

Future design takes shape at API

Two dozen movers and shakers in the field of newspaper design pondered the substance and form of 21st century newspapers at the American Press Institute's annual J. Montgomery Curtis Memorial Seminar.

The round-table seminar, conducted at the institute in Reston, Va., Sept. 11-13, used as a focal point hypothetical front-pages dated 2000 and beyond that were designed by participants and posted on the walls of the seminar room.

At the center of the designers' circle stood their silent, but influential, electronic partner: the Apple Computer Inc. Macintosh, which got frequent kudos for advancing the place of graphics in newspapers.

Allowing their imaginations free rein, the designers created front pages that sported display ads, lotto tickets, an unabashed use of color, holograms, and stories tagged with bar codes or phone numbers guiding the reader to more in-depth information accessible by personal computer.

Some of the front pages suggested newspapers will turn to a format larger than today's broadsheet, making room for ads, while others predicted the common magazine dimensions of 8 1/2-by-11 inches would prevail for the sake of portability.

The designers also leaped directly to versions of a front page that could be called up on a reader's personal computer or delivered via a facsimile machine.

"The spread of predictions goes from a mildly enhanced front page that we could produce today if the top editors and publishers would just go along, to a completely interactive electronic newspaper," observed publication designer Roger Black of Black Inc. in New York City. Formerly chief art director at The New York Times and Newsweek, Black recently directed the redesign of the San Francisco Examiner.

Despite the display of electronic front pages, a prevailing theme of the seminar was that newspapers won't go the way of the Pony Express when trains came along.

A newspaper's virtues of portability and scannability will continue to offset the detractions of high newsprint and transportation costs, the designers predicted.

"There's nothing like taking a newspaper outside in the park and reading it under a tree to demonstrate what the computer terminal paradigm is up against," observed Black.

W. John Lees, partner in the graphic design firm of Herman and Lees Associates Inc. in Cambridge, Mass., anonymously quoted one critic of electronic news delivery who likened it to "putting a garden hose in



C. David Rambo

Consultant Miller (right) leads working-group discussion on future newspaper design.

your mouth and turning on the faucet."

Paying heed to the "ever-expanding wealth of available data," Robert Lockwood, president of News Graphics in New Tripoli, Pa., and Edward D. Miller, former publisher of The Morning Call in Allentown, Pa., and now a newspaper consultant based in Princeton, N.J., predicted journalists will become more essential because "readers will seek human intervention to help navigate" the sea of information.

"The existence of databases does not guarantee their use or comprehension," Lockwood and Miller said as an introduction to their futuristic front page. They were among the participants who outlined a multi-delivery approach to newspapering in the future, with a core newspaper, special zoned sections, a facsimile service and a PC interactive database.

In a humanizing touch, they placed at the top of their year-2000 front page a chatty personal letter from the editor summarizing the news.

The group returned again and again to the irony of having an overload of information side by side with the anguishing problem of illiteracy.

Marty Petty, vice president/deputy executive editor of The Hartford Courant, said for the health of the industry newspapers would have to consider publishing separate editions for the less educated as well as multilingual versions. She asked, "Can we survive long enough to outlast (illiteracy)?"

Sara Giovanitti, president of Giovanitti Design Group Inc. of New York City and former design director for The Boston

Globe, offered the idea of newspapers' fighting illiteracy by sponsoring TV programs that would use newspapers to teach reading.

Consultant Miller suggested newspapers may have to bypass the problem of illiteracy by targeting their product to a better educated audience "as they do in Third World countries where newspapers are profitable."

To capture readers' attention in a frenzied world that will press them increasingly for time, informational graphics must play a bigger role in presentations of newspaper stories, agreed most of the group, who represented the *crème de la crème* of the field. Many are founders or officers, past and present, of the Society of Newspaper Design.

Howard I. Finberg, assistant managing editor of The Arizona Republic, said the overwhelming majority of editors he questioned predicted graphics will play a greater part in newspapers in the year 2000. But this priority seems to shrink when talk turns to money: The editors told Finberg they would spend 70 percent of any extra funds for reporting and editing, and only 10 percent for graphics.

Seminar participants asked themselves what was stopping tomorrow's newspaper designs from arriving today. The impasse, they felt, was in the offices of the decision makers—the editors and publishers—who are slow to warm up to change.

Roger F. Fidler, Knight-Ridder Inc.'s corporate director for graphics and newsroom technology, offered this terse assessment: "You've got to redesign the publisher to redesign the paper." —*Pamela M. Terrell*