



INTEROFFICE MEMO

Wednesday, January 08, 1997

TO: Don Henninger, Steve Knickmeyer
FROM: Howard I. Finberg
SUBJECT: The Future

I thought our conversations yesterday were great and I appreciated the opportunity to share my ideas about the skills that journalists will need in the future.

While we might have gotten some specifics down on paper, I wanted to give you some other thoughts that have been rattling around my brain. Some of these ideas we've talked about; some I know you are thinking about today; and some are different.

The overall direction that I see journalism [and journalists] heading in the next five to 10 years is one of multi-skilled individuals. These will be the people that will succeed and prosper in the next century. In a sense, we will be going back to our roots – the small town publisher/editor/reporter/ad salesman – to find models that put more responsibility for all aspects of journalism in the hands of the source. If good journalism is good story telling, let's put all the story telling tools into everyone's hands and give them the access to information to help tell their stories.

In the past, we have looked for and encouraged separation between departments and between members of a department [i.e., a reporter can't edit, an editor can't write, etc.] While this might have been for a good cause – getting out a single printed product, I think we agree that model won't work in the future.

When I joined the Republic, I thought a separate design department¹ made the most sense; with the technology we had available, it did. However, with today's [and tomorrow's] technology, that centralized department – as

¹ Even sillier in retrospective was the separation of the art department and design department. That was based solely on technology – the number of pagination machines and the cost and effort of training artists to use technology that was difficult. So, in a sense, we created a "graphics factory," because they had their own special technology – the Macintosh – to create charts and maps. With evolving technology, those tools are now available to everyone – everyone with a computer and the right software could create maps on the fly and charts for any story.



an example – makes less sense. We talked about this briefly, but let me state it again: it is not that we want every copy editor to be a designer or every designer to be a copy editor. There will still be the need for specialized talents. However, the artificial separation of skills based on technology will be eliminated [and much sooner than the five to 10-year time frame that I'm using].

Here's another example of where we -- the industry and/or PNI -- might be going: the role of photographer versus the role of taking or getting pictures.

Technology has come so far that "goof proof" pictures [in digital format] are very possible. Why do we want more photographs, since we don't have room in the paper for all the photos that we current take? Other delivery methods will consume huge amounts of visual material that we don't have. Why not consider having every reporter carry a digital camera and take pictures at every assignment?

Continuing with photography, I wonder how we'll develop the skills to deal with video images? Should this also be a requirement for future journalists? What are the editing skills necessarily to put together compelling stories that combine words, audio, still images and video?² In many respects, I consider the Web to be more akin to broadcast than to print.

And yet, the Web isn't anything like broadcast. Broadcast – the one-to-many model – is very much like print as it pushes information to a consumer in a very linear fashion. If you come into the middle of a TV news report, you might have many questions and no way to get answers. In print, at least you can start at the top of the story and move to the bottom. With the Web, neither model works.

On the Web, you tell stories in non-linear fashion. You need to tell those stories in such a way that the reader/consumer/user can understand the story regardless of where he entered the presentation. This is a different way of presenting news.

From an editing view point, that means taking linear stories and "decomposing" them into Web format. That is a new and developing skill that will become essential in the future.

There is another area that we didn't talk about that I urge you give some consideration – interactivity with readers. The "new media" demands response, since it is basically a one to one communications method. I wonder whether we should require that from all our staff members - the ability or understanding of effective customer communication. Understanding how to talk to customers isn't a skill set that we have required of many in the

² And I'll skip over the issues of audio, although that is likely something we'll want to explore sooner than video.



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newsroom; it is something we could learn by watching our advertising and circulation departments work with their customers. Answering reader questions – both via phone and electronically – is a strategic advantage that newspapers will have as they battle companies like US West and Microsoft in the local content arena.

These are just some quick thoughts based on our conversations yesterday. Thanks for letting me share them.

cc: John Oppedahl, Pam Johnson, Toni Antonellis