



Phoenix Newspapers, Inc.

INTEROFFICE MEMO

Wednesday, October 09, 1996

TO: John Oppedahl
FROM: Howard I. Finberg
SUBJECT: New technology and new newsroom

Phoenix Newspapers was invited by CCI Europe to participate in a seminar to help address questions of changing news organization and newspapers future technology needs. In addition to myself, other participants included senior executives from the Chicago Tribune, the Ft. Lauderdale Sun Sentinel, the Orlando Sentinel, De Telegraaf of the Netherlands, Ullstein Verlag of Germany, Politiken of Denmark and the Helsingin Sanomat of Finland. The group was joined by the management team from CCI, headed by Carsten Christensen, managing director. The seminar was facilitated by Gunther Bottcher, managing director of IFRA.

It is CCI's stated intention to use the information shared at the seminar to help plan its direction during the next two to five years. CCI would like to shift from an engineer-driven company to one focused on meeting customer needs in advance of the marketplace. In addition, CCI would like to have its leading customers become closer in the development process. The newspaper executives who attended were very enthusiastic about this approach. They felt it was in the best interest of all for a healthy and progressive software/integrator in the newspaper industry.¹

The following is a brief summary of the proceedings:

First, the good news – other newspapers share our technology strategy.² PNI's vision of an integrated and fully connected system is a concept shared by all of the participants and being implemented at those newspapers today.

Now, the not-so-good news – it will take a lot of work to get to where we want to be. Not only technical or system work, but striving to address issues of how we organize, train, and deploy our workforce.

¹ If only SII had listen to its customers – including PNI – 10 years ago. It would “own” this market. Instead SII – I worry – is headed into non-newspaper markets or out of business.

² Here is a quick update on CCI's newest customers: Hartford Courant, USA Today are working on projects; San Jose Mercury News has started its PSD process. Under discussion are contracts with the Washington Post and San Antonio Express News. Hartford will start its PSD early next year, after Indianapolis Star News begins its project planning.

The workforce issues will be the toughest – with or without union considerations.³ We like our journalistic traditions and the current workflow; the organizational structure easy to understand and manage.

However, companies will need to adjust their business processes – as they have in other industries – to reap the full benefit of their technology investment. Flying a jet between two cities 50 miles apart is a waste of equipment.

The future holds more products – the Politiken – even publishes maps of Western and parts of Central Eastern Europe – more services and more types of delivery methods. To achieve this goal, newspaper companies will need a new type of news or content management at the section editor or assistant level.

THE NEW NEWSROOM

In much the same way PNI [and other companies] have developed advertising sales teams, the CCI seminar group predicted there will be strong focus on developing the concept of “content teams” for news and information products. Rather than having the staff focused solely on coverage areas, many of the journalists and support staff members would work in editorial teams focused around products.

To achieve that type of organization, more skills and training are vital. In addition, the “unspoken” single task [i.e., *I’m a copy editor, I don’t do writing; I’m a reporter, I don’t do editing*] functions will need to be examined and changed. The expectations are that organizations will not hire much beyond today’s workforce levels. While the team might include specialists – those with technical skills, perhaps – the goal would be to have multi-skilled specialists. The day of the “designer only” is coming to an end.⁴

One of the key issues discussed – and where CCI will need to focus on in the future – is the development of content management tools. The goal is to help the newsroom make decisions earlier in the process so that content – news stories, for example – can be “pre-purposed” rather than re-purposed. [Re-purposed means taking the content already pushed through the production system and then re-use it for another medium; *pre-purpose*

³ If the U.S. newspaper industry thinks it has labor issues, a quick discussion with our European colleagues can brighten your outlook. Not only do they have labor issues, but many of those issues are government regulations.

⁴ One of the executives from IFRA told of a recent university study that concluded there are about 15 different design shapes inside a newspaper. In addition, several Germany newspapers use a system of “templates” for all of their pages. The content executives have mini-views of these templates numbered on cards and refer to the type of design by these numbers. Stories are written to length; photos cropped to fit. While that might be extreme, it is a system that might be worth understanding so we might understand its multi-disciplined content team approach.

means making a decision early in the process that a story will be written for and published in multiple mediums.]

To accomplish these “pre-purpose” goals, every news and content decision maker needs to have the tools and training to understand the mediums the company works uses for publishing. In addition, there will be a tremendous need for story, art and other element tracking and archiving. As you know, keeping tracking of all the elements for print is difficult enough. What happens when we add video, audio and other data types?

Other issues involving the need for more content management, involve the management of the databases of information. As this process develops, we’ll need to make sure we can find what we want. Re-use of this information means the staff needs to have access, not just the customer.

NEW COMMUNICATION TOOLS

The future newsroom team members will need to work in a collaborative and/or cooperative environment. Using technology the future newsroom will have the tools to share more information and more types of information. The goal is to avoid the current situation of “second-class citizens” in the information flow.

Not only does the work group structure change, so will the workplace, as physical proximity becomes irrelevant. To support such an environment, we’ll need a network and communication infrastructure that is much more robust and seamless than we have today. Editorial staff members will need new tools to exchange ideas, ask for help, pass on tips, and develop stories in much the same manner as they do today, by shouting out questions or comments to colleagues. This model is more than e-mail, which can be effective on a one-to-one level. However, if you broadcast a request by using that message system while on deadline, most people will ignore the message, thinking it doesn’t apply to them. We’ll need new tools to communicate effectively and reach those who need information now or reach those who want to know in the future.

This communication model is a “many-to-many” system that allows everyone to join the discussion.⁵

OTHER KEY ISSUES

There were a number of other issues discussed:

- Content management. How will we structure and use our content databases? This is a technical and organizational issue.

⁵ One example of such a system can be seen in PNI’s Lotus Notes discussion databases. We have the technical ability to do this; what we’ll need to discuss and organize is the cultural shift to set the foundation for new forms of communications.

- Production management. There will be a greater need for the tracking and management of various products throughout the production and distribution networks.
- User[s] interface. The need for better tools for the non-production worker. Solutions might involve voice interface and artificial intelligence.
- System manageability. Managing all the workstations and servers throughout the organization. The network computer might provide a solution instead of the personal computer.

cc: Chip Weil, Mal Applegate, Pam Johnson