Sink or Shift: how local television measures up to the digital challenge

University of Montana School of Journalism
Sink or Shift: how local television measures up to the digital challenge

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HOT SPOTS
The footage is striking. Tiny dots of red, yellow, and green kayaks floating down the White Salmon River in Washington. It’s shot directly from above; a true bird’s eye view.

Nick Wolcott, a professional photographer and drone pilot, captured the footage with his Cinestar Octocopter and a Canon 5D for Patagonia’s “Damnation” film. That footage could not be re-created today.

The National Park Service and the Federal Aviation Administration are cracking down on the use of drones, and photographers have a lot to lose.

The NPS issued a parks-wide ban on unmanned aircrafts after drones crashed into Yellowstone’s Grand Prismatic Spring and Yellowstone Lake this summer. Yellowstone National Park spokesman Al Nash said the rule was needed to protect visitors, wildlife, and the park’s natural icons.

The FAA issued a ban on commercial drone use in 2007, but never went through official rule-making channels to actually make it illegal. It has only recently begun to develop regulations and exceptions.

That ambiguity created a wild-west atmosphere for commercial drone users. Everyone from wedding photographers to real estate and landscape photographers were turning to the skies.

“There are plenty of people making an awful lot of money flying drones,” said Peter Sachs, a lawyer, drone pilot, and First Amendment advocate. “They are just keeping their heads down to avoid any kind of confrontation with the FAA.”

Journalists are no exception.

“Let’s say I want to fly recreationally and film a protest that is going on, that is fine,” Sachs said. “But if you are a journalist working for station WXYZ, then that is illegal because you are getting paid.”

Sachs recommends keeping a low profile and being a responsible user to avoid the FAA.

Of course, journalists can still use helicopters to get the aerial footage they need. But it is far more expensive, less safe, and less capable.

“The footage I was shooting this morning, you just couldn’t do with a helicopter,” Wolcott said while on assignment for BBC at Goblin Valley State Park in Utah. The area features sandstone goblins and unique natural formations.

He described how he circled his Octocopter from high in the sky, swooping dramatically down to ground level, and then smoothly cruising right through the gaps in the goblins.

“It just made for some incredible shots.”

Erik Petersen has been photographing life in Montana and around the world for 15 years. His work is at erikpetersen.photoshelter.com
WHEN DAN BOYCE LEFT his post as Montana Public Radio’s capitol bureau chief for Denver, it wasn’t to cover the legislature in yet another western state. Instead, he joined a team of reporters at Inside Energy, a platform created by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to tackle stories related to what Boyce calls the issue of our time.

Throughout the West, the oil-and-gas boom has spurred demand for energy stories. Coverage in western newspapers has increased by 50 percent in the past 10 years. Special titles attract industry.

The Bismarck Tribune currently publishes two separate energy publications focused around North Dakota’s oil drilling hub. The Bakken Breakout and The Bakken Breakout Weekly have led to expanded freelance contracts for writers with energy and geology backgrounds.

In Colorado’s Weld County, The Greeley Tribune started the monthly magazine, Energy Pipeline, in 2013, to tell diverse stories of the oil boom in its backyard.

Energy stories in those special titles are sometimes tailored toward a business audience, but there’s also a hunger for in-depth energy stories among the general public.

Telling those stories requires time to understand and explain the complex acronyms and jargon of the industry, Boyce said. “Energy reporting is not a cakewalk, but we need all the good reporters we can get.”

As a hybrid of policy, technology, business, and environmental topics, the energy beat is creating opportunities for journalists of diverse backgrounds to rise to the challenge.

Jayme Dittmar

Dan Boyce

Screenshot from video by Brian Gill

Kimball Bennion grew up in Wyoming, graduated from Montana, and worked in newspapers before stumbling into the assignment desk of Salt Lake City’s KUTV. He’s never been skiing.
DAIRY BLACKOUT

Story by Kelly Conde

A STORY ABOUT cow hooves was all Mychel Matthews was after. Reporting for the Times-News out of Twin Falls, Idaho, she wanted to tell her readers how large dairy operations trim their cattle’s hooves. But days before the photo shoot and interview, the industry opted out.

In 20 years on the agriculture beat, access to sources has never been so difficult for Matthews. “The dairymen are extremely nervous,” she said. “The managers of these dairies don’t want any publicity because it will be turned into bad publicity even if it starts out as good.”

Things came to a head when, in February of 2014, Idaho’s legislature passed a bill making it illegal for anyone to film, video, or take photos without authorization. Known as the ag-gag law, the new rule was applauded by the agricultural industry, which according to Matthews had lost all faith in the media.

Six months later, a confidential letter written by the United Dairymen of Idaho (UDI) to all Idaho cattle industries urged dairymen to deny media tours or interviews.

Once the letter had been leaked, the UDI issued a retraction, stating that it did not accurately portray its position toward the media.

Matthews called the ag-gag law an extreme response to extreme activism on the part of animal rights activists. “We’ve lost balance,” she said.

Nate Carlisle, a reporter for The Salt Lake Tribune, said the problem for journalists is that the new rules are applied too broadly. The Tribune is challenging the constitutionality of the Utah ag-gag law in court.

Meanwhile, in Idaho, Matthews is concerned about how to do her daily work. The law has affected her ability to talk to people and their willingness to talk to her. And without that conversation, she doesn’t have a story.

Kelly Conde is a recent-ish graduate of the University of Montana’s environmental science and natural resource journalism program. She now lives in Stanley, Idaho, and works for the Sawtooth Society.
RIGHT NOW, in a newsroom somewhere, panic has set in.

Mounting financial pressure from a newspaper publisher has trickled down into every column inch of what used to be such a simple and beautiful process.

From the whisper of a lead to an exhaustive round of sourcing, journalists would weave together a narrative and deliver it through a medium owned by their employer.

It was a romantic time for the industry—until media became social. Today, journalists in newsrooms scan the same firehose of Tweets and alerts as their readers do. Moreover, few of them are still dictating what is newsworthy.

It’s a bad time to be a journalist. It’s a great time to be the new journalist.

At 21 years old, I became a news anchor for three CBS affiliates across Montana, including Bozeman, Butte, and Helena. As both a reporter and producer, I was also tasked with putting together a nightly newscast. I would scour the wires, check with the local law enforcement for updates, and carve out a feature story or two in hopes of entertaining someone.

Looking back, it seems ridiculous that media outlets could serve as gatekeepers of information. In some ways, we were a bottleneck of information, and because of it, we could monetize it.

Today, news breaks at the source and is distributed through social media channels. At first, journalists were quick to jump on the “that’s not credible” bandwagon. But consumers were far more intelligent than they were given credit for in previous models.

They know a Tweet isn’t necessarily fact, but they don’t care. They appreciate the real-time delivery and start digging into the background story themselves.

The new journalists don’t aim to change the world by exposing corruption. Instead, they’re information mavens who want to empower people and generate meaningful conversations. They break stories down into facts, stats, and quotes, and use smartphones to share them instantly.

The new journalists understand that no one owns the message—they simply brand it. To be the new journalist, look around you. Listen to what people are saying, sharing, and Tweeting— that’s news. Understand that a six-second Vine video is no less relevant than this 400-word article.

As journalists, we were never smarter than anyone else; we were just good at packaging information. That’s still the case. It’s just not as romantic as it once was.

Jason Kintzler is the founder and CEO of PitchEngine, a media and marketing technology company.

Illustration by Tiffany Garner
Under a Closer Scope

A Bitterroot couple without journalism experience resurrects the community newspaper

Story by Jacob Baynham
Photos by Bess Brownlee
Michael and Victoria Howell founded the Bitterroot Star newspaper nearly 30 years ago. They are involved in every aspect of running the paper, from reporting and designing to advertising and administration.

The Bitterroot Star not only turns out a weekly newspaper, it also sells coffee beans, treats, local eggs, chocolate, grass-fed beef raised by the owner of the drugstore down the road.

You almost have to check your iPhone to see what year it is. There’s a soda fountain on the next block and a saloon a few doors down. And yet here, at the center of town, in 2014, is a newspaper that still covers high school sports, the town council, and school board meetings. It might not be riveting reading for an outsider. But the knots that bind a community are tied in its pages.

Old-world as it seems, Stevensville didn’t always have the Star. In fact, the town might not have a paper at all were it not for an entrepreneurial hitchhiker and a poor family driving a school bus to Montana.

Michael Howell came to Missoula from Texas in 1974 as a graduate student in philosophy. Victoria moved from California and met Michael when she was waiting tables in the Mammyth Bakery. He came in every day for a cup of soup. One day he asked her on a date.

Eventually, they had a couple children and set out traveling. In 1985, they decided to move back to Montana. They bought a school bus in New Mexico that would be their home, and started driving.

Somewhere in Utah they stopped for a hitchhiker named Harry Van Horn. At first, Michael and Victoria didn’t know whether to believe his stories. He said he spent time in prison before being pardoned by President Reagan. He was the sports editor of the Houston Chronicle, he said, until his wife left him on account of his drinking. Disillusioned with his desk job, he set out to travel the country and write a book about the homeless.

He started newspapers along the way, he said, sticking around just long enough to get them off the ground. “He was a Johnny Appleseed of newspapers,” Michael says. “He’d get them started and then leave.”

Michael and Victoria heard a great deal more about Van Horn as they traveled, and grew to like him. In Deer Lodge, they spent their final $2.75 on donuts. Van Horn asked what they were going to do for money. Michael and Victoria didn’t have anything lined up. They hoped for construction work and odd jobs.

“Why don’t you start a paper?” Van Horn asked.

The Howells had no experience in journalism. But Van Horn was an able, if eccentric, teacher. He took them to the Mission Valley and showed them how to sell ads for a paper that didn’t exist. He got a picture of Arlee High School’s graduating class and canvassed local businesses asking if they’d pay $10 to appear in a congratulatory note below the photograph in the first issue of the St. Ignatius Enquirer.

They collected $70, which they took to a second-hand store in Missoula and bought a Pentax camera, a Royal typewriter, some border tape, a roll of film, and a developing canister. “And then we went and started a newspaper,” Michael says.
The Enquirer only survived a few months. But Michael and Victoria were learning. They moved down to Missoula and started a quarterly called The Missoula Senior Citizen Voice. The paper was so successful they decided to start another in the Bitterroot.

While selling ads in Stevensville, they met Bill Perrin, a banker who asked if they’d start a community newspaper.

“At the time there was no weekly newspaper in the Bitterroot,” Michael says. “There used to be two weeklies, until E.W. Scripps bought and shuttered them, to focus on the local daily, the Ravalli Republic. Michael and Victoria agreed to start a weekly. They called it the Stevensville Star. They were living and working out of their school bus, which they’d parked at a fishing access outside of town. One day a Fish and Wildlife warden came to inform them of the two-week camping limit. They agreed to move the bus, but couldn’t start it. When the warden gave them a jump, Michael took his photograph and put the story on the front page of the next paper.

The Star came out against all odds in those days. Van Horn stuck around until falling in love and eloping to Idaho (he was last seen in Grangeville), and then it was just Michael and Victoria.

Their children slept on the floor while they worked. Without a darkroom, Michael developed his film in the ice-cream shop.

“One day I was in the bathroom, turning on the lights out and shove my coat under the doorknob,” he says. “Two weeks later the paper is still running under the same ownership nearly 30 years later is no small achievement in the world of community papers,” says Kemmick, a retired reporter for the Billings Gazette, who writes a blog called “The Last Best News.”

“The reason they work is because they’re established,” Kemmick says. “People trust them. That’s the biggest edge that weeklies have. They’re part of the community. They know the stories worth pursuing.”

The effort and cost of producing a weekly have pushed many owners to sell out to media corporations. In 2000, Todd Mowbray sold four independent weeklies in the Flathead Valley to Lee Enterprises, the Iowa-based company that owns the Missoulian, the Gazette, and the Bitterroot’s daily, the Ravalli Republic. (Lee owns 46 mid-sized dailies in 22 states.)

Lee then sold them to Hagadone, an Idaho company that now owns eight papers across Northwest Montana.

Kemmick says a newspaper changes when a corporation runs it. “Corporate papers really are like corporations,” he says. “When you’re the mainstream media, you feel this obligation to be all things to all people. The independents, they have more freedom with their approach. They can be more informal, and can probably take more chances.”

Independent weeklies can pursue investigative stories, for example, and aren’t as constrained by the economic influence of big advertisers.

Kemmick keeps an eye on Montana’s media. He says that while independent weeklies still remain — the Daniels County Leader in Scobey, for example, has been published by the Bowler family since 1922—the current economics don’t make sense to start new ones. He predicts that the future of community newspapers will be on the Internet.

“You can start with almost nothing,” he says, “a couple thousand dollars as opposed to a couple hundred thousand to start a print paper.” The Bozeman Magpie, for example, is a successful online paper that launched in 2010.
But in the short term, the small community and aging demographics of the Bitterroot may shelter the Star from the economic winds that are buffeting other newspapers. That's comforting for newspaper nostalgics.

"That whole community feel of sitting at the local diner and reading the paper, talking about it, and passing it to the next guy is lost when you're reading a publication on your phone," Kemmick says. "I think papers like this will go a lot longer than the Lee papers. And Lee papers will go a lot longer than big city papers. It's just a question of scale."

It may be a question of appreciation, too. Perrin, the banker who first encouraged Michael and Victoria, remembers talking to townsfolk about the need for a paper before the Star began. "I felt that a paper would help bring people together to feel like they're more part of a community," he recalls.

Over the years, Perrin has seen Michael and Victoria become part of that community, too. Michael is a member of a river advocacy group, and Victoria is on the boards of the library and the Main Street Association.

"Living here's a participatory sport," Perrin says. "They exemplify that."

Perrin has read the Star since it started. He's seen it weather controversy — the paper has filed several freedom of information lawsuits against public agencies — and he's seen it become the forum for community dialogue. (The Star publishes every letter to the editor).

Perrin loves it for its tenacity. "The Star will follow an issue," he says, "to the point that you'll find out what's really going on."

There's no better example of that persistence than Michael's recent coverage of the Ravalli County treasurer, Valerie Stamey. In 2013, Michael heard that the library wasn't getting its money from the county. He found other agencies weren't getting what they needed from the treasurer, either. Then someone told Michael that Stamey was driving with expired plates. He checked, and saw they had expired in 2010.

Stranger still, the car was registered under an alias. Michael dug deeper and found that in South Carolina, Stamey was accused of cashing an $18,000 check twice.▶
The Bitterroot Star is run by a very small staff. Michael Howell does much of the reporting and his wife Victoria edits, designs pages, and handles administrative tasks. Above, Victoria demonstrates how she designs the layout of the paper before sending it off to the printers.

“I was able to find out more and more about her,” Michael says. “For some reason it was something that nobody else took the time to do. I’m not sure why. How many treasurers do we know in Montana who go by three different names?”

The reporting caught the attention of other papers, and eventually the county commissioners, who suspended Stamey. It was classic watchdog journalism. “A lot of people recognized they were getting something form the local weekly that no other paper was going to give them,” Michael says. “I can hardly go anywhere these days without people bringing it up.”

Scoops like that, when the Star beat the Missoulian and the Republic, illustrate the value of a locally owned community newspaper. When the treasurer story was unfolding, Michael and Victoria could hardly keep the Star on the stands. Readership spiked to almost double the Republic’s. Some businesses took out ads to support the paper. The Star now has a circulation of 7,200, but still has a meager budget, and an editorial staff of three — Michael, Victoria, and sports reporter Jean Schurman.

But its small size gives them freedom and mobility, too. “We don’t have anybody telling us what to cover and when to cover it,” Michael says. “We don’t have anybody telling us what to cover and when to cover it,” Michael says. “We’ve existed on a shoestring for 30 years,” Victoria adds. “We’re still on a shoestring. Would any bigger corporate entity be willing to do that? Heck no.”

The Howells aren’t sure what will become of the Star. They’re in their 60s and haven’t found anyone to take over. They imagine it moving online one day, but they’d have to overhaul their website and they’re not sure the readers would follow. They’d consider selling it—even to a corporation—but they worry about what would happen when they’re gone. Humble as its profits have been, the Star has given the Howells more than an income all these years.

“It’s pretty satisfying,” Victoria says. “We do it all day long, we go home and we talk about it. Nobody’s going to get rich, but we’ve raised our family, and it’s been a lifelong career now.”

For Michael, running the Star has entwined him to Stevensville in a way he never imagined.

“Getting involved in my community has given me a lot of enjoyment,” he says. “People talk about it a lot, but there’s a real truth to it. The joy and rewards that you get, you just can’t measure in dollars. You just can’t.”

Jacob Baynham is a freelance journalist and adjunct professor who lives with his family in Polson. He writes for Outside, Men’s Journal, Esquire, and other magazines.
FOLLOWING A LONG night of filming we hid and watched as the mob began to run, filling the streets. Police in full riot gear marched through downtown, arresting all those in their way. As the noise died down and the police moved on we caught a glimpse of a lone local TV cameraman. He had emerged from one of the local businesses and was filming the now quiet streets. Within moments, we witnessed how police instructed him to leave the area and then tackled him to the ground while he asserted his First Amendment rights as a journalist.

The story may ring of the recent uprisings in Ferguson, Missouri. But it actually happened July 30, 2000, in Missoula, when the Hell’s Angels spent the weekend in town. Many citizens were furious with the heavy-handed tactics of the police. While my friends and I saw the necessity of keeping rowdy bikers in check, we questioned why police were coming down hard on local citizens. We didn’t learn until later that the escalation had everything to do with the 2001 Salt Lake City Olympics. Police numbers were inflated, with officers in town for crowd-control training. Of course, we may not have learned even this much had we not brought our cameras, which sparked a community-wide discussion.

It is the question “How can we get this information out?” that prompts so many today to pull their cell phone cameras and begin recording whenever violence escalates on the streets. Through tweets, posts, and Internet blogs, the camera acts as the witness. It is a threat to those who choose to overstep the moral boundaries of a community. It is the new security blanket for the people. It allows the average citizen an opportunity to show the world what is happening as it happens. If police with guns are here to protect society against criminal activity, cameras are here to protect society against police with guns.

Today’s journalists need to take note of this shift. It used to be unusual to see live footage of an uprising, but today’s technology allows those on the ground to scoop the story. Journalists need to continue to ask the hard questions and place the status quo under direct scrutiny. When they fail to do justice to our citizens’ stories, they need to provide them with the opportunity to do it. Citizen journalists will become our eyes and ears, but only if we are willing to listen.

Linda Tracy traveled the country attending schools such as Brooks Photographic Institute and Columbia College before graduating from the Radio/TV production department at the University of Montana. With Digital Magic Video she had the pleasure of producing programs, commercials and PSAs with both local & national companies. She is currently working as a still photographer.

Many citizens were furious with the heavy-handed tactics of the police...We didn’t learn until later that the escalation had everything to do with the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics.
Along with his University of Montana Journalism School sock monkey keychain, Austin Green, 23, enters the Missoula International Airport at 5:15 a.m. on Monday, October 6, 2014. He’s a J-school alum on his way to Spain to teach English as a second language while reporting on professional basketball in Europe.

Photos by Sarah Chaput de Saintonge

It took one editors’ meeting on the first day of Austin Green’s internship to make him rethink how to accomplish his career goal — to file stories from every continent. He was in Salt Lake City listening to the newspaper’s plan to lay off reporters when he realized there’s no real job security.

“I’d rather adventure and travel the world than to go to, say, Wyoming, and cover city council to be fired any given day.”

After graduating from the University of Montana, Green took his talents to Spain to launch Los Crossovers, a website about European professional basketball, while teaching English on the side.

The Whitefish native’s plan almost flopped when his co-founder, a multimedia specialist, decided to stay in the United States.

But rather than give-up, Green used some of the money they had raised through crowd funding for mobile video equipment and iPhone apps, counting on his former partner to help him remotely with web design.

Worst case, his adventure will allow him a few years in Europe.

Best case, he gets to write features that might land him a sustained gig down the road.

Michael Beall is a journalism graduate from the University of Montana and former MJR editor, traveling the world and writing for his travel journalism site, www.meanderingbeaz.com

Last Best Place Pays Reporters the Worst

Based on median salaries in the West

$43,000, $38,210, $30,670, $30,540, $28,420, $28,210, $26,740


Compiled by: Michael Hanan

Graphic by: Amanda Bryant
ABOUT 1,500 READERS visit the Last Best News website daily. Thanks to a campaign to encourage Oscar-winning actor Jeff Bridges to run for U.S. Senate, that number spiked to 8,000 in August 2014.

Ed Kemmick, who started the independent news site after quitting his job of 25 years at the Billings Gazette, broke the story. And it went viral. The Washington Post blog, Politico, MSNBC, and Fox News reported on the push to make “The Dude” a U.S. Senate candidate.

“I think people are just so depressed and fed up with politics as usual that even if it’s just kind of a joke, it’s more fun to get involved in something like this,” Kemmick said.

“I saw what was going on and thought, ‘Well, this is way too much fun.’”

Robert Saldin, an associate professor of political science at the University of Montana, said three things made this 72-hour story gain momentum – name recognition, Bridges’ potential to fund the campaign, and the excitement and intrigue it created.

Kemmick’s source was Lizbeth Pratt, who created the Facebook page to urge Bridges to campaign after a plagiarism scandal forced Sen. John Walsh to end his re-election campaign.

“He’s a great candidate, and if anyone can get him to run for something, he’s going to win,” said Pratt, who spent much of her life in Montana.

The push to persuade Bridges failed, but Kemmick’s site didn’t. He says he has enough business with advertisers to replace his income at the Gazette.

REPORTERS IN BILLINGS used to rely on their police scanner to alert them to crimes. These days, they have to be more proactive to make it to the scene on time.

As part of a nationwide trend, the Billings Police Department started encrypting police transmissions between dispatch and officers, as well as chatter among officers, in May 2014. Billings Police spokesman Kevin Iffland said the change would help police combat crime and protect private information.

Losing the police scanner as an alert system left reporters scrambling.

“Sometimes we don’t know a situation has occurred until after it’s over,” said Chris Cioffi, who covers cops and courts for the Billings Gazette.

Other media organizations around the country have appealed to police to create special scanner privileges for reporters. Cioffi, on the other hand, has found ways to deal with the shift. He pays special attention to context clues in other official chatter to discover if something significant is occurring.

Or he simply calls EMS services to report the news.
KYLE MASSICK BARELY believed his eyes when he spotted the planes in the river. Resting on the steep embankment of the Clark Fork river were three Boeing 737 fuselages, stranded there after a freight train derailed on its way to an assembly plant in Washington on July 3, 2014.

Massick, a river guide and photojournalism student at the University of Montana, pulled into an eddy behind a rocky outcropping, got out his Canon 30D with its 70-200mm F/4 lens, and waited an hour for the perfect shot.

“I tried to get that illusion of how powerful the earth is, and the environment within it,” he said.

By July 7, his photo series of small rafts floating past towering plane bodies had traveled around the world.

Massick scored his early career break through a combination of luck and nonchalance.

After failing to sell his photos to the Missoulian, he gave them to King 5 News in Seattle for free. The photo credit he was hoping for turned out to be a major one.

Reuters, the global news agency, spotted his work and purchased redistribution rights for three pictures for $500.

A latecomer to photojournalism after trying majors in nursing, psychology, and forestry, Massick says he holds no illusions that the photos will launch his career. For now, he’s happy to photograph tourists as they navigate the rapids of the Clark Fork—a river rat, ready for the big one to break.

Three years of teaching English in Russia and on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation left Nicky Ouellet with no shortage of stories or wanderlust. Now in the classroom as a graduate student, she continues to seek out stories and adventures in western Montana.
**LOSE HOME ADVANTAGE**

Story by Allison Franz

ENJOY SITTING DOWN with your coffee each morning to find—and smirk at—slip-ups in your daily paper? Well, you’re about to smirk a whole lot more.

The Gannett-owned Great Falls Tribune, whose pages have been laid out by designers in Phoenix since 2012, is planning to outsource copy-editing duties to off-site editors. The move is part of a company initiative apparently intended to liberate local journalists from the annoyance of actually producing the local paper.

In 2015, at least four of Montana’s seven major newspapers will be paginated by designers thousands of miles away. The Lee-owned Montana Standard, Helena Independent Record, and Missoulian transitioned or were set to transition to a regional design center in Munster, Indiana, in 2014. Will Lee eventually follow Gannett’s lead and outsource its copy editing as well?

Even with its copy editing still done in-house, the Montana Standard experienced a major flub (pictured) during its transition to the design center. Readers in Butte must have been shocked to discover their hometown paper had actually been serving Helena all this time. Montanans should get ready for more such snafus.

Anyone who’s worked in a newsroom knows communication can get lost in translation, even when the people communicating are in the same building.

Now, imagine some late-breaking news comes in over the police scanner, and the front page requires some hefty rearranging.

And the only way you can communicate this major overhaul is via instant messages sent to an editor and designer a time zone away, who have never even been to your town and couldn’t care less if one of its most iconic buildings is burning to the ground.

Layoffs and other cost-cutting measures in recent years have already whittled down most copy desks to bare-bones operations. In corporate speak, Lee Enterprises has been “aggregating top talent” and “taking advantage of new technologies” to produce “better designed pages more efficiently” in their regional design centers.

Too bad said “top talent” can’t always match the right caption with the correct photo.

The outsourcing of design and copy tasks is also likely to mean Montana newspapers will employ even fewer local journalists. But the true losers are the readers, who continue to see the quality of their corporate-owned local newspapers decline. Except, of course, those readers who truly enjoy smirking at typos.

Allison Franz is a former copy editor and digital content editor for the Great Falls Tribune.
TRANSIENTS OF THE DIGITAL AGE

SOURCE CHECK

BOILING POINT
TRANSIENTS
OF THE
DIGITAL
AGE

Story by Bjorn Bergeson
Photos by Elliott Natz
Broadcast and print are fiercely competing for online audiences, forcing journalists to use their skills in new ways.

Billings Gazette reporter Slim Kimmel shoots a local high school football game.
SANJAY TALWANI packs a video camera and a tripod into the back of his company SUV, pulls out onto Last Chance Gulch, and drives across Helena to Montana’s Museum. Within minutes of arriving, he’s taping a small throng of children slinging spears at cardboard cutouts of cartoon animals. It’s Native American Heritage Day, and Talwani’s here to produce a quick human-interest story for KXLH’s 5:30 p.m. news broadcast.

He interviews the organizer of the event and then shoots 30 seconds worth of footage of the gigantic buffalo-skull sculpture resting against the front of the museum. The whole process takes him 30 minutes. Then Talwani packs his gear again and drives back across Helena. It’s 1:00 p.m. now. If he gets straight to editing, the package will be done with time to spare.

For a TV reporter, this is pretty standard procedure, but Talwani isn’t a traditional broadcast journalist. Unlike his colleagues at KXLH, he spent the first five years of his career at a newspaper and a magazine. Back when he worked the city beat for the Helena Independent Record, he never thought he’d be in front or behind a video camera. “It wasn’t something that ever occurred to me,” he said. “I wasn’t like, oh, I want to go into TV.”

Talwani is one of a handful of Montana journalists who’ve shifted from newspaper to broadcast news, or vice versa, in recent years. Some took the leap out of sheer need for a job, while Talwani explains his move as a logical way to stay ahead of the competition.

“The kids coming in to the newsrooms now, they know how to shoot a video and post to Twitter,” he said. “The old guys can’t rely on a notebook and pen and doing it the rest of our lives, if we want to stay competitive and marketable, sad to say.”

In the digital arena, both print and broadcast skills are in demand as television stations and newspapers in Montana invest in online platforms that tell the news through text as well as video. Faced with changing audiences and advertising flows, both companies and journalists struggle to stay relevant. The question is, are they treading water or pushing upstream?
“I think my background in print allows me to quickly report information in a written format,” Tuttle said. “Broadcast journalists are taught to report in front of a camera more than they are in front of a keyboard. It does make a difference when the minutes count.”

While they’re trying to adapt, reporters and editors are stuck in an industry model that is becoming less relevant by the day.

When Tuttle moved from print to TV, Kyle Rickhoff had already migrated in the opposite direction. Rickhoff started working in television when he was 15. He never had much interest in becoming a journalist, and he still doesn’t consider himself to be one. When he was young, he says, he wanted to be a disc jockey, and he had a persistent mother.

“My mom kept calling the radio station and telling them that I wanted to work for them,” Rickhoff said. “They pretty much ignored her. So she started trying the TV stations.”

Early in his career, at KULR-8 in Billings, Rickhoff worked in the control room and edited commercials. Occasionally, when the newsroom was short-handed, he’d be sent out as a cameraman. In 2002, he moved over to Q2, where he worked as an editor, newscast director, trainer and online news content manager. In 2008, he left Q2 when the Gazette offered him more money and a change of pace.

At the time, the Gazette was intent on revamping its online presence. Its management wanted to run more video content on the website, Rickhoff said, but technical problems, crummy audio, and poorly shot video detracted from the clips and didn’t earn the clicks the Gazette hoped for. “The idea was to bring in a TV guy to help boost the quality of the product,” Rickhoff said. “So they hired me.”

Sanjay Talwani looks at his camera’s video screen, prepping his camera for a short interview with the coordinator of Native American Heritage Day in Helena.

Greg Tuttle sits behind computer screens at his desk in the Q2 newsroom. Aside from writing AP style scripts, Tuttle also surfs the web, watching what other media outlets are posting as well as monitoring his own online articles.

Talwani talks on the phone to a secretary in the records office at the Capitol building in Helena during a short break from editing his footage from the Native American Heritage Day. Reminders, phone numbers, and records litter his desk.
**Who Owns Montana’s Television Stations?**

![Diagram showing ownership of Montana television stations]

**Owners**
- Gray Television
- Evening Post Publishing
- Bluestone Television
- Cowles Publishing
- Bonten Media (bought Bluestone)
- Max Media
- Other

**Current Owner**
- Previous owner

Source: http://www.stationindex.com

Infographic by James Alan Rolph

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Shortly after Rickhoff joined the staff, a room at the Billings Gazette office was painted black and soundproofed. Graffiti artists were invited to add some color, and the paper had a weekly online segment dedicated to local music. Step by step, Rickhoff was joined by other former TV employees, to help him with the Gazette website. Together, they perform the critical task of getting the news out before the paper does. “The news is digital first now,” Rickhoff said. “Get the story up online first. The newspaper just recaps it all the next day.”

TV news airs four times a day, while the newspaper comes out once in the morning. But the online world has created a 24-hour news cycle where both sides compete on the same clock.

Shortly after joining KXLH in October of 2013, Talwani broke a story about Montana Sen. John Walsh using his rank in the Montana National Guard to pressure other guardsman into donating money to the National Guard Association.

“The first day it came out in Lee Enterprise papers, they were quoting MTN (Mountain Television Network) stations,” he said with pride.

“That’s one reason why they hired print reporters. We love beating those print guys.”

In the basement of the Missoulian newspaper, there’s a room slightly larger than a broom closet. A green sheet stretches across one wall haphazardly, while the others are lined with egg foam. Three soft-boxes provide all the light. There’s a camcorder on a tripod, and an iPad sits on a music stand.

Emily Foster stands in front of the green sheet with her hands clasped. She takes a deep breath, straightens her posture, and begins. “Hello Missoula, thanks for watching The 4:06.”

Foster belongs to a new generation of journalists who were trained to perform across platforms from the outset. After graduating from the University of Montana in 2012, she worked as a television reporter for KTMF Fox in Missoula.

In August 2014, she was offered a position as the Missoulian’s digital director. The paper was looking to bolster its position in the competition for a younger audience. Since the mid-2000s, print has seen its advertising revenue shrink, forcing some papers to fold and others to initiate massive layoffs. To remain relevant, newspapers increased web presence, but showing the flag online didn’t directly translate to greater revenues. Many papers offered content for free at first, which made it hard to implement paywalls later, as audiences didn’t want to pay for what they’d already been getting.

According to the Newspaper Association of America, digital advertising rose by 1.5 percent in 2013, while print advertising dropped by 8.6 percent. The picture looked only slightly better than 2012, when newspapers gained $1 for every $15 lost. “We call it ‘digital dimes’ to ‘analogue dollars,’” said Steve Outing, an independent media consultant and former print journalist who founded the Digital Test Kitchen in Boulder, Colorado.
The comparatively healthy state of the television industry conceals a worrisome trend. While audience numbers remain steady overall, the viewership is getting older. According to the Pew Research Center, 84 percent of Americans over the age of 65 get their news from TV, while only 55 percent of those aged 18-29 rely on television news. Instead, more young people are picking up tablets and cellphones to access information. “The age issue is really huge,” Outing said. “They need to figure out how to attract younger audiences.”

Newspapers as well as television stations struggle to do just that. Outing said part of the problem is that traditional audiences still read the paper and watch TV. To grab the younger demographics requires news outlets to change their tone and style, which could alienate the very people keeping them alive at the moment.

So, despite the constant blast of content they put online, stations and papers still struggle with creating a platform people want to look at. That’s not an insult to Montana journalists necessarily. Nationwide, the smaller local websites aren’t too pretty to look at either. “They’re pretty bad overall,” Outing said. “Established media has had a hard time moving to digital.”

Compared to the nation’s newspapers, television stations are in better financial shape. Not only do they show more growth in online advertising revenue, there’s also been a rebound in local television news viewership recently. Moreover, TV stations reported record profits in 2012, in large part due to revenue from campaign ads after the U.S. Supreme Court’s Citizen’s United ruling, which allowed unlimited spending on those ads.

The windfall made TV stations look like a good investment to many companies. In 2013, across the country, 290 local stations changed hands for a total of $8.8 billion, according to the Pew Research Journalism Project. In Montana, the Fox stations previously owned by Max Media were bought by Cowles Publishing, a company based in Spokane. The sale resulted in more money being pumped into KTMF Fox, Foster’s former employer. “We hired new talent, new anchors, we’re launching a morning show,” Damon Callisto, KTMF’s digital manager, said.

When Foster moved from KTMF to the Missoulian, the paper had been attempting a daily newscast for its website for several months.

The idea was to be on the air one hour before the TV news shows. The 4:06, a five-minute short, featured newspaper reporters green-screened into a static shot of the Missoula skyline. The reporters were obviously nervous and the video quality was negligible.

Since taking over The 4:06, Foster has brought in a new design, giving the show a fresh background and slicker graphics. The new graphics add more time to the editing process, but the end result looks better than before Foster came on board.

On this particular day, the show consists of a quick rundown of five headlines from around the state, ranging from a violent crime to a woman who grabbed two kids and stuck them in her car to get them away from a black bear.

Instead of field reporting, most days Foster can be found behind her desk, writing the script for The 4:06, working on web content and ad placement.

“I’ve always been interested in the business and advertising side of things and this gave me the opportunity to explore that,” she said.
FOR TELEVISION stations across Montana, election season ushers in a sometimes staggering stream of revenue.

The 2012 U.S. Senate showdown between Jon Tester and Denny Rehberg brought millions of dollars in campaign advertising to the state, with the Wesleyan Media Project recording more than 90,000 ads by the third week of October.

Two years later, television stations in Montana still rake in money, though Bob Hermes, general manager at Missoula’s CBS affiliate KPAX, says advertising dipped. “It’s still busy,” he added, “but not to the level of 2012.” Hermes thinks the abrupt withdrawal of Democratic Sen. John Walsh from the ticket contributed to the lull. Replacement candidate Amanda Curtis, a state legislator from Butte, produced only two ads in the weeks before Election Day, and the switch-up relieved much of the pressure on Republican candidate Steve Daines, he easily won the contest.

For federal election ads in 2014, CBS affiliates KBZK in Bozeman, KRTV in Great Falls, and KPAX in Missoula had contracts for a total of more than $300,000. For KSVI in Billings, the sum was $92,023, and KWYB in Butte had $93,900 in political ad contracts, according to the FCC’s website.

A quick perusal of the nonprofit Sunlight Foundation’s political ad file listing showed scattered ad buys by candidates for the U.S. House, Montana Supreme Court, and even Yellowstone County Treasurer.

But particularly when it came to negative messaging, Hermes saw a comparatively quiet year.
The failure to capitalize on the move to digital pushes stations and papers to produce more exclusive content for their websites. Some of these efforts have fallen flat, like the attempt by the Billings Gazette to produce a local music webcast. It was a novel idea, but there wasn’t an audience for it. The Missoulian’s 4:06 show has improved since Foster took over, but the demographics are still out as to whether the changes have really impacted viewership.

At the websites of local papers and TV stations, journalists rarely get to use the full range of their cross-media skills. The 4:06 is a recap of stories from around the state, not a showcase of exclusive, in-depth multimedia stories. Punishing deadlines make it hard for Talwani to add web-only content, and sometimes the nature of his assignments means there isn’t much to add.

Nationwide, companies have cut staff and pay, while the workload of journalists has continued to grow. As stations and papers struggle with effective approaches to social media and websites, reporters hop from job to job.

“A lot of journalists have left the media,” Outing said. “Some have gone on to PR companies. Others have left for digital upstarts.”

In this climate, journalists become transients and the Internet has turned into a refugee camp. A reporter from a newspaper may find herself being offered a position at a TV station managing content for the station’s website, or vice versa. But simply switching media formats isn’t synonymous with innovation.

Talwani is a reporter who works hard to adapt, but remains traditional in his approach. “The reporting skills are the same,” he said. “Knowing what the story is. Setting up interviews. The basics. Those things are all the same.” His words can be read as a statement on the condition traditional media outlets are in.

While they’re trying to adapt, reporters and editors are stuck in an industry model that is becoming less relevant by the day.

Television has more of a cushion than print, but it is already facing competition from digital upstarts like Vice News that pull in younger viewers with spectacular stories. “Vice had the only reporter inside the Islamic State,” Outing said. “They’re like adventure athletes, and young people like watching them.”

Outing believes that the hope for traditional outlets lies in experimenting with new payment plans, and in more cooperation between the outlets. He cites the Guardian’s recent implementation of a membership program as an example for moving beyond a regular paywall, or subscription system. To convert online advertising dimes into dollars, news outlets will have to keep experimenting with different ad models and pay plans.

One thing is for sure: The eyes that watch news programs on TV are getting older and will eventually burn out – in much the same way that fewer people read the news in a physical newspaper.

Emily Foster makes sure every camera setting is perfect before recording, including white balance.
EVEN IN AN ERA when finding information is often as simple as a Google search, news organizations focused on producing stories quickly can fail to identify sources and their motives to readers. To understand how Montana’s TV stations measure up, MJR studied coverage of the debate surrounding energy development and its environmental impact. When it comes to informing audiences on the intentions of special-interest groups, Montana TV outlets – at least on their websites - deliver the bare minimum. They could do much more.
Starting from the digital transition for television in 2009 until August 2014, MJR gathered stories from Montana TV stations by searching their websites for a list of keywords related to energy issues. For our final analysis, we checked how each article or video went about identifying advocacy groups on both sides of the political aisle. We used a five-point scale, from explicit definition, to none at all.

The totals for each station include AP content and stories from affiliated networks because the material is under the editorial control of each station that posts it. MJR cannot guarantee that this is a complete survey for these stories, as the archives for some stations are incomplete or nonexistent. But we did analyze over 370 stories and included two newspapers (the Billings Gazette and the Great Falls Tribune) for comparison. TV stations where fewer than 10 results were found were not included in the analysis.

Overall, newspapers showed a limited advantage over their broadcast counterparts: They gave some definition of their sources in 74 percent of their articles, as opposed to 62 percent for TV stations. Newspapers also fulfilled the criteria for a clear-in-context definition in 33 percent of the articles analyzed, compared to slightly fewer than 20 percent for TV stations. However, when it came to explicit definitions, newspapers were only one percentage point stronger. In addition, they did not link to outside sources for added information, whereas TV stations did so in 11 percent of the cases.

The practice of using links could indicate specific newsroom policies, especially in the case of websites like KAJ18.com (34 percent of their stories included links) and KPAX.com (53 percent), which are both CBS affiliates. Some stations hyperlink depending on subject matter, says David Sherman, KRTV’s online producer. “I see what gets clicked, and political stories don’t.”

When a story about a boy in Great Falls dying from a spider bite lit up the station’s social media, Sherman inserted links to memorial fundraisers, a Facebook page in memory of the child, and even a quote from an entomologist explaining the geographic range of the arachnid. It’s not something he’ll do for a story with only a few views. ▶
The time crunch for individual reporters could also be causing the problem. Bob Steele, the Nelson Poynter Fellow for Journalism Values, says shrinking newsroom staffs means less time for journalists to develop the knowledge base in a specific field to inform audiences of the motives of interest groups in their stories. “Too often nowadays, journalists aren’t very well schooled in the fields they report,” Steele says, adding that thoroughly identifying sources bolsters two pillars of good reporting: accuracy and fairness. “If a news organization ignores the identification of an advocacy group, the news consumer may be confused or even fooled.”

Bob Hermes, general manager of KPAX in Missoula, says there’s no intention on the part of his newsroom to mislead its audience. “There’s no reason we wouldn’t attribute correctly,” Hermes said. Perhaps not, but the evidence suggests that Montana’s TV stations aren’t paying enough attention to their public service duties. Whether or not they can recover depends on where they set their priorities over the next few years: total page views, or a well-informed audience.

Research by Courtney Anderson, Tera Dittbrenner, Jesse Flickinger, Michael Hanan, and Ryan Mintz.
NEWS OUTLETS RELY on sources of authority to back up their leads and to convey the opinions of “experts” about events of the day. But all too often, the public is given no reliable information to determine whether those sources are trustworthy.

Scarcely a day goes by without outlets quoting “government sources,” whether back East at the White House or down at the sheriff’s office. Those unnamed sources voice criticism without any way for the public to hold them accountable for their claims. The phenomenon becomes even more nettlesome when reporters cite dubious sources to achieve balance in a story in an effort to prove journalistic neutrality they’ve been trained to display.

Corporate interests invested a great deal of time and money creating or fueling so-called experts to mouth what a company or industry wants to be policy. The tobacco industry pioneered this public relations tactic, known as the “third party technique.” They created what are known as “front groups,” represented by doctors or other experts, who lied to the American people by claiming that cigarettes did not cause cancer, and even that they were good for you.

Nowadays, corporations and CEO-funded charities bankroll “think tanks” or “policy institutes” on state and federal levels, which publish findings that support legislation and public policies that the corporations and their leaders want to become law. Such groups publish claims that are not subject to scientific rigor or peer review, unlike research from a university. They deploy PR departments or firms to pitch quotes from their staff to inexperienced reporters. Their funding gives them a real bias, regardless of the rhetoric they deploy.

What can be done about this problem?

Describing a group in ideological terms, such as “conservative” or “liberal,” isn’t good enough. It merely confirms the political predispositions of the audience and doesn’t illuminate the sources’ pecuniary motives, which are cloaked in politics.

It would be far more informative to note who funds the groups in the first place. Even though the Internal Revenue Service does not require disclosure of major funders, the media could insist in the name of helping audiences assess the expert’s bias. If the group refuses to name the biggest sources of their funding, the media should either make that clear in news stories or not cite the group.

This would be a change that would genuinely help inform the public and assess “expert” claims repeated by news outlets as if they were credible and impartial, instead of deepening the partisan divide.

Lisa Graves is the Executive Director of the Center for Media and Democracy, which publishes PRWatch.org, ALECexposed.org, and SourceWatch.org. Graves previously served as Deputy Assistant Attorney General at the U.S. Department of Justice under both John Ashcroft and Janet Reno and in other posts.
STUDYING WEATHER AND CLIMATE CHANGE is like watching a pot of water on the stove. Both climate scientists and meteorologists observe the temperature of the stove burner, the temperature of the water, the size of the pot, how much water it contains, and the temperature of air around the pot. Though both look at the same scenario, each is concerned with a different end. Meteorologists focus on where the first bubble will burst. Climate scientists only care that the pot will eventually boil. TV weathercasters have long been tagged as climate deniers. Though a large majority of them acknowledge that earth is in the middle of a significant warming trend, only 54 percent of respondents to a 2011 National Science Foundation survey were convinced that humans had anything to do with it.

Some think the planet is on an upward swing in temperature but will undoubtedly cycle down again, while a tiny minority thinks that climate change is a political conspiracy.

Climate change is a large-scale phenomenon with effects that are difficult to predict. The American Meteorological Society says the warming of the earth is unequivocal. Evidence shows increases in average air and ocean temperatures, along with widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising sea levels. In Montana, where weather is notoriously fickle, it seems that most meteorologists look beyond the first bubble while watching the pot.

Kate Siberell has a journalism degree from the University of Montana, and strives to surround herself with creative people doing cool things. She plans to travel the world and tell stories in innovative ways.
Russ Thomas graduated with a degree in meteorology in 2000 from Florida State University. He remembers a professor saying meteorologists question climate change the most. Thomas studies weather in detail at KPAX in Missoula. He understands there is more to climate change than the cut and dry, intense warming that’s generally perceived.

“It goes in cycles,” Thomas said. “There are periods where it’s a little bit warmer than usual, and periods where it’s a little cooler than usual. And that’s something that will continue to be there. We see this slow evolution of the climate getting warmer; it’s one of those things that is inevitable... but big picture, I think it’s hard to deny that global warming exists.”
Mike Rawlins works on the weather team at KRTV in Great Falls. He fell in love with weather when he was 8 years old, and used to do pretend weathercasts in his basement. He earned a seal of approval from the National Weather Association in 2011. He is a passionate meteorologist, exemplified by his choice to include updates from Climate Central, an independent organization of scientists and journalists, in his weather coverage.

“I wouldn’t call myself a climate researcher, but as a meteorologist it’s very clear that climate change is happening. I think there’s a lot of research there, and we’re seeing more and more people open their eyes to the idea. The huge debate now seems to be whether or not humans are responsible for this change. I think the answer is yes.”
Dave Cochran originally wanted to be a commercial airplane pilot, which gives him a very practical approach to weather and climate change. He studied broadcast journalism at what was then the University of Southern Colorado, and worked at numerous stations as a reporter, producer, photojournalist, and anchor. He became good with computers and landed a job as the single weatherman at ABC FOX in Missoula, because he could do it all.

“Everything I’ve seen from people who are a heck of a lot smarter than I am; I just don’t think that you can pump as much pollution into the planet that we have globally, and not see some sort of change,” Cochran said. “And I think that a lot of the climate change debate going on right now has very little to do with science. It has more to do with the political anger in America today.”
ABOUT FACE

Kathy Weber traded her camera and career in TV news for a seat at the political table

Story by Alexander Deedy
Photos by Elliott Natz
Weber pauses from her work to watch Lewis talk about his family life during the debate.

As senior campaign adviser and communications director for John Lewis, the 2014 Democratic candidate for Montana's lone seat in the U.S. House, she crafted a narrative to plug her candidate.

“In journalism, you learn from day one that no story is complete without real people,” Weber said.

It’s a lesson that’s served her well on both sides of the journalistic-political divide.

Later, as a cops-and-courts reporter for KPAX in Missoula, she’d watch people on what was perhaps the worst day of their lives, with a camera in her hand.

“You see someone one day, it’s their fourth DUI, a couple months later it’s their 10th DUI. And you start to wonder as a journalist, what am I doing, am I making a difference? Does anyone even care?”

The question lingered until the day Weber reported on an unknown victim of a serial killer. Soon after the story was posted online, the sheriff’s office received a call from the victim’s brother. He never knew what happened to his sister who had disappeared.

“That family to me was one reason why journalists are so important,” Weber said. “They help people know what happened.”

Later in 2010, when she was an anchor in Billings, she received a call from Sen. Baucus’ office. She expected a routine news check-up, but when they sat down for coffee, it became clear they were offering her a job.
"I still think of myself as a journalist. I never got tired of journalism and I don’t think I ever will."

KATHY WEBER

She went home, told her husband, and cried.

Joe Bates, her husband, didn’t have much work in his job as a builder, so the pay raise was a positive. Plus, her role as an anchor kept her from seeing her children in the evenings.

She took the job.

“I still think of myself as a journalist. I never got tired of journalism and I don’t think I ever will, ‘cause I believe it’s important. I really enjoy working with reporters every day. When I left the news business, it wasn’t because I was trying to escape, it was because I was recruited by Sen. Baucus’ office.”

Weber sounded ready to explain the move.

After all, she wasn’t the first journalist to shift to advocacy and PR, and won’t be the last.

Kyle Schmauch, grassroots coordinator for Steve Daines’ senatorial campaign, wanted to make sure the cameras had the best lighting possible on primary night.

When the news cameras arrived, Schmauch took a moment to peer through the lens. He knew lighting would make the difference between the candidate looking flat on screen or appearing natural.

Since high school, Schmauch had been chasing both politics and journalism. Just like Weber, he graduated from the University of Montana with degrees in journalism and political science.

After interning in New York City for “The Five,” a talk show on Fox News, he figured he could get a job with Fox post-graduation.

But that would require embarking on a 10-or-15-year climb up the corporate ladder.

“I decided that I could have a bit more of a direct impact by working on the political side for the actual people who are making the decisions, where the actual policies are being discussed,” Schmauch said.

He says his journalism background keeps him from promoting something he doesn’t agree with, just because it might highlight the candidate. At the same time, he knows first-hand that journalists are always seeking more information, whereas political candidates do their best to stay on message.

“There’s really no benefit whatsoever in being too open, because at the end of the day all that can do is hurt you, most of the time,” Schmauch said.

From his perspective, political spokespeople don’t intend to mislead, but are merely working toward a goal: Trying to get their candidate elected.

“Going to the ‘dark side,’ working on communications or politics, that kind of thing, isn’t as much of a ‘dark side,’ I think, as reporters make it out to be.”

For her part, Kathy Weber cites an old adage that has the politician wake up and run as fast as he can away from the journalist, “and the journalist wakes up and runs as fast as he or she can to trip the politician.

That method, she said, isn’t the way to earn public trust. She prefers the old-fashioned method: Taking reporters’ tough questions head on.

Veteran political reporter Chuck Johnson, of Lee Enterprises, spent a day on the Flathead Indian Reservation with John Lewis and Kathy Weber, working on a profile of the House candidate.

At one point during the day, Johnson asked Lewis about his wife Melissa’s work as a lobbyist in Helena. Lewis, Johnson said, was fine answering the question.

Weber was a little more hesitant.

Johnson recalls her saying something along the lines of “I sure hope that isn’t going to be a big part of your story. And I was like— well I had decided early on it was probably a separate story,” he said.
“I mean, her job is to protect her candidate and my job is to try to tell what’s going on. And I understand that, and she does, too.”

Johnson says back when Weber worked for Baucus, he’d receive three to four press releases a day from the senator’s office.

However, pursuing a story outside the press releases that was negative could prove a struggle, which is true with most political offices, Johnson said.

“Their job is to get you info when you need it, and if they think you’re barking up the wrong tree they’ll tell ya, and that’s just part of the give and take.”

Weber says she believes strongly in the importance of journalists taking an unbiased stance. She knows the opposition is going to get media attention too, and she’s OK with that, as long as her candidate is treated fairly.

She says she expects hard questions, but when she thinks a reporter got it wrong she has no problem saying so, and will provide evidence to back it up.

“I’m living and breathing the critical importance of fact checking and sourcing — getting independent verification of sources,” Weber said.

“Her job is to protect her candidate and my job is to try to tell what’s going on.”

Chuck Johnson
Political Reporter

Questioning whether things work, or don’t work, and why, is key in forming legislation that can last for generations, she said.

“I believe in service, that we’re all in this together, and there’s a lot of different ways to tell stories.”

The truth, Weber figures, will come out in the end. So she prefers to not dodge reporters and she expects the tough questions — she used to be the one asking them.

Alexander Deedy graduated from the University of Montana in 2014. He is the education and business reporter for the Independent Record, the daily newspaper in Helena.
A DEBATE ON THE MERITS OF USING FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVE IN STORYTELLING

FEATURING

HAMILTON NOLAN AND LAURA MUNSON

Few narrative devices are as contentious in journalism as the first-person point of view. First-time storytellers in particular pine to use it, only to be told off by editors who hit delete whenever they encounter the word “I” outside of a quote. How valid is this doctrine of detachment in an era of the personal journalistic brand?

Montana Journalism Review invited two nationally renowned writers to debate the issue. Laura Munson, a bestselling author, speaker, and founder of Haven Writing Retreats who lives in Whitefish, wrote one of the most popular columns in the New York Times’ Modern Love series, “Those aren’t fighting words, dear.” Hamilton Nolan, a senior writer at Gawker, is revered as the blog’s (and maybe even New York City’s) chief bullshit detector. Boxing and media criticism are his primary beats.

Both Munson and Nolan have thought long and hard about narrative point of view. Here’s the gist of their discussion; read the complete exchange at mjr.jour.umt.edu.

**MUNSON:** I’m rarely asked to write hard news or features, so my work finds its way into print as personal essays starring me and my life, and have been published in glossy magazines and newspapers where personal essay is appropriate. Lately, a lot of my stuff is about sending a kid off to college, reinvention, creating sanctuary for writers at my Haven Retreats, and using writing as a therapeutic tool that I believe should be up there with diet and exercise in the way of preventative wellness.

I’m a sucker for a personal story, so I’d rather read a piece with a human in it holding their heart in their hand than straight news. But if that’s all we had, we’d be in trouble!

**NOLAN:** In many ways the first-person viewpoint is the most honest way to write journalism, because it gets rid of the fiction that the writer is not actually present in and somehow affecting the scene he’s writing about. That said, it takes a very skilled touch to use first-person writing well. It is incredibly easy for first-person journalism to become infected by first-person fascination. It is incredibly easy for the writer to lose sight of the ostensible topic of the story and slip into the habit of making the story about himself.
MUNSON: I think that the first-person must be hard-won. Especially when we’re young and hot on the heels of the natural and necessary developmental stage of teendom—when it’s “all about me.” When we’re that age, we lack empathy, and writers have to be empathetic, almost to a fault, in order to write truly, no matter the genre or voice.

When I sit down to write, I imagine this portal inside me—an opening to the human experience. Sometimes that calls for personal stories, which help people to know that we are all in this together. Sometimes that calls for more distance. But always, in effective writing, empathy is the force driving the piece.

NOLAN: If I’m writing something in which I’m placing the highest value on objectivity, I would not write in the first-person. There’s a reason why newspaper journalism isn’t written in first-person. Whether or not true objectivity exists is its own (old) debate, but it’s common sense that if simply conveying objective facts is your main purpose, there’s no need for the first person to creep into your writing.

Objectivity is not the aim of first-person writing. Honesty is. First-person writing can be both completely subjective and completely honest. For me, honesty means saying what I actually believe rather than what I think the audience will want to hear or what will be most popular. It also means doing my best to reckon with my own flaws, biases, preferences, tastes, and various areas of ignorance. It means being up front about why I think what I think, and not pretending to be the voice of God. This, I think, is why first-person writing, while lacking in objectivity, is ultimately more honest than other styles. It allows you to reveal very plainly that you’re just another jerk. Just like your reader!

MUNSON: I agree with Hamilton. The first-person really doesn’t have any place in straight-up journalism. In short-form writing, it belongs in personal essay and op-ed blogs. In a socially networked berserk world, there is too much “I”, in my opinion.

I spoke on a panel this week at a high school career day and was asked by the students in each session how to essentially find the “I” in their work, especially when they didn’t care about the subject. Really, they were asking me how to care about their writing. My answer was simple. CARE about what you write.

Figure out how to care. And like Hamilton said, you might look like a jerk. Oh well. Expose yourself, whether it’s overt or the undercurrent that drives the piece. Be vulnerable. Be inconvenient. Embarrass your mother. But behind it all, know why you write in the first place. The rest of it will follow.

NOLAN: I read a pretty broad cross-section of “the media” each day, and I think that for years now there’s been a pretty heavy overload of personal essays. They do well online, they get a lot of clicks, and more traditional mainstream news outlets have rushed in in the footsteps of online sites to replicate that popularity.

Personal essays are fine. But the beauty of journalism is telling stories about the world—stories outside of yourself. The world is full of billions of interesting people and they all have their own stories, and as journalists, we’re lucky enough to be able to mine those stories for our own work. We should take advantage of that.

Journalism is far, far more interesting than ourselves. Focusing too much on ourselves is a rip-off for us, for all the people whose stories are not getting told, and for the readers who deserve something more interesting than my own navel-gazing. At least sometimes.

Contributed portraits from Hamilton Nolan and Laura Munson

https://scholarworks.umt.edu/mjr/vol1/iss44/1
These two photos were shot within minutes of each other, one in film and one in digital. Can you tell which is which?
PULLING OUT HIS camera, Tom Robertson prepared for the next biker to come around the corner. He only had one shot to capture his image. He had to get it right the first time.

A Missoula-based photographer who has worked for publications such as Bicycling, Trail Runner, and Road, Robertson used to primarily shoot digital. These days, he packs a medium-format Mamiya 7.

He struggled to put into words how reverting to an old tool has changed his work. “The thing with film, it’s just so easy,” he said. “It just comes out looking so good.”

Robertson’s shift from digital to film was prompted by fellow photographer Chris Milliman, whom he watched using a medium-format camera in Missoula. “Just seeing his images I was like, ‘that’s what I want mine to look like. How do I do that?’”

Once he’d put his first roll through his Mamiya, Robertson had his answer. “There wasn’t a shot I didn’t like,” he said.

Theories abound on why images produced on film seem to have a special appeal. There’s no scientific evidence for claims of superior technology. The opposite might well be true. For example, digital cameras offer users the ability to change tonal ranges in-camera, making it easier to match different tones to different lighting conditions. And with computer display technologies such as Apple’s Retina Display, viewers might not be able to tell the difference between a digital image and a scanned film image on a screen.

So perhaps more than in technology, the difference lies in the photographer’s approach. Ami Vitale, a documentary photographer who uses film to shoot personal work, said it adds value to each image. “It slows you down, makes you think about each shot.”

Shane McMillan, a freelance photographer and instructor at the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies in Portland, Maine, believes one reason why people like film may be found in its history. “The thing about film is it’s our heritage as photographers,” he said. “It’s pleasing to the eye.”

McMillan still shoots film regularly. “There’s a skill that’s lost on digital,” he said. “There’s a different sense of what’s going on inside your camera when you can’t see [the image].”

That said, McMillan stressed how digital actually offers advantages compared to film in improving photography. He cited advances in sports photography, which he said has improved in strides since the dawn of digital. This is in part because of the speed of modern cameras and the ability to shoot thousands of images without the need to switch out film.
It is for the same reason that commercial photography with film remains a niche. “Many clients won’t allow for it in their timeline and budget,” Vitale said. “It’s really tough to get people to agree to use it if they are used to working with digital photographers.”

At National Geographic, Chief Content Officer Chris Johns said it’s up to the photographer to choose the medium. “It’s about how they express what they see and what they feel,” he said. “I don’t care what medium they choose. It’s about how the photographer sees the image.”

Robertson is aware that digital is the better medium to quickly edit and post images online. On the other hand, sifting through thousands of images requires more computer time. He finds waiting for the shot more exciting. Plus, he’s able to go home and relax after a shoot.

Robertson’s collection of color negatives is spread out across his kitchen table with one of his film cameras (left) and one of his digital cameras. A huge difference with film is the physical existence of negatives. They take up space and can’t be erased with the click of a mouse.

Robertson works on capturing a biker as he makes a sharp turn through the course. He says there is more contemplation involved with film, and it’s difficult to get quick shots because there is more time involved in getting ready.

Winding down an evening of photographing a cyclocross race in Missoula, Robertson pulled out his digital camera. He shot 30 frames in five seconds, catching a group of bikers mid-race. He edited the images the same night and sent them to the organizers to post online.

Even if film is seeing a comeback, commercial photographers need to be well practiced with digital cameras to survive. In today’s competitive market, it’s more about the quality of images than the medium used.
Robertson fiddles with his Canon 1DX while his Mamiyas dangle at his side. He carries two Mamiyas with two different film speeds because different film speeds offer varying sensitivities to light. Higher numbers like 800 and 3200 indicate a higher sensitivity, which means the photographer can shoot in lower light, but the photos come out more grainy.

Robertson looks for the next shot during the cyclocross race. He switches back and forth between using his digital and film cameras, depending upon what he wants to capture. He tries to use film as much as possible, but when he needs to produce photos quickly, he uses digital.

Robertson files through some of his earlier images taken with his Mamiya 7. When he started shooting, he noticed it was rare that he got a photograph he didn’t like, inspiring him to pursue photographing with medium-format film.
IN AN ERA OF GLOBAL INFORMATION, LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA OFTEN BORROW FROM EACH OTHER, WITH ONLY THE MOST SPECTACULAR EVENTS LIKELY TO BRING FORTH THE FULL DIVERSITY OF JOURNALISTIC VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES

Photo illustration by Kristin Kirkland
MISSOULIAN CRIME reporter Kate Haake is thankfully free on weekends from checking the police blotter and court schedules that are the go-to sources for stories on her beat. But habit is hard to break. She still skims Twitter, keeping on top of the news so as not to face any Monday-morning surprises.

On Sunday, April 27, 2014, a Tweet from her newspaper snagged her gaze. “Unarmed teenager shot, killed in Grant Creek garage; resident arrested.”

“Oh, shit.” Haake clicked on the story.

The victim, Diren Dede, was 17. “The male resident of the house reportedly found the intruder in his garage after an alarm went off, and shot him with a shotgun,” the story said. The homeowner was being held on suspicion of homicide. In a city that averages fewer than five murders a year, this meant automatic front-page news. Factor in the death of a teenager, and the story’s impact heightened exponentially.

Several thousand miles away, in Washington, D.C., a different combination of words on Twitter grabbed Karin Assmann’s attention: German and shot. As a correspondent for Spiegel TV, affiliated with Der Spiegel, the German weekly newsmagazine with a circulation of 880,000, Assmann’s job is to report on U.S. news of particular interest to Germans. The death of a German teenager far from home fit the bill. And, just as with Montana news organizations, the manner of death made the story even more compelling.

Gun ownership is strictly regulated in Germany. The Small Arms Survey, a Switzerland-based international research project, found there to be one gun-related death per 100,000 residents in Germany in 2013, compared to 10 in the United States. Germans are keenly aware of, and fascinated by, that difference. Thus stories involving gun culture in the United States “are always stories that an editor will take,” Assmann said.

She’d already worked her maximum number of days for the pay period. But with a story of this magnitude, it didn’t matter. Der Spiegel needed a magazine story, and Spiegel TV wanted her to produce a show. Assmann was going to Montana.

The Monday after the shooting, local reporters still had the story largely to themselves. They listened at Markus Kaarma’s initial court appearance as his attorney invoked Montana’s Castle Doctrine, which gives legal immunity to someone who kills an intruder as long as he is afraid of being harmed or losing his life.
By Tuesday and Wednesday, reporters from national and international publications—among them Assmann and Spiegel colleague Marc Hujer—hit the ground in Missoula. They began the tap-dance familiar to reporters who “parachute” into unfamiliar places to cover breaking stories, working out of motel rooms and rental cars, tapping information into their phones and laptops between interviews. They sought to capture the story’s essence in just two or three days, resulting in the sort of sleep deprivation that benefits local coffee shops.

The competition for interviews can be daunting, with sources already besieged with calls from local reporters. Given the choice of calling back people with whom they’re on a first-name basis, or responding to requests from publications several time zones away, sources frequently opt for the former.

The reverse is true when working the international angle. Even before leaving Washington, Assmann sought the German embassy’s help in reaching Dede’s father, Celal. That groundwork helped Der Spiegel pull off a scoop. Assmann and Hujer were the only people to snag an in-person interview with Celal Dede when he came to Missoula to bring his son’s body home.

The interview with Celal Dede had not yet been granted when Assmann arrived in Missoula. She, Hujer, and local photographer Lido Vizzutti spent a grueling day interviewing one of Dede’s soccer coaches. They also sought — unsuccessfully — interviews with the Big Sky High School principal and guidance counselor, setting up interviews with students they met at Big Sky while trying to reach the administrators, and finally, at the end of their day, getting the call to meet Celal Dede.

“The Lost Son” is the title of an article about Diren Dede’s death in a German magazine, Der Spiegel. The subtitle reads, “An exchange student from Hamburg is shot in Montana. The perpetrator that committed the act says he had to defend himself. The death of Diren Dede also shows the lack of understanding between Germany and America.” Later on in the story, Diren’s father said that if it had been up to him, his son would have never gone to America. To Celal Dede, America means violence and crime. The article was published by Der Spiegel in May of 2014.
The right interview can also be a matter of luck. None of Assmann’s telephone calls to Dede’s host family had been returned. But when Der Spiegel’s team went to the family’s neighborhood for photos of the home, the host parents were outside arranging a memorial on the lawn. Often, people are more apt to speak to a reporter standing in front of them than a voice on the other end of a telephone, and that was the case for Assmann. “They were very open to talking,” she said.

Assmann said she did not, as some national and international journalists do, try the shortcut of contacting local reporters and seeking their sources. Instead, she read local stories and figured out the sources for herself. Not that it did much good. “I spent some time trying to get law enforcement, etc., to go on the record,” Assmann wrote in an email, “to no avail.”

In the Missoulian newsroom, Haake and others got plenty of calls from outside reporters trying to take that shortcut. Haake patiently directed them to the Missoula Police Department and the County Attorney’s Office. Several of the callers, she said, also focused on the subject that so intrigued Der Spiegel’s readers.

“Guns,” said Haake, “There’s that stereotype that has life in Germany and the rest of the world—that this is the Wild West, that we love our guns.”

As Haake juggled those requests with her own work, she tried to convey some perspective to those callers, pointing out “that a lot of gun owners are really responsible.” Overseas, though, puzzlement reigned.
Basak, Dede’s older sister who lives in Hamburg, asked the reporters from Der Spiegel: “How can you shoot someone just because he comes into your garage?”

It was, said Der Spiegel, “the question that nobody has an answer for.”

In Missoula, it seemed nearly everyone had an answer.

Debate raged over the shooting—over guns themselves, and the Castle Doctrine, too. Stories about the case routinely logged dozens, and sometimes hundreds, of comments.

“Welcome to Montana, where the residents have the right to defend themselves! Please don’t threaten us because we will shoot! I LOVE MY STATE!” a woman calling herself “buckshot mama” posted on the Missoulian’s site.

“This law is mostly working for bullies. It is doing more harm than good,” responded someone with the screen name “Avalanche Creek.”

Missoulian Editor Sherry Devlin began to notice something else in the comments. German residents logged onto the Missoulian website to express their own opinions in a discussion that moved away from guns.

“Over time, it devolved into Germans arguing over the fact that he was Turkish.” (Dede’s family emigrated from Turkey to Germany, and he was buried in Turkey.)

In Germany, that ethnic issue, which barely surfaced in Montana papers, got personal. Der Spiegel reported one of Hamburg's soccer clubs had to turn off the comment function on its website after a multitude of xenophobic postings.

Missoula journalist Mike Gerrity has seen the gun story from both sides. In 2010, he freelanced a long-form story on gun culture for Die Tageszeitung, the German daily newspaper commonly referred to as taz.

“For me, the concept that 9 of 10 people have guns is not that impressive,” Gerrity said. To his surprise, his German editor thought otherwise. “It really got me to pull myself out of this geographical box.”
After the death of exchange student Diren Dede, the Missoulian newspaper had to pull from German news organizations to cover certain aspects of the story. On May 2, 2014, it ran an Associated Press article based on a German reporter’s interview with Diren’s father, Celal. Like many Germans, Celal Dede was bewildered by the Montana legal system. “I didn’t think for one

dark

Don’t get left in the dark

CONGRATULATIONS to the School of Journalism on your 100th anniversary!

from the UM Broadcast Media Center

www.MontanaPublicNotices.com

As part of the story, Gerrity bought a .38-caliber handgun and took a firearms safety class. The longer he had the gun, he said, “the more I found myself preoccupied with what kind of scenario might arise where I’d have to use it.”

The fascination ended when he needed money for a security deposit. He sold the gun.

The foray into Missoula by the overseas reporters covering the Dede case was equally short-lived. Der Spiegel’s team left town after just a few days. Their report, translated for the magazine’s English-language website, made the rounds in Missoula. Then the magazine’s coverage moved on to other news.

Just as the Missoulian ran an Associated Press story crediting a German news outlet for quotes from Diren Dede’s father, overseas media sourced its occasional updates to Montana news organizations that continued to cover legal developments in the case.

In an era of global information, local and international media often borrow from each other with only the most spectacular events likely to bring the full diversity of journalistic voices and perspectives. And no matter how much reporting is done by journalists on either side of the Atlantic Ocean, it will not resolve the issue that brought the overseas reporters here in the first place.

As Der Spiegel noted in its story: “The tragedy sheds light on a side of America that will likely always remain foreign to many Europeans. It reveals a country where freedom is more important than anything else. And that includes the freedom to defend one’s own property—with violence if necessary.”

Longtime journalist Gwen Florio has reported breaking news stories around the country and the world. She is now a novelist and an adjunct professor at the University of Montana’s School of Journalism.
Tell us about your project. Why World War I?

The film is an animated oral history of American soldiers in World War I. Just the soldiers. It doesn’t have any romantic air war, it doesn’t have anything romantic at all in it. It is done with stop motion with a Super 8 camera, with Super 8 film, and this is a very old style of animation that originated in Germany in the 1920s.

There was something really remote about World War I. Just by looking at the pictures with the pointy helmets, and the crazy old-fashioned tanks that looked like the Nautilus from, you know, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.

(Above) Smetanka uses silhouette figures for his feature film, “And We Were Young.” When he’s not filming, he spends his time cutting and arranging figures. The characters are made from card stock paper and pieced together using hot glue and wire nails.

(Left) He creates all of his animations under a wooden light table, and uses a Super 8 film camera. In 2008 Andy started using Super 8 film and says he has always loved and been inspired by animation, and had his heart set on “doing a film with film.”
2 Why did you decide to use Super 8?

If you want to do stop-motion animation the way I do, you basically need to use film. What I need is just that magic of light combining with chemicals to store it on emulsion. It’s so forgiving. It covers everything with that sort of dreamy lacquer of emulsion, and it’s really forgiving, even the projector itself. There’s, you know, frame blur that gives it a really soft image.

You can replicate those things digitally, I’m sure, but I don’t know how. I really can’t be bothered to learn, I don’t want to. I don’t see myself adding digital artifacts to make something look Super 8, when I’d much rather be doing the real thing.

3 What’s next for you?

I know that I’m not going to tackle a one-man feature any time soon. I also know that I don’t want to work for anybody else.

I’m actually toying with the idea of making a Missoula movie, you know. A kind of Missoula - - I don’t want to say autobiography, but sort of a Missoula documentary. I’m looking at this successful Winnipeg movie that I was involved with, and I’m like, ‘Yeah. Yeah, I think it’s time to examine my hometown.’

Aside from filming and editing, Andy Smetanka spends a lot of time creating, repairing, and organizing his hand-constructed silhouette characters. They are organized by scene and character, and arranged in large envelopes.

Rob Truax is a Montana native, and recent Media Arts graduate of the University of Montana. He makes films, documentaries, and animations. You can view his website at www.robtruax.org.
When the Great Falls Tribune redesigned its website, it sought to offer more choice to more readers and gain more advertisers. Here’s a look at challenges and opportunities presented before and after the change.

The lead story on the old home page sure took its time getting to the point, with a head and deck totaling an astonishing 33 words; a wordy habit carried over from newspaper layout. The new lead headline (facing page) gets to the point in a much more economical eight words, emphasizing the value and need for smarter headline writing.

The smaller horizontal photos in this central area posed a problem: Many images, especially the sports action shots chosen here, are too busy to translate to this small size. The revamped photo teasers in the redesigned page (facing) are more successful in presenting readable content.

In this sample, the former home page layout allowed 20 headline options for the home page visitor. The new version (facing page) offers nearly 60, not counting rotating galleries, which offer additional options. Obviously this was a remake about volume, volume, volume. The home page is deeper, of course, but offers more stories in photo and video form. Readers are visual creatures, and the new design plays well to that.

Design consultant Ron Reason will be the University of Montana School of Journalism’s Distinguished Pollner Professor for Spring 2015.

Archival screen snapshot courtesy of Joe Addy, Webmaster, Great Falls Tribune.

Ron’s Reasons: An Illustrated Web Critique
Commentary by Ron Reason

In this instance, the Great Falls Tribune staff actually had a fair amount of say in how the redesign went. They had almost full control of the content on the front page, including photos, videos, links, images, etc. They did get to choose their own color scheme as well, but as with most corporate overhauls, much of the design was determined by the owners, Gannett Corporation. They aimed to get readers more of the content they desired online by going with a heavy image/video site design, as you can see on the facing page. Web Master Joe Addy said they felt satisfied that the new site accomplished their goals.
NEW HOME PAGE: ADOPTED MARCH 2, 2014

October 10, 2014 home page was randomly selected for commentary below.

A bolder, slightly deeper header features a larger logo in caps and lowercase. This wisely moves beyond an old, stale trend for newspaper websites, shown on the older home page: all-lowercase logos (too casual) with a “.com” added, which was superfluous - we knew we were on a website, right?

A larger image in a quickly rotating “lead story” gallery creates a greater sense of hierarchy and action. Don’t like the top item? Wait a few seconds, another option appears. Reflects the idea that greater updating and higher volume offers readers more choices and keeps them around longer.

High up, this “utility rail” clearly presents visitors with info on how to use the site, contact staff, or submit items. Very user friendly.

The “Brady Bunch” shapes in this block of teasers might threaten to get a bit monotonous. But, if the content of each square surprises, stories update often, and heads are well written, readers will stick around. The reverse white heads present a challenge: bottoms of images must be dark enough to ensure readability.

Content such as VIDEO is clearly organized (as with GALLERIES, farther down). But an ongoing challenge for news websites is to present content that truly deserves to be shown as video. The headline on this story - “data breach at Jimmy John’s” - doesn’t suggest a dynamic viewing experience so much as, perhaps, a talking head. Opening screen shots should also present some hint of action to come. If this content is from an automated feed, there may not be much you can do, but if published live and locally, these are things to look out for.

Readers are scanners. This rail serves them well. A vertical layout moves the eye quickly (and has since the days of The Wall Street Journal’s “What’s News” column). Reverse white-on-black text can get hard to read, but the narrow column and short bits of text make it work here.

From a reader’s standpoint, the lack of advertising on the home page template on this particular date may be a godsend. From a publisher’s standpoint, it’s a concern: Where’s the revenue going to come from? The “Today’s Deal” near the bottom of the home page might be moved higher, and might benefit from offering more than one product. Or, text-only ads (horizontal 1-or 2-lines, as in Google) could be subtly introduced between editorial elements, and might boost revenue.
One of the most common misconceptions about people with disabilities is that they live hard, miserable, dreary lives. But Boatman says this is simply not the case. He is passionate about writing, going to concerts, and spending time with friends. He enjoys his life and thinks most other people with disabilities would say the same.

Nearly one in five Americans, or 56.7 million people, have some form of a disability. Yet while women and ethnic minorities changed the face of journalism in recent decades, people with significant disabilities continue to remain invisible from much of the “mainstream media.”

When I enrolled in the University of Montana’s School of Journalism in 2010, I didn’t have a single classmate with any kind of physical disability. I didn’t dwell on this because I knew I had the skills needed for a job within the realm of journalism. Graduation soon came, and I wondered where to apply the professional skills I had learned. An editor from New Mobility, one of the largest disability-related magazines in the country, offered me a news-and-freelance position. I accepted, and for the last two years, have used my journalistic skills to inform many people with disabilities about stories that affect their lives.

Journalism is an ever-changing profession that needs many diverse storytellers, including people with disabilities. We are the largest minority in the country, but the most underrepresented group in the news industry. Hiring journalists with disabilities not only helps stories about the disability experience to be told better but also brings fresh perspectives into newsrooms, which isn’t a bad thing. Not bad at all.
SKYPE
Skype has been a useful tool in conducting and recording a majority of my phone interviews. Having an audio copy of an interview is valuable when you need to write down a complete quote.

AUDIO VOICE RECORDER
When I’m out in the field or in a noisier environment, my digital voice recorder is handy for catching interviews on the go. Many of today’s recorders can be plugged into any USB port for quick and easy download of any interview.

SMARTNAV BY NATURALPOINT
My SmartNav head-operated mouse uses an infrared camera to track my head movements through a reflective dot worn on my nose. I control individual mouse clicks with a button that I click with my right thumb and index finger.

CONCEPTUS BITE SWITCH
I use a Nikon DSLR camera with a tripod, but I needed to figure out how to independently operate the shutter. This bite switch was devised by skydiving photographers for taking photos in high-altitude environments, and it allows me to quickly take pictures without assistance.

Illustrations by Rachel Leathe
WITH THE NEWSPAPER

business facing a continuous crisis, one of the best laboratories for the future should be college media.

College newspapers live in the coveted world of digital natives who learn on campus from world-class industry thinkers. We expect college researchers in medicine, software, and manufacturing to solve the biggest challenges in the world. Why not news?

There isn’t one right way to revamp a college newsroom to help figure out the future of news. The best model depends on the newsroom’s culture, budget, and audience. But there is a standard process college editors can use.

STEP 1: DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Learn the business of news: As Mark Briggs wrote in his book “Entrepreneurial Journalism,” “The willful ignorance of the business of news is precisely what made us journalists such awful and irresponsible stewards of journalism.”


Study your campus and the industry: Survey readers, advertisers, alumni, faculty and staff. Where do they get campus information? What would make them pick up your paper or visit your website? Call editors and business managers at the leading college papers. Ask them what new stuff they’re working on. What worked? What failed and what did they learn?

STEP 2: DOCUMENT WHAT YOU LEARN

Write a report: Open a new file. Name it “Change the Future.” Start chapters for news and business. Within news, create sections for print, digital, mobile, and social newsroom structure. Within business, create sections for revenue, expenses, marketing, sales, and distribution. Write out everything you learn along the way. This will become the background document supporting your plan.

Start a team: Find your smartest, most committed students in news and business and assign them a chapter to research and write.

Set a schedule: Pick a date that’s three months off. This is when your report is due.

STEP 3: PLAN, THEN ACT

Strategy: Now, the fun part. Set up a work session with your team on a Saturday. Order pizza. Grab all the Post-It notes in the office. Set up in front of a white board. Start with big, broad topics. What’s your mission and core purpose? And what kind of structure and culture do you need to deliver on those? Give your team 48 hours to finish the first draft strategy for news and business.

Get advice: Share your draft around the newsroom and with your faculty and alumni. Write out what you hear.

Revise, revise, then go: Give yourself another three-month deadline to collect feedback and tweak your strategy.

Launch day: When you’re done, pick a launch date to put your strategy into action. Plan a party for your staff and readers. You’ve earned it. ▲

Ryan Frank is the former president of Emerald Media Group, the nonprofit student media company at the University of Oregon. He blogs at http://ryanfrank.io/
Our Ad Revenue is Dope: MJR passed up an ad sale for a medical marijuana dispensary this year. Which other publications would have run the ad?

Firewalls around Forests: The Forest Service is restricting photo and video shoots in wilderness areas. MJR predicts a First Amendment battle in the courts.

The Court of Hashtag Opinion: A social media storm led to the disgrace of a Montana judge who had disparaged a rape victim. How is the justice system as a whole responding to the rise of the hashtags?

The Undergraduate: Journalism departments are changing their curriculum. What lessons learned in J-School work in the brave new media world?

Plenty of Gates, No Fences Around: Newspapers know how people are avoiding paywalls on their websites. Why aren’t they doing anything to plug the leaks?

Grahamland: In 2006, UM Journalism professor Keith Graham launched the Dutton Country Courier as part of a plan to give rural communities their own news sources. Almost 10 years later, does the desertification of the media landscape persist?

How Do I Zoom In?: Caffeine-addled reporters with shaky smartphones are taking the jobs of news photographers. Do audiences notice the difference?

The Ladder Climb: The traditional career path for journalists - from small town papers to larger markets and eventually the big city – has been disrupted. What does the rat race of new journalism look like?

Virtual Encounters: After games and drones, virtual reality is the latest hype in journalism innovation. What immersion scenarios does the West offer?

The Seven-Letter Acronym: Journalists should translate jargon for the general public. At what point should they incorporate tongue breakers like LGBTQIA into their lexicon?

SMARTPHONES TRUMP FREE RURAL TV

SMARTPHONE RECEPTION in Montana is slated to improve, but in exchange, some people in small rural towns are likely to lose access to free TV.

In 2015, the Federal Communications Commission plans to auction off airwaves given up by TV stations to provide more space for mobile companies to expand wireless data services, like 4G networks.

While major broadcasters have little to worry about during this switch, smaller TV translators and low-powered stations are at risk of getting bumped.

Across Montana, more than 420 community translators allow people living in rural areas to receive TV signals from larger markets. Those who can’t afford satellite or cable depend on those translators, broadcasting engineer Charlie Cannaliato said.

Cannaliato, who services and maintains about 60 translators in Montana, said 25 to 75 of them could cease operations when the airwaves are auctioned.

Jim McDonald, president of the National Translator Association, said the plan affects mostly rural and elderly people who live near small or agricultural towns.

He thinks the FCC’s decision to sell airwaves to wireless companies came from officials who believe broadband will eventually replace television.

McDonald said the older generation, which relies on the morning paper and evening newscasts for information rather than real-time updates delivered to pocket-sized gadgets, is what’s keeping the government from a quick transition.

“There is a trend, but it’s not as fast as the FCC wants to make it,” McDonald said. “I think we still have close to a generation to wait for people to finish using their TV.”

Corin Cates-Carney is a 2014 graduate of the University of Montana School of Journalism.
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ANNIVERSARY OF VIETNAM
Through a Veteran’s Lens

BERNIE AZURE, an Assiniboine from Montana, volunteered for Vietnam when he was 19 years old. He returned with an archive full of images he shot while deployed in Chu Lai, about 50 miles south of Da Nang. “I always wanted a record of my existence on the planet, and the people I spent time with,” he said. His Vietnam experience sparked a career as a reporter and photographer for the Lake County Leader in Polson. Today, he works as a public information officer for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. His photos from Vietnam appear in print for the first time, 50 years after the war began.

About war photography, Azure said: “I’ve always admired journalists who do that, who go out, who have that sense of duty, that’s a paramount, ideal way to be, to have the need to expose the dirtiness and ugliness of war, and maybe, just maybe, it’ll have an effect, a positive effect, in showing the ugliness, the futility, the damage, and the waste that it has.”

Photos by Bernie Azure

Story by Tera Dittbrenner
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