

# Poynter.

## INTEROFFICE MEMO

Thursday, January 29, 2004

TO: Karen Dunlap, Janet Weaver, Paul Pohlman, Bill Mitchell, Al Tompkins  
FROM: Howard I. Finberg  
SUBJECT: Proposal for Web+10 Seminar/Conference

Anniversaries are important. We mark milestones so we can celebrate the past and look towards the future. Online journalism has reached a very important milestone period in its short history. Among the dozens of noteworthy dates in the very brief history of online news are:

- March, 1994: Access Atlanta, the first newspaper site on Prodigy, is launched by the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*
- July, 1994: *Raleigh News and Observer* goes to the net, launching the NandoTimes
- December, 1994: Poynter goes online with a BBS system
- January, 1995: Mercury Center Web launches, complete with advertising
- April, 1995: *USA Today* launches a direct-dialup service that actually is hosted on CompuServe
- April, 1995: Eight major newspaper publishing companies announce formation of New Century Network, a content consortium

And while marking these anniversaries would be interesting and nostalgic, there is a more important purpose. During the past 10 years online editors and journalists and even publishers have learned a great deal. What we take as "conventional wisdom" however, did not start out that way. Hard lessons were learned. These lessons provide the foundations for the development of a new form of journalism and a new type of information medium.

It is time for the Poynter Institute to celebrate the past and, more important, help journalists look toward the future.

I would like to organize a conference/seminar on this topic for late this year or early 200. Using the model of "Planning Your Election Coverage," this seminar would be an opportunity for online editors and journalists to dive deep in key topics. Attendance would include a combination of industry leaders and working managers. Poynter would also seek out some of the pioneers in this field to come as participants and speakers.

Among the topics / sessions might that could be explored:

- **The evolution of journalism on the Web:** how the technology has shaped the news
- **Lessons learned from readers:** what they want [and don't] from online news sites
- **Truth and convergence:** what really works and why [and practical and academic exploration]
- **"The eyes have it":** understanding and working with the new EyeTrack research
- **New media, old ethics:** revisiting the credibility issues for online news

- It's not your father's gadget: how technology is shaping how journalists work [inside and outside the newsroom]
- Reading news, but not newspapers: the Internet-only news consumer and other changing media habits
- Sight and sound: the emerging Web senses
- You provide, but I drive: the interactivity challenge facing journalism when readers are in control

These are just a few of the potential subject areas we could cover in such a conference. The format for the sessions would be a combination of presentation, discussion and small group work.

And this conference ought to use all of Poynter's new ideas about e-learning, with additional discussions before and after the in-person meeting, using News University as a platform.

But wait, there's more. We should plan to take the teaching from this conference into both Poynter Online and News University. And, perhaps, publish a special Poynter Report that could be a handbook to guide online journalism into the next 10 years.

The planning for such a conference—assuming someone says “yes” —needs to cut across a number of groups: broadcast/online, visual journalism, leadership, ethics and writing and reporting. In other words, it will be important that everyone has a chance to contribute to the planning and execution of this potentially important seminar.

It is my goal to write a number of stories marking some of the key milestones. If we have approval, we could use those events to solicit participants and ideas for the seminar. We could collect stories from various pioneers—lessons learned that would provide additional learning.

I would be glad to put together other material if needed. Please let me know if you have any questions.

P.S. Shortly after completing this memo, Robin Sloan posted an item to Convergence Chaser that is very relevant:

On Tuesday, New York Times Digital CEO Martin Nisenholtz spoke to the Software & Information Industry Association in New York City about... well, about Pong.

He said:

Pong was one of those magical moments in computing when an entirely new way of creating was popularized. It was the spark that led to a multi-billion dollar industry that today earns more revenues than filmed entertainment. It happened because the elements of technology came together in a way that enabled the creative community – in this case computer programmers (there were no videogame specialists in those days) to make an experience that was just good enough to engage millions of people.

Now, he says, the Pong moment has come for nytimes.com, which he thinks "will evolve from sorting, distributing and making accessible content created principally for other formats, to creating **content that is native to the computing world** from which we evolved."

We need to have Martin Nisenholtz come to Poynter to explore this issue and how creating “native content” impacts the world of journalists and journalism.

Cc: Julie Moos, Robin Sloan, Larry Larsen, Anne Conneen, Steve Outing, Matt Thompson