

Pagination Puzzle: Forever 5 Years Away?

BY MARK FITZGERALD

WHEN NEWSPAPER OPERATIONS executives talk about pagination, the sense of *déjà vu* can become so strong it's downright spooky.

Someone will say "true" pagination is still five years down the road. Someone else will make a joke about how it's always "five years down the road." Yet another person will boast, "We're doing pagination, true pagination, right now, today!" Inevitably, someone will refer to pagination as "really" a management or organizational or work-flow issue.

It says a lot about the haunting, almost mystical, hold that pagination has on the imaginations of operations people that in 1996, the first Newspaper Association of America Newspaper Operations SuperConference would devote one afternoon's discussion to "The Uncertain Path to Pagination."

The uncertain path? More than a decade after pagination first emerged with its promise to be ready for prime time — five years down the road? To be sure, much has changed in that time.

"From a technology point of view, we've gone leap years from where we began," Linda Bruning, director of business development for EDS, said at the conference.

Indeed, what we talk about when we talk about pagination is no longer "area composition" performed on parts of pages by proprietary systems that had difficulty tracking their own work. Newspapers have largely solved the whole-page pagination problem, the editorial/advertising integration problem, the work-flow problem, and, in many cases, the database integration problem.

These advances prompted Bruning to caution operations people with advice that undoubtedly rang a distant bell in their minds: "There's a whole lot more to pagination than technology. We focus so much on the technology, we tend to forget about

the organization and the flow issues."

And Bruning was just one of four speakers describing their pagination successes — right now, today. In fact, one of those speakers, Howard Finberg, was in Miami Beach to describe Phoenix Newspapers' experience in choosing and installing its *second* pagination system.

"We've been completely paginated since 1988," said Finberg, senior editor/information technology for the Phoenix papers. "Every time we went to a conference like this and heard that pagination was five years down the road, we wondered what road that was."

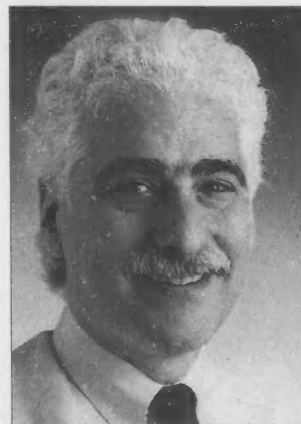
After a long experience with pagination, the newspapers posed a very basic question when they were considering a new system: "We asked ourselves a big question: Did we want to paginate?" Finberg said. "I think even the use of the term pagination should be banned from here on out. Because that's not what you want to do — paginate. What you want is to work more effectively," he continued.

Finberg and other operations executives argued that no matter what specific pagination system a paper settles on, the most important thing is to first determine the business goals and changes in work flow. Because, as Finberg said, pagination changes everything.

"My feeling is that going from hot type to cold type wasn't really revolutionary — it was evolutionary. When we did that back then, we used an existing work flow and applied it to a new technology," he said.

Going digital, however, requires a rethinking of the process of data input and output, Finberg said. That's the primary reason Phoenix Newspapers moved to a new pagination approach, the SQL database-oriented system offered by the Danish firm CCI.

"We wanted to end the assembly line where nobody is really looking at the whole publication,"



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Despite growing accomplishments, pagination remains elusive for the biggest newspapers

Finberg said. The CCI system was "robust" enough to handle the number of pages Phoenix Newspapers was handling while allowing the publisher to expand product lines — into niche publications and Internet publishing — using the same database, Finberg said.

"The goal is multiple products from the same information," he said. One other reason for picking CCI: "There is a long and technical part of the installation that forces you to look at work-flow issues first," Finberg said.

Similar database-oriented approaches — and vendor selection techniques — were taken by two smaller papers, the 27,000-circulation *Niagara Gazette* in Niagara Falls, N.Y., and 128,000-circulation *Daily Herald* in suburban Chicago.

At the *Gazette*, which still prints on the Goss Mark I letterpress it bought in 1949, pagination was not seen as an end in itself, according to president and publisher Mark Francis.

"What I've seen is generally we've done a lousy job of picking pagination systems," he said. "Basically, I think what we do is do it backward. Too many of us know where we want to be now or do now with a pagination system, but we take too narrow a view of what the pagination system should achieve, and too short a vision of where we want to go."

To broaden its vision, the *Gazette* decided to give every department an equal vote on picking the new system — in contrast to most papers, which tend to make the editorial department, in the words of *Animal Farm*, more equal than others. The result was a vendor, Orem, Utah-based Digital Technology International, which perhaps fit the whole newspaper better than its parts, Francis suggested.

"It doesn't have as good a newsroom system as others on the market. It doesn't have as good a classified system as others on the market. But when the pieces were put together, this came closer to where we thought we wanted to be," Francis said.

From a work-flow point of view, DTI created a unified database for news, advertising and production. The publisher said it also achieved the paper's business goals: cutting labor costs, allowing better color and providing better service for advertisers.

"We do 50% of our copy within two hours of presstime," Francis said. "We do an awful lot late — because we can. My own little newspaper already is 100% paginated with all pages going direct to negative film. And, except for the limitations of letterpress, we would be going direct to plate."

At the *Daily Herald*, Digital Equipment Corp., which had installed the paper's earlier-generation Text Management System (TMS) and Classified Management System (CMS), was chosen as the integrator for a pagination system centered around Dewar

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Information Systems Corp.'s DewarView work-flow manager.

In contrast to Phoenix Newspapers and the *Niagara Gazette*, which chose and installed their systems over months, the *Daily Herald* took a more deliberate approach, moving DewarView into the work flow gradually, said Mike Schoepke, manager of computer operations for Paddock Publications, the newspaper's parent company.

"Our first goal was to go slow, and build one element at a time," Schoepke said. DEC was chosen as the integrator in the spring of 1993, and the final element in the system, classified, was turned on in DewarView in April 1994. More recently, the system has been running classified ads on the Internet, Schoepke added.

Despite the obvious successes, operations executives at the nation's biggest papers say there is still reason to look upon pagination as something that belongs more to the future than the present.

"There are still functionality issues," said Paul Lynch, manager of quality and technical training at the *Chicago Tribune*. When vendors are able to paginate big papers like the *Tribune* — with its many subsidiary niche, online and Web products — then perhaps they can say they have achieved true pagination, he added.

"There are many technical barriers ahead, tons of them," said Tom Cusack, director of prepress for the *Star-Ledger*, based in Newark, N.J. "The single largest barrier to paginating medium to large circulation papers is the network and communications issues internally," he continued.

While scanning, RIPing and moving full-page ads across a newspaper's network is relatively simple from a technological standpoint, Cusack said, moving, say, 200 full-color ads is an entirely different matter because of the enormous size of the files involved. These problems persist even with digitally delivered files.

"The network issues have become the bottleneck, and it's not something easily addressed because of the volume of data," he said. One solution, Cusack suggested, would be the adoption of a much faster communications standard such as the so-called Group 4 digital fax compression, capable of compressing a 30-megabyte TIFF file to 2.6 MB for exceptionally quick delivery across a network.

"The problem is very few [vendors] support Group 4 compression. From a practical standpoint, I don't see it going anywhere soon simply because JPEG is too deeply embedded in the newspaper industry," Cusack said, referring to the compression standard.

Still, as with just about everything in pagination, that may change. Down the road, of course.