?

A: Because I have worked here for four years, I talk to people. I can ask news people questions about certain stories if there’s something I don’t understand. But generally I work on my own.

Sandy Burgoyne, Internet Editor, Warrandyte Diary

Q: What was your original motivation for creating your online service?

A: A person within the community who was keen on the Internet offered to put selected Diary stories on the Internet about three years ago. The Editor said that he “grasped the opportunity” as he saw it as “a valuable tool”. (This arrangement lasted a few months until the person providing the HTML skills moved interstate and the Diary was without an Internet presence for about six months until I became Internet editor.)

Q: What specific advantages did you perceive in going online?

A: A wider readership. Warrandyte people are great travellers and many move interstate or overseas with their jobs. They can now stay in touch with their local newspaper via the Internet. We know from the email we receive that some people also use our site to research Warrandyte if they are planning to visit from overseas.

Q: How is your online service integrated into your overall organisation?

A: We are a community organisation and all work done on the Diary is honorary. With both Webmasters the arrangement arose from an offer made by someone who had the necessary skills. In my case I have been a contributor of photos, news items and features to the Diary for more than 20 years. The change-over from print/Pagemaker form to formatted HTML pages is quite complicated.

Q: How does the format and style of online content differ from offline content?

A: The format is different but the content is not changed.

Q: What do you think the Web user wants? Have you done any market research?

A: We have performed no market research, but we do get emails. All comments are encouraging, with Warrandyte people living overseas and interstate being particularly grateful for our online service.

Q: How do you feel about citizen reporting without the mediation of journalists?

This is already happening. We received an unsolicited email this week telling us that Martin Bryant is innocent. (I’m not the best person to send this to as I lost a friend to the killer at Port Arthur.) I believe that news moves away from the journalist at the community’s peril. I know...
that many news consumers consider journalists to be a rabid band of tabloid exhibitionists and in a very few cases they may be correct. But without the journalist’s role of the gatekeeper and the heavy responsibility that goes with that office “the news” will descend into a mire of advertorial, personal biases and crankism.

Q: How do you feel about Interactivity between publishers and their audience?

A: Our only experience of this is our email link, which is used as much for simple “hello” and “thanks for the Diary” messages, as it is for letters to the editor.

Q: How can publishers best generate revenue for their sites?

A: This is a problem that we don’t have, as we are a not-for-profit publication. Our hard copy Diary sells advertising space (very successfully) and we make enough for our expenses and the occasional new computer or software update that we need.

Ulrike Eichmeyer, Office Manager, Weekly Times

Q: Why did you go online?

A: We need to back up printed communications with new technology. I don’t think any newspaper can avoid this, especially with the younger generation. The Web site started in September 1999.

Q: Were there any precise advantages?

A: No. Economically, it is not advantageous.

Q: How is the Web production integrated into the organisation?

A: We are too small to have a separate division. The paper is finished first, then I grab the stories I think would be relevant on the Web. We try to give it the same appearance as the written publication. I am not the editor, I am the office manager. The stories selected for the Web are those that have a broader appeal, and also are relevant for ex residents who want to keep in touch. Stories are emailed in a raw format to the Webmaster, who is another entity off-site. They handle layout, design.

Q: Do you receive many emails?

A: They come in from all over the world. I have inquiries about relatives, especially from the UK.

Q: Have you done any market research?

A: No.

Q: How do you feel about citizen reporting?

A: I don’t think it’s scary. Professional publications will be sought out deliberately. They are easier to find, and have credibility.

Anna Featherstone, Web Manager, Yahoo Australia

Q: Yahoo is a major portal that delivers all sorts of content. How is news delivery perceived within the context of Yahoo’s overall mission?
A: Yahoo! is all about providing people with compelling services that are important to their daily lives, so news plays a huge part in that. That said, provision of news is just one of the numerous services we offer our users (e.g., shopping, auctions, communication tools, movie info etc), so though it’s important, it’s not overriding.

Q: Discuss traffic patterns.

A: Sorry, not something we can release publicly. I can say though that when a big event happens we notice a massive surge in the number of people using the Net to find details.

Q: Most of Yahoo!’s principal news comes from the ABC. Discuss the mechanics of this arrangement.

A: We run the ABC stories unmodified, that’s because our aim is to aggregate great content and we go to the people who do the news the best. therefore, Yahoo! Doesn’t have editorial control, that’s the way we, our users and content partners like it and it seems to work.

Q: Is the approach taken by Yahoo Australia any different from its international counterpart?

A: No, we all work pretty much the same way, we’re just at different stages in market maturity. A relatively uniform approach is crucial because the global Yahoo! Network is integrated, so that people from all over the world can customise their My Yahoo! Service.

Richard Walsh, Editor, Zeitgeist Gazette

Q: What was the rationale behind creating the Zeitgeist Gazette?

A: It wasn’t so much a belief in the Internet as a belief in the need for a daily commentary on the various news media in Sydney. Ultimately, we found that only the Net could provide a medium for what we wanted to do. People who are interested in news read the morning papers. What they read is already out of date. The papers also contradict each other and are selective with what they print. We wanted to draw attention to the fact that the news values of the paper are very different, and are contradictory, and the papers were out of date. Most papers have a deadline of 9 or 10 at night.

We wanted to present at 3 PM an update and an annotation. The only other way we could have done this is by fax, which is not as instantaneous and does not look as good.

Most people want to be Net publishers first. We started with an idea for content first.

I had a career in print. Much of the energy in a print publication is taking up with printing, distribution, etc. Only a little is spent on journalism. The liberating thing about Zeitgeist is that most energy could be spent on journalism.

Q: How did the routine work?

A: Two of us, David Salter and I, wrote most of it. My day started at 5:00 am when I would wake up and listen to 702 AM ABC radio, to the Wall St Report. Next, I would hear the ABC news, then Philip Clark reads the newspaper headlines from the day on 702. So I could work out what the stories of the day were. Phil Clark also went through what was going to happen that day too. I would take a quick shower and at 5:30 listen to the 2UE news, which has different news values. Then I would listen to Alan Jones and the issues he would examine. With all this in my head, I would get in my car at 6:00 and drive to work in 15 minutes. My chief of Staff would arrive at 6, having read the papers on the bus, I would then read the papers, taking notes. My Co-editor (Salter) would arrive, and at 7:15 three of us would have an editorial meeting. We also had monitors who listened to various radio stations and TV programs like
7:30 report, dateline, etc from the night before. So we got a sense of what people had said from the night before. David and I would then decide which topics we wanted to write about that day. Some subjects were dominant news. What we were looking for was different accounts of the same news. Papers would reach different conclusions about the same events. Some events were also too late for the papers. We wanted to make sense of this cacophony.

At 7:30 we would start writing. Our chief of staff Bob Mills would pass updates from John Laws and other sources to me. We would write until about 1:00 pm. We could all see each other's copy. Our paper was divided into 4 sections, and sometimes we would allocate the stories ourselves, but sometimes Bob would move them to different sections. Bob would do the Zeitgag photo parody. We combined proofing and subbing together. At 3:00 it's on the Net.

Afterwards, I would put out an email edition of the content, which was cheaper. The text would be boiled down to 4 pages for the Zeitwatch Express. On Fridays, we brought out a "best of" weekly edition.

Q: Why publish at 3:00 PM?

A: It was connected with my personal experiences of liking to take a break from work at 3 PM. I used to do this by reading the afternoon tabloid papers, when they still existed. We thought people would read it for about 20 minutes. 3 PM was also a good time because we could report on the contents of the London and New York papers. We also wanted to be able to monitor Alan Jones and John Laws, who have a lot of influence in Sydney. All of these factors pointed to 3:00.

When you work in print, you don't know who your readers are, but we even knew the names of our subscribers. The bulk of them came online between 3 and 5 PM, most between 3 and 3:30. The people who subscribed obviously loved it enough to log in promptly.

Because we were charging a lot, we felt that the subscribers would be people in work who would convince their employers to pay for it, so it was important to publish while people were at work.

With our weekly, which came out at 6 PM on Friday, we had people trying to persuade us to publish it earlier while they were at work. Some people stayed at work to wait for it. 90% of the access was between 3 and 5 PM.

Q: You didn't update more than once daily.

A: No. We said we were publishers using the Net, not Net publishers. We were taking advantage of the Web, but we did not feel compelled to supply updates. This is not hot updates. This is cool analysis. However, sometimes, we would revise stories a day later and say we were totally wrong.

Q: Any comments on demographics or navigation?

A: We know that the average reader stayed for 23 minutes. Some people would stay for less or longer. We only did 2 detailed studies of this. In November, the average was 18 minutes, in February, it was 23. Our core audience had increased in that time.

Q: Does this length of login affect the quantity of material?

A: This was a discussion point. I had originally wanted shorter articles, but David felt that because the subscription was expensive, people wouldn't feel that they were getting value. I hoped that he would understand that there is value in selectivity and the art of compression. I think we probably asked people for more time than they had to spare. Originally, when you checked in, you went straight for 24 hours, then the contents page. But later we put the contents page first. This was a compromise because people could choose the items they wanted to read.
Originally, we thought that people would read linearly, and we found this was how people read it. We did have some overseas subscribers, too.

Q: Were you too Sydney-centric?

A: Our view was that we could only physically comment on Sydney. We did have interstate monitors, including monitoring 3AW, but we are Sydney people. Even reading The Age online doesn’t give you the same experience as being there. News Ltd only put their material up at 8:30 in the morning. If we had been successful in Sydney, we would have started a separate operation in Melbourne. This would have been less expensive than the Sydney operation.

While we were operating, we had (Crikey editor) Stephen Mayne helping to bring down (Victorian Premier) Kennett with jeffed.com.

Q: How do you feel about defying the traditional structure of news production?

A: I feel that Zeitgeist was too early. It could be re-launched in five years, when everyone is on the Net and people are less fidgety. If this becomes a prototype for publishing in the future, the people will be able to concentrate more on journalism than physical delivery. Printing presses are very expensive. The Web does not require as much capital.

Q: How do you feel about citizen reporting?

A: It’s a worry. I think that people who are on the Net have lost all sense of provenance. If it’s a paranoid with a conspiracy theory or a seasoned journalist with a story, they all seem to have equal weight. There’s a fine line here, though, with serious maverick journalists. We are in an undiscriminating phase. The medium is dominating the message. People are so transfixed with the medium that they are making very few demands of it. It’s like television in its early days. It took us 10 years to start demanding quality.

Q: How do you feel about interactivity?

A: Not much on our site. I think it’s an advantage on the Net and a good journalistic tool. There is a role for people to write in like letters to the editor in a traditional publication, but we have to find a way of converting someone who posts to a chat room into conventional journalism. We have to make people understand that they need to judge things. There needs to be a gatekeeper, but how do you do this without too much censorship or placing value judgements on people.

Q: What do you think about news on portal sites?

A: I think it devalues news. Most of this news is correct, but it’s underselling news. The attitude seems to be all you need is headlines. But this is only the beginning of the story. We are living in a world where a lot of people are satisfied with this.

Q: If people are so easily satisfied, does this affect the design of sites, or vice versa?

A: I don’t know. If we had stayed in business, I think portals would have asked us for content. They were beginning to believe that news feeds were bland, and smart marketers would want to provide something better.

Q: Any comments on running a subscriber-based publication?

A: It needs more capital than we had. I think we were optimistic about the time it would take for us to become viable. I still think it is the only way to exist. If it were advertiser-supported, the revenue would never pay for the underlying cost. Television was once free, but now we have pay television. We are in a user-pays world.

Q: Does a subscriber-only publication attract different readers?
A: Totally. There is no room for half-hearted readers. People either love you or hate you.

Q: That suggests that subscribers want sharply differentiated publications.

A: Yes. You need to have a niche of devoted readers.

Q: Does revenue models influence the other publications?

A: I don’t think anyone else has a sensible revenue model, and this will be their undoing. The bubble will burst. They are working on the belief that if you have eyeballs, you can make money from it. Some are just amateur sites, which is nice.

Q: What is the path of the future?

A: Nobody knows for sure. One reason why everyone is investing so widely is that nobody knows what will succeed. We won’t know until this medium settles down and people stop surfing.

End of Appendix C