



4th Working Round
Working Group D4
e-business for journalists

Brief conclusions summary

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«Internet is its own revolution»

Internet Society

Internet. The revolution of the digital era!

We live, by now, in a society replete with information. A society presenting a trend toward offering all citizens the possibility of access to and participation in high level creations of the mind, thanks to digital information processing and the respective training.

However, with regard to Internet, it would be more appropriate to speak about the Imagination Society or the Knowledge Society. In the virtual reality society of the Internet, information, and therefore knowledge are disseminated through electronic bits. In such a society, information is the new center of gravity of the socioeconomic system.

Information has two faces on the Internet. At times it appears as an economic phenomenon (marketing object), technological or technical phenomenon (change of its form and content by the medium), social phenomenon (differentiation depending on its recipients), political phenomenon (since it is related to power), and cultural expression (since it appears in a specific social symbolism).

It is true that today's society disseminates the most information as compared to all previous forms of society together. However, this amazing growth of information also poses the problem of overinformation which presents two "black holes". On the one hand there is misinformation and on the other one we realize that only a tiny part of the information can become accessible to a public that still remains restricted.

Despite all that, the Internet has given another dimension to information. Or even better, the Web has democratized the information.

News is not any more a monopoly of publishing houses. Anybody with a computer can even compete against "major" publications. Nowadays, everybody can call themselves Internet journalists, and host in their website the most important search engines.

However, the immediacy of information dissemination in conjunction with the legal framework gap typical of the Internet, pose a problem of frivolity and misinformation, quite frequent in the Internet content.

If, then, a new medium implies a new message, then new rules must be established governing e-information.

The Internet is by now quite evolved to be considered a reliable mass communication medium. The Internet journalists along with all those authorized to or who can "load" information, publish articles. At the same time they also break the rules. Many online journalists work without an established professional framework, ignoring traditional journalism rules.

Thanks to that enormous spider web, information becomes global and almost eliminates the concepts of space and time. Texts, images, sounds, programs, and data

banks can be read, copied and loaded from every which point on the planet. All these new tools change the way information is processed.

Contrary to what we believed in the beginning, e-publications do not need to be limited to the e-copying of the respective paper publications. It is beyond all doubt that the Internet provides readers with an additional privilege: interactivity. People are not any more passive recipients of information, they click on issues of interest to them and can research down to infinity.

Hence, journalists as well face the need to experiment with the form of information dissemination and the quality of the main point of contact with readers: valid and useful information coming from the Internet.

Just like readers must learn to use intelligently all Internet tools in order to find what they are looking for, maybe journalists as well need to review their educational background to adapt to the new medium.

Creation of information on the Internet must be different.

The fourth largest mass communication medium is in search of new professionals: the Internet Journalists!

This lesson combines research on the new reality and needs of journalism as a result of the constant evolution of the Internet. Each chapter approaches, analyzes and provides answers to the current mass media environment (Chapter I), the Internet, the part of the press and journalism (Chapter II), peripherals and the mass media (Chapter IV), changes in the journalism profession (Chapter V), and ends with conclusions (VI) and proposals (VII).

Group conclusions

Communication is and shall always be a social phenomenon, and not a simple technological achievement. Hence, it is of importance to be particularly careful and criticize new technologies, so that we can use them correctly in journalism.

We must avoid falling in the trap of utopias and show moderate enthusiasm towards technological developments. Then we will be able to have, really, unique freedom of movement in an effort to improve the information provided to people. It is beyond doubt that the Internet, being a new medium, is very promising, however, we must approach it with particularly critical mind.

The continuous technological evolution of multimedia is changing the traditional practices of the press. Now, everything moves faster. Information moves at the speed of light, but humans still move at the same speed they used to. We understand by now, that direct information is not closer to reality than the information that requires research. On the contrary, time allows us to stand back and better process and cross check our information. Also, the current phenomenon of overinformation does not let us keep a distance from facts and the excessive involvement of the media in some of them makes the public even more unhappy. The opinion that we shall never need journalists ever again is wrong, journalistic education will always be necessary to decipher facts and attribute to them their real dimension.

The Internet has also been seen by newspapers as a good opportunity to cover the distance separating them from the remaining electronic information media. The Internet has provided many possibilities, the most important of which have been:

- immediate updating of news and content in general;
- unlimited space;
- enhancement of content with interactive tools, customized services, video and audio material, and links;
- the increase of the number of readers; e-newspapers may reach any area without any problem and approach young people as well, that before would not buy the printed version;
- the possibility of improving profits through on-line services and on-line advertising space.

The traditional means had the “raw material” and the new one has the technology, and a fusion of these two features has created an “explosive” combination for the reality of the Worldwide Web.

The first steps of publishers in on line publishing were more of an experimental nature and a way of “meeting” the new medium, rather a business activity.

However this stage did not last long, and very soon newspapers started having high profitability expectations. The first expectations were tuned towards *on line advertising*. In accordance with the strategy of most e-newspapers advertising was to become the main source of income around which all other actions would have a part in

support of the increase of profit. However, “fishing” for advertisees for the newspapers websites has proven to be difficult.

The effort of publishing companies would collide against the general cut down in advertising funds in the past years, as well as the strong “distrust” of advertisers until recently. The main problem lies in the fact that there is no clear method to measure the efficiency of online advertising, since there are no specific standards to determine the advertising dynamics of each site. However, it is estimated that the operation of the Interactive Advertising Bureau, shall provide a solution to these problems and shall place the development of online advertising on a more specific basis. To date though, user registration has contributed significantly towards that direction.

Most e-newspapers "require" from users that they fill in a form with their particulars before gaining access to certain services in the site or to the whole content. Publishing companies obtain in this way a clear image of their public (age, educational background, hobbies, income, etc.), and can, in their turn, offer useful information to those advertised. Targeted advertising (namely advertising targeted at a very specific public) is by now one of the most hot issues on the Internet.

A second area, not at all insignificant, offered for an increase of income in online publishing is *paid content*. Although in the beginning when newspapers had started getting involved with the Internet they did not have the "luxury" of charging for their content, this perspective begins to be gradually obtaining higher probability levels. The majority of e-newspapers, except for a few exceptions (e.g. the US "Wall Street Journal") that had an “aggressive” policy straight from the beginning, follow a quite “conservative” strategy in this matter.

In short, the method followed initially was that of having users "addicted" to electronic information. Online publications have shown "good will" towards users offering them unlimited free content. In that way they were luring users and at the same time were advertising their website. However, as time went by, this strategy has started ceding, and publishing companies have started mentioning subscriptions. Added value services and the archive were the first components of the websites of newspapers to be provided on a subscription basis.

It should be noted that the service of searching the archive is now a paid service in almost all cases, even if the remaining content is provided free of charge. Subscribed services, although very commonplace by now, have not yet gained a high level of "acceptance" by the public.

The logic behind online newspapers is that added value services and direct and primary information shall become finally important incentives for paying for the content provided. It is expected that customized services, in which high investments are anticipated, shall play a key part. Generally, with regard to paid content, according to Jupiter Media Metrix data (Internet and new technologies research and analysis company) on the one hand, the online content market will recover, while on the other hand this shall happen at very low rates. More specifically, it is estimated that the income from paid online content will increase to \$ 5.8 billion by 2006 as compared to \$ 1.4 billion in 2002.

However, the opportunities of e-newspapers to sell content are not limited to B2C (Business to Customer). The perspective opening up to B2B (Business to Business) synergies is also important. *Syndication* is the uprising source of profitability, not only for on line publications, but also for all other information web providers. E—newspapers have already taken intensive action towards that direction, which does not seem to gain significant ground in the electronic world.

Publishing houses are in a constant search for Internet opportunities. However, their electronic efforts are accompanied by constant preoccupation, as the market is evolving and it is not possible to safely foresee the plans being promoted. In the beginning, skepticism focused on the effect of e-newspapers on printed media. The worry that online publications would raise issues of loss of future gains for printed newspapers was soon belied soon, as the sites not only did they not take subscribers away from the printed media but added to the existing ones. According to international data, newspaper websites are a good area for attracting new subscribers to the printed versions.

Electronic newspapers seem to be slowly finding their identity in the cyberspace. With time they are "building" their profile which is directly affected by the reputation in the market of the respective printed version. Some years back, US newspapers had made the most important steps. The attempts of "Wall Street Journal", "New York Times" and "Washington Post" have led the way for more efforts on the Internet, and have set some of the standards of online publications.

European newspapers were not late to follow the example set by their American "colleagues" and entered the Worldwide Web quite dynamically and demandingly. The websites of European newspapers are particularly rich in content, widely use new technologies and they do not lack in anything as compared to other e-newspapers. It should be stressed, however, that US online publications have a more "aggressive" position in the electronic world than their European counterparts.

Greek newspapers have started moving fast towards the Internet. The first electronic "experience" in the Greek publications market has been somewhere in the mid 90s, when "Eleftherotypia" launched its first online version. There were many newspapers to follow, while today most newspapers have their own website. The "weakness" of Greek electronic newspapers as compared to international ones is clear and sensed both as regards the organization of content, and commercial organization.

Most websites mainly contain the content of the printed version, resulting in the online version being seen as an electronic copy and not as an autonomous and independent medium. Greek electronic publications are generally "poor" in material and do not make extensive use of new technologies. In most cases there is lack of interactive tools and customized services, while in terms of esthetics the result is not of particular quality. Some bright exceptions to that rule are the sites of "Naftemporiki" and "Imerisia", which seem to have adopted the international trends and adapted them successfully to Greek reality.

The need for use of the Internet by Greek journalists has preceded the "cloning" of the press and its transfer to the Internet. This perception has been also incited by fears for the appearance of "theft" phenomena within the publication companies themselves. Such worry has also been the reason that has initially led newspaper directors to update their websites one day later. Later, at the time of the first wave of Internet investments

in the US, major US newspapers and TV stations had created digital press rooms, investing in machinery and human resources. Passive archive websites were redesigned and evolved into online news services by rotation, following the standards of press agencies.

However, Greek businesses, although they tried to follow that pattern, they soon ceded and any initial attempts made led either to shrinkage of their activities or in definite business "shut down" for many of them.

Major news sites have cut their staff numbers down a lot, are constantly on the look for alliances to be able to bear the financial burden, while smaller businesses are holding onto their businesses in any way they can, in anticipation of their share in the sum of about 1 trillion GRD to be allocated under the 3rd CSF to the Information Society.

On the other hand, electronic newspapers still do not publish original material. This, as is natural, also affects the work of journalists. Nowadays, journalists search for information in news sites, which they can often have much earlier.

On the other hand, public authorities are not renowned for their expediency in terms of updating their websites, and often certain information is published first in the press and then in their websites.

Nonetheless, what we can say is that there is a satisfactory access percentage of journalists on the Internet. An 88% is positive with regard to the penetrability of new technologies in businesses managing information and also shows an ever growing trend. At the same time, however, existing lack in infrastructure and content, currently typical of Greek websites, will also show.

Despite the fact that all Greek newspapers have an impressive presence on the Internet, they, however, hide in them a powerful dynamic to be unrolled in the near future. It is estimated that the increase of the penetration of the Internet shall provide a determining impulse to e-newspapers and the reinforcement of their commercial value. Already, messages are encouraging, since the number of Internet users in Greece is increasing in geometrical order.

The processing and dissemination of information shall see many changes in the years to come. For that reason we are invited to take a proactive stance with regard to the problems to arise. Yet, the growth of e-commerce is an additional negative factor for the independency of information, since the act of informing may be serving certain financial interests. Polemics regarding journalism ethics and morale shall focus on Internet journalism, because it encompasses dilemmas to be faced by the other media as well.

Cyberjournalism is starting little by little to set its own rules and codes, and to be separated slowly but steadily from traditional media. Of course, it is true that it is not easy to set rules in an area where rules are far from being a reality. Especially, in a cyberculture that likes opposing itself to all types of rules.

Nowadays, online newspapers see themselves obliged to set their own rules and codes separately. Differentiation in this area is very pronounced and from what it seems, ethics shall be established in the long run. However, the rules and values of the classical media may be used as a solid base to support the ethics of cyberjournalism.

It is also beyond doubt that today we are witnesses of a real transformation of the mass media. The Internet is changing the traditional practices of journalism and reviews the relations between journalists and their public. It will be a challenge for the press to obtain the ability to skillfully use the sole interactivity possibility provided to it by the Internet, turning it into a significant advantage of journalism.

Hence we see that a new kind of journalists is arising along with new technologies. The world of the Internet requires new skills and rules for journalism.

It has not been long since new journalists simply had to choose between printed and audiovisual journalism. Today they are offered a new choice.

A new world is under construction and is asking for our participation. We can foresee from now the necessary advantages that this new kind of journalists must have: specialization, flexibility, and creativity. However, this new form of journalism, cyberjournalism, also affects even the traditional media that are by now starting to look for the same properties in their reporters.

Therefore, journalism schools must teach the correct use of the huge source of information provided by new technologies, as well as the organization of such information. This shall lead to the absolute facilitation of reader access to specific information or to information in general. Whoever enters the Internet, they must be able to surf from one piece of information to the other thanks to intelligently located links.

Furthermore, Internet journalists will also need to be trained in new article editing techniques. Those of us who get in contact with the Internet, have realized that we do not read a printed newspaper or magazine in exactly the same way we read the respective online versions.

Cyberspace is an ever evolving world and Internet journalists must above all have a vivid imagination and curiosity. Cyberjournalists must be informed about imminent technological changes, they must be always in a "technological awareness". It is also important that they be able to foresee the mutations and transformations of the Internet.

More than ever, online journalists are both technicians and reporters. The writing talent and the hunch for "hot news" are not enough any more; they must be combined with knowledge about the new communication technologies.

The risk here may be an overturning of the temporary balance. Then journalists will simply become a technician, a "content feeder".

Proposals

I. Journalist training center

Developments in new technologies in conjunction with the gaps in the area of the continuous vocational training of journalists, create the need for the establishment of a vocational training institute in Greece. The setup of university departments in the early 90s has provided, to a certain extent, a solution to the problem of basic training, even late. The problem still exists in continuous education. It should be noted that in almost all European States, such institutionalized authorities have been in place for many decades. Of course, the setup of the authority must be of the concern of trade unions in the sector, which in collaboration with the university community and other authorities could design and implement such an idea. It should certainly be reminded that a relevant study about the setup of a Mediterranean Journalism Center had been conducted a few years ago by the Prefecture of Hania, in cooperation with the European Journalism Center in Maastricht. It is self evident that such a center must not be limited to training, but it could also extend to applied research. This element is directly related to the shortage also evident in our country in terms of profession research.

Broader developments in communications and the media, render the implementation of such an objective more transnational in the sense that its orientation will be beyond national frontier, most probably transbalkanic and maybe Mediterranean.

II. Regional Mass Media

Most probably, developments in Europe are leading to a gradual decline of the nationcentric model as this has been developed during the 20th Century. The need for enlarged markets goes through the development of the regions. Thus, the media of the regions show a relative upward course in terms of readability and investments in human resources and new technologies. However, this is contradictory to the lack of integrated investment programs especially for the press. European policy in this matter is oriented more towards supporting the audiovisual sector, with emphasis placed on production and distribution. This is logical to a certain extent, since the European market is not competitive, resulting in a dominance of the American industry. However, the press is a valuable cultural and democratic tool which must maintain its historical role. Under these conditions, there is need for investment incentives at national and European level, which must be more oriented towards the regional printed media. And this is so, because at the central level there are strong centralization trends, leading in the dissemination of information being channeled through some strong Mass Media Groups. Groups that are directly linked to political power and financial elites. Providing support to the local and regional media through integrated investment programs, shall support the forces working against centralization, enhance democracy and culture. At the same time, the development of regional media will help the local markets and economy.

III. Following Steps

Initially, there is need for further dissemination of the results of the research on the use of the new media by the regional press, presenting the problems caused by the centralization and making even more evident that the development of regional media will help local markets and economy. The results of the research through new actions must be disseminated through:

- informative workshops;
- educational seminars;
- releases;
- Internet websites;
- discussion forums for the executives of central and regional media.

Along with the aforementioned actions, the results shall be further disseminated among journalists and in the wider academic and research community, through:

- informative workshops;
- releases;
- websites, etc..

Having also noticed the hesitation among investment programs aimed at helping the regional media, it is necessary to establish new aid actions and activities, the main objective being the cooperation of research teams from different university departments and experienced information groups aiming at disseminating the know-how and experience they have to all regional information units. Also, in this way the following shall be rendered possible:

- the setup of Learning Communities (drawing on modern network tools and communications methods), and implementation of educational programs in specialized application areas of the new media to regional journalism;
- the change of mentality with regard to the use of new information and communication technologies;
- a change in the regional media culture towards individual responsibility for education and training, and the acceptance of training as a common investment between employers and employees.