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FAX 602-271-8044**

**To Dr. Juan A. Giner
Innovacion Periodistica
School of Journalism
University of Navarra**

Dear Juan:

I hope this information is delivered to you quickly and that you find the responses helpful. The Reports sound most interesting and perhaps you will be able to send along a copy. I hope that the Summit Meeting of Editors and Publishers is a huge success and if I can be of any other assistance please feel free to call upon me. (I am sending this via fax. I will also send along a copy via Mac disk (MS Word 4.0))

Sincerely,

Howard I. Finberg

The Electronic Newspaper of the Future

Response to Questionnaire

By Howard I. Finberg

Author, "Visual Editing. A Graphic Guide for Journalists"
Assistant Managing Editor/ Features and Visuals,
The Arizona Republic

1. The newspaper industry's traditional methods of printing will most likely be unchanged by the year 2000. It would take a major technological change — with a low price tag and a high return on investment—to force newspapers to give up their current printing methods.

Except for the improvement of printing technology to allow newspapers to use more and better color advertisements, photography and graphics, there is little to suggest there will be a significant change in printing operations.

Forward looking newspapers, however, will strive to develop new methods of distribution. Gone will be the last of the youth carriers; they will be replaced by adults using cars or trucks so that they can cover a larger geographical area. This change will also force publishers to examine other methods of getting a product into the hands of the consumer. Shared delivery operations — using the motor fleet of a company like Federal Express or United Parcel Service — could allow the sale and distribution of specialized products. These companies today have large number of trucks that sit idle at the very time a newspaper needs to deliver its product.

To assist such a distribution system, new methods will be needed to package specific products after they come off the printing press. The year 2000 could see sophisticated inserting and routing systems so that a customer can receive a tailored newspaper.

2. The news information market place will be very crowded in the year 2000, a shopping center full of ideas and systems. Already the industry is wondering what role it will have as others get into position to perform tasks traditionally done by newspapers. Consider all of the "pipelines" that are already in a consumer's home: telephone wire; cable wire; television receivers; radio receivers; computer modem.

All of these devices provide access to an information marketplace far larger than the printed pages of a newspaper. However, this is not to suggest that newspapers will "disappear" or shrink. Quite the contrary: Newspapers have a tremendous amount of information — mostly unused — that could be sold to both the customer/reader and to other vendors or distributors of information. The typical newspaper delivers perhaps five percent of the total amount of information it currently receives and throws away 95 percent.

By the year 2000, newspapers could offer readers access to that "95 percent" in the form of electronic gateways. Or, perhaps, sell different types of that information to other vendors (the telephone company) for distribution via phone lines. Newspapers will need to see themselves as being in the "information business" not the newspaper business. (See response to Question #5.)

3. The **Screen Paper** is here and now. The problem is that the paper isn't paper and the screen is just like the computer screen you

are using now to read this article (or similar articles). There will not be a screen newspaper to replace the paper newspaper that we receive in the morning or afternoon. Rather, additional news information will be transmitted via computer and modem/phone lines to those sophisticated news consumers.

The texture will probably be more readable than current monitors; e.g. type will be easier to read. In addition, the images presented will have the clarity of high quality magazine photographs.

Rather than using keyboard or mouse, the news consumer will have the option of a touch screen. By using his/her finger, the news consumer could receive additional information by touching specific points on the screen. As for "paper" copies of the information, a laser printer could be attached to provide a "hard copy" of the information. (Readers will still want to portability of a paper news product.)

The practical use of such information comes back to addressing a very narrow part of the marketplace — the news sophisticated reader. This individual will pay for specific news and information that can assist him/her in career, investing and time management (the ability to do more with less time).

4. The future of the **Fax Paper** is mixed, at best. This is a hybrid form of communication — neither old nor new, neither newspaper or computer. Fax has the feel of paper (old technology) and the speed of a computer (new technology).

There are several disadvantages to current fax technology:

- It requires a special type of machine and paper
- It requires a special phone line (generally) for home use
- The quality (currently) of transmission does not lend itself

to the presentation of visuals

All of these drawbacks, however, could change as technology improves. If phone lines could be “split” and route calls to the fax machine automatically without cutting off regular voice communication, the potential for home use will increase greatly. Furthermore, the introduction of new fax transmission method (group four) could give receivers high quality visuals in black & white and color. But these are currently big “ifs”.

Assuming all of these disadvantages can be overcome, then a fax paper could take the place of many of the functions handled by electronic mail (via computer) and overnight delivery systems. However, given the cost factors involved in long-distance communication, it is unlikely there will be a fax paper as large or as complete as the daily newspaper delivery to the front door every morning.

(An aside: A newspaper could develop a “tip” sheet that could be sent to key readers and customers, giving them an advance look at tomorrow’s newspaper. In a world where power is

knowledge, such advance knowledge could benefit those willing to pay.)

5. Can the current publishers/editors adapt to new forms of electronic publishing? If they don't, they will not be doing their jobs for too much longer.

Publishing, like any other industry, is a profit drive proposition. If it doesn't have the leaders in place to deal with new forms of technology, then, eventually, it will find new leaders and put together teams of traditional and electronic editors and journalists.

However, history and conventional wisdom suggests that newspapers are slow to adapt to changing cultural and economic forces. This suggests that they will not embrace the newer forms of communication with open arms. But to bury one's head in the sand is to end up with your backside exposed — a very dangerous position.

At the start of the 20th century, the railroads companies thought of themselves as being in the *railroad business*. If they had thought of themselves as being in the *transportation business*, travelers might be flying on Sante Fe Airlines or Penn Central Airlines.

Newspaper editors and publisher need to understand that they are in the *information business* and not the *newspaper business*.

They have information to sell, regardless of the form it takes to reach the reader. Unfortunately, only a few see the road ahead; too many are looking behind at the road they have just traveled.

If the current leadership fails in understanding the market place or fails to adjust to the needs of the news consumer, then the consequences will be two-fold:

- Many more companies will go out of business
- Many more companies will be bought by those who understand the needs of the marketplace and replace those publishers and editors who do not.

The future will belong to the quick and smart. Be neither quick nor smart and you'll be out of the game.

End of Howard I. Finberg's responses to the questionnaire regarding The Electronic Newspaper of the Future.