



UNIVERSITETET
I OSLO

INSTITUTT FOR MEDIER OG KOMMUNIKASJON

Take-home examination

Spring 2008

JOUR3422- Trends in international journalism

Hand out Monday April 7., 10.00. Hand in Thursday April 10., between 12.00.-14.00.

Answer one of the three following questions:

1. Discuss the enclosed article from *The Economist*, Aug 24th 2006, as a background for discussing the challenge that new communication technologies pose for the printed press. Use the title: "The Newspaper Industry".
2. Use the enclosed article from the *New York Review of Books*, Volume 55, Number 2 . February 14, 2008, as a background for discussing how blogging relates to journalism. Use the title: "Blogging".
3. Use selected case studies in De Burgh, Hugo (ed). *Making Journalists* and Anderson, Peter J. & Geoff Ward (eds): *The Future of Journalism in the Advanced Democracies*, to analyse how media systems from different parts of the world may fit in the categories proposed by Hallin & Mancini in *Comparing Media Systems. Three models of Media and Politics*. Use the title: "Media Systems".

Helge Rønning is available for questions on: +47 90023561

*The exam may be written in English or Norwegian. The submitted paper may be up to 10 pages (one page is calculated to 2300 characters without spaces). Please hand in **three** copies of your paper, with your candidate number (see: <https://studweb.uio.no/as/WebObjects/studentweb?inst=UiO>), **NOT** name, on the front page.*

**The examination results will be publicised in Studentweb May 2. 2008.
The results will not be given by telephone or e-mail**

Blogs

By Sarah Boxer

BOOKS MENTIONED IN THIS ARTICLE

We've Got Blog: How Weblogs Are Changing Our Culture
compiled and edited by John Rodzvilla, with an introduction by Rebecca Blood

Basic Books, 242 pp., \$20.00

Against the Machine: Being Human in the Age of the Electronic Mob
by Lee Siegel

Spiegel and Grau, 182 pp., \$22.95

Republic.com 2.0
by Cass R. Sunstein

Princeton University Press, 251 pp., \$24.95

Blogwars
by David D. Perlmutter

Oxford University Press, 235 pp., \$24.95

The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor, and Privacy on the Internet
by Daniel J. Solove

Yale University Press, 247 pp., \$24.00

We're All Journalists Now: The Transformation of the Press and Reshaping of the Law in the Internet Age
by Scott Gant

Free Press, 240 pp., \$26.00

Blog: Understanding the Information Reformation That's Changing Your World
by Hugh Hewitt

Nelson Books, 225 pp., \$14.99 (paper)

The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet Is Killing Our Culture
by Andrew Keen

Doubleday/Currency, 228 pp., \$22.95

Naked Conversations: How Blogs Are Changing the Way Businesses Talk with Customers
by Robert Scoble and Shel Israel, foreword by Tom Peters

Wiley, 252 pp., \$24.95

Blog! How the Newest Media Revolution Is Changing Politics, Business, and Culture
by David Kline and Dan Burstein

CDS Books, 402 pp., \$24.95

Two years ago, I was given a dreadful idea for a book: create an anthology of blogs. It could not be done, I was sure. Books are tight. Blogs are reckless. Books are slow. Blogs are fast. Books ask you to stay between their covers. Blogs invite you to stray. Books fret over copyright and libel. Blogs grab whatever they want with impunity—news, gossip, pictures, videos. Making a book out of bloggy material, if it could be done at all, would kill it, wouldn't it?[1]

A blog, for those who don't know, is a journal or log that appears on a Web site. It is written on line, read on line, and updated on line. It's there for anyone with an Internet connection to see and (in many cases) comment on. The entries, or posts, are organized in reverse chronological order, like a pile of unread mail, with the newest posts on top and the older stuff on the bottom. Some blogs resemble on-line magazines, complete with graphics, sidebars,

and captioned photos. Others just have the name of the blog at the top and the dated entries under it. You can find blogs by doing a regular Google search for the blog name (if you know it) or by doing a Google Blog search using keywords.

The word "blog" is a portmanteau term for Web log or Weblog. In 1997 Jorn Barger, the keeper of Robot Wisdom, a Web site full of writings about James Joyce, artificial intelligence, and Judaism as racism (he's reputedly a racist himself), coined the word "Weblog." In 1999 Peter Merholz, the author of a Weblog called Peterme, split it in two like this—"We blog"—creating a word that could serve as either noun or verb. "Blog" was born.

Today there are, by one count, more than 100 million blogs in the world, with about 15 million of them active. (In Japan neglected or abandoned blogs are called *ishikoro*, pebbles.) There are political blogs, confessional blogs, gossip blogs, sex blogs, mommy blogs, science blogs, soldier blogs, gadget blogs, fiction blogs, video blogs, photo blogs, and cartoon blogs, to name a few. Some people blog alone and some in groups. Every self-respecting newspaper and magazine has some reporters and critics blogging, including The New York Times, The Atlantic, and The New Yorker.

Every sport, every war, every hurricane brings out a crop of bloggers, who often outdo the mainstream media in timeliness, geographic reach, insider information, and obsessive detail. You can read about the Iraq war from Iraqi bloggers, from American soldiers (often censored now), or from scholars like Juan Cole, whose blog, *Informed Comment*, summarizes, analyzes, and translates news from the front. For opera, to take another example, you have *Parterre Box*, which is kind of campy, or *Sieglinde's Diaries* and *My Favorite Intermissions*, written by frequent Met-goers, or *Opera Chic*, a Milan-based blog focused on La Scala (which followed in great detail the scandal of Roberto Alagna's walkout during *Aida* a year ago). And that doesn't begin to cover it.

With such riches to choose from, you might think it would be a snap to put a bunch of blogs into a book and call it an anthology. And you would be wrong. The trouble? Links—those bits of highlighted text that you click on to be transported to another blog or another Web site. (Links are the Web equivalent of footnotes, except that they take you directly to the source.) It's not only that the links are hard to transpose into print. It's that the whole culture of linking—composing on the fly, grabbing and posting whatever you like, making weird, unexplained connections and references—doesn't sit happily in a book. Yes, I'm talking about bloggy writing itself.

Is there really such a thing? A growing stack of books has pondered the effects of blogs and bloggers on culture (*We've Got Blog and Against the Machine*), on democracy (*Republic .com 2.0*), on politics (*Blogwars*), on privacy (*The Future of Reputation*), on media (*Blog: Understanding the Information Reformation and We're All Journalists Now*), on professionalism (*The Cult of the Amateur*), on business (*Naked Conversations*), and on all of the above (*Blog!*). But what about the effect of blogs on language?

Are they a new literary genre? Do they have their own conceits, forms, and rules? Do they have an essence?

Reading blogs, it's pretty clear, is not like reading a newspaper article or a book. Blog readers jump around. They follow links. They move from blogs to news clips to videos on YouTube, and they do it more easily than you can turn a newspaper page. They are always getting carried away—somewhere. Bloggers thrive on fragmented attention and dole it out too—one-liners, samples of songs, summary news, and summary judgments. Sometimes they don't even stop to punctuate. And if they can't put quite the right inflection on a sentence, they'll often use an OMG (Oh my god!) or an emoticon, e.g., a smiley face :-), or a wink ;-), or a frown :-(instead of words. (Tilt your head to the left to see the emoticons here.)

Many bloggers really don't write much at all. They are more like impresarios, curators, or editors, picking and choosing things they find on line, occasionally slapping on a funny headline or adding a snarky (read: snotty and catty) comment. Some days, the only original writing you see on a blog is the equivalent of "Read this.... Take a look.... But, seriously, this is lame.... Can you believe this?"

Consider these two quite unrelated early-morning posts on December 5 from Instapundit, a well-known political blog operated by Glenn Reynolds, a law professor at the University of Tennessee:

HUCKABEEING AND NOTHINGNESS: Great title.

posted at 07:28 AM

by Glenn Reynolds

ALCEE HASTINGS resigns from Intel committee. That seems like a good thing, though Hastings disagrees:

In an interview with Congressional Quarterly in April, Hastings expressed some anger at "Democrats in high places" who made an issue—during his bid for the chairmanship—of the fact that he was impeached and removed from office as a federal judge in 1989 on corruption and perjury charges.

Yeah, can you believe they'd be so uptight?

posted at 07:21 AM

by Glenn Reynolds

The items are short and elliptical—teasers. To see what they are about you click on the links. Here, clicking on the highlighted words "AND NOTHINGNESS" whisks you to a blog post by John Podhoretz on the Web site of Commentary magazine with the title "Huckabeeing and Nothingness"; clicking on "resigns from Intel committee" brings you to an article about Hastings quitting the House Intelligence Committee that was posted on CQ Today, the daily news Web site of Congressional Quarterly. Following links is like putting on 3-D glasses. Too bad there is no equivalent in print.

Political blogs are among the trickiest to capture in a book because they tend to rely heavily on links and ephemeral information. But even blogs that have few or no links still show the imprint of the Web, its associative ethos, and its obsession with connection—the stink of the link. Blogs are porous to the world of texts and facts and opinions on line. (And this is probably as close as I can come to defining an essence of blog writing.)

Bloggers assume that if you're reading them, you're one of their friends, or at least in on the gossip, the joke, or the names they drop. They often begin their posts mid-thought or mid-rant—in medias craze. They don't care if they leave you in the dust. They're not responsible for your education. Bloggers, as Mark Liberman, one of the founders of the blog called Language Log, once noted, are like Plato. :-) The unspoken message is: Hey, I'm here talking with my buddies. Keep up with me or don't. It's up to you. Here is the beginning of Plato's Republic:

I went down yesterday to the Peiraeus with Glaucon, the son of Ariston, to pay my devotions to the Goddess, and also because I wished to see how they would conduct the festival since this was its inauguration.

Wait a second! Who is Ariston? What Goddess? What festival?

And here, for comparison's sake, is a passage from Julia {Here Be Hippogriffs}, a blog about motherhood and infertility:

Having left Steve to his own devices for the past three days I am being heavily pressured to abandon the internet (you! he wants me to abandon you!) and come downstairs to watch SG-1 with him....

So this will have to be quick. Vite! Aprisa aprisa!

I went to Blogger. It was rather fun and rather ridiculous and I am quite glad I went although I do not know if I would ever go again. One thing of note for my infertile blogging friends: DO NOT EVEN THINK ABOUT IT. Do not go. Do not ever ever go to Blogger.

Huh? Who's Steve? What's Blogger? A blog? (No.) A mothers' club? (No.) A blogging conference? (Yes.)

You get the point. Bloggers breeze through places, people, texts, and blogs that you might or might not know without providing any helpful identification. They figure that even if they don't provide you with links you can get all the background you need by Googling unfamiliar terms, clicking through Wikipedia (the collaborative on-line encyclopedia) or searching their blog's archives.

The very tone of most blogs—reactive, punchy, conversational, knowing, and free-associative—is predicated on linkiness and infused with it. And that's no accident. Once upon a time blogs were nothing but links with bits of commentary.

Although blogging has precedents going back to the early 1980s—on-line newsgroups, on-line diaries, and the "What's New" sections of personal homepages—blogging as we know it (according to Rebecca Blood's essay in

We've Got Blog) began gathering steam around 1998. That was when a number of people began using their Web sites to record and to link to the new sites they had discovered. These early bloggers didn't always offer much commentary. What they did do was offer place names and coordinates on the Web—like a ship's log. They provided, Blood notes, "a valuable filtering function for their readers." They "pre-surfed" the Web.

That small, cozy world exploded in 1999, the year that a handful of build-your-own-web-log tools for setting up blogs popped up on the Internet—LiveJournal, Diaryland, and, most importantly, Blogger, a free blogging tool courtesy of Pyra Labs. After that anyone with a computer and Internet access could start a blog. You'd simply go to a service like Blogger (now owned by Google) or, in later years, to a social networking site like MySpace. Then you'd follow the instructions: choose a name for your blog, consider how much to reveal on the "About Me" page, decide whether to allow comments from readers, and pick a template—including the layout, font, and background screen.

At the beginning of 1999 there were a few dozen blogs, Blood reports. By the end of the year there were thousands, and it was impossible for anyone to keep up. At the end of 2003 there were two million blogs and the number was doubling every five months. In early 2006 Technorati, a search engine that tracks blogs, counted 27 million. In late 2007, the count passed 100 million. (The largest number of blog posts, some 37 percent, are now in Japanese, according to a recent Washington Post article by Blaine Harden, and most of these are polite and self-effacing—"karaoke for shy people." Thirty-six percent of posts are in English, and most of them are the opposite of polite and self-effacing.)

When the blog boom came, the tone of the blogosphere began to shift. A lot of the new blogs—though certainly not all of them—weren't so much filters for the Web as vents for opinion and self-revelation. Instead of figuring out ways to serve up good fresh finds, many of the new bloggers were fixated on getting found. So the very significance of linking began to change. The links that had once mattered were the ones you offered on your blog, the so-called outbound links pointing to other sites. Now the links that mattered most—and still do—are those on other blogs pointing toward your blog, the so-called inbound links. Those are the ones that blog-trackers like Technorati count. They are the measure of fame.

Now that fame and links are one and the same, there are bloggers out there who will do practically anything—start rumors, tell lies, pick fights, create fake personas, and post embarrassing videos—to get noticed and linked to. They are, in the parlance of the blogosphere, "link whores." And those who succeed are blog celebrities, or "blogebrities."

One of the surest ways to hoist your blog to the top of the charts is to bring down a big-time politician or journalist. (Bloggers who constantly dog the mainstream media, or MSM, have been dubbed the Pajamahadeen.) In 2004 the blogs Little Green Footballs and Power Line helped set RATHERGATE in motion when they spread the allegation that the memos Dan Rather presented on 60 Minutes II about President George W. Bush's Air National Guard duty were fakes. (Since then, a CBS panel investigating the matter has failed to prove that Rather's account of Bush's military career was substantially wrong,[2] and Rather has pressed a suit against CBS for "wrongful dismissal.") In 2006 Little Green Footballs scored another hit by pointing out that a Reuters photograph of an Israeli air strike had been doctored to make the smoke plumes over Lebanon larger and darker. In 2004 many right-wing blogs helped the Swift Boat Veterans sink John Kerry's bid for the presidency. In 2002 it was bloggers like Joshua Micah Marshall of Talking Points Memo and Atrios (a pseudonym) of Eschaton who first publicized Trent Lott's racist remarks at Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday party, leading to Lott's resignation as Senate majority leader.

Sex, of course, can also give your blog a lift. In 2004 a "Staff Ass" (staff assistant) on Capitol Hill named Jessica Cutler used her blog Washingtonienne to broadcast firsthand tales of sex (sometimes for money) with a lot of men on the Hill, including one married Bush official. When Ana Marie Cox, who was then blogging as Wonkette, got wind of it and let the world know, Washingtonienne became famous and Wonkette became more famous than she had been. Both bloggers went on to publish novels. In 2005 Diablo Cody, a former stripper from Minnesota who keeps a blog called The Pussy Ranch, wrote a book (Candy Girl: A Year in the Life of an Unlikely Stripper); and this year the movie she wrote (Juno) became a hit. Here's a bit of her blog:

I'm at my parents' house. I came in from Seattle last night and slept for 14 hours straight. My mother peeked into my room at noon today and reports that I was so unresponsive she checked my breathing. 29 years ago she probably did the same on a nightly basis, except I was ostensibly a lot cuter then and didn't mutter cock ring in my sleep.

For many bloggers infamy is better than no kind of fame at all. In his book *The Future of Reputation*, Daniel Solove quotes Jessica Cutler of the Washingtonienne blog: "Some people with blogs are never going to get famous, and they've been doing it for, like, over a year. I feel bad for them.... Everyone should have a blog. It's the most

democratic thing ever." To go unnoticed in this democracy is to not exist. This kind of existential pressure, naturally, ups the ante on language.

Invective—hilarious, acidulous invective, often served up with false apologies—is everywhere. The law of the blogosphere is Hobbesian: survival of the snarkiest. In 2004 a British blogger known as Eurotrash went after a New York Times food writer who had written a gushy restaurant review. Here is a sample of her attack:

You make my teeth want to vomit. The last time you took the subway was in 1983. You once read a Kurt Vonnegut novel and pretended you understood it. You laugh like a hyena, but you crave approval. Your clothes are nice, though. I don't know. I don't know you from Adam. I'm sorry.

The blogger's attack was so merciless that people took notice. And before long someone found out that the chef under review had blurbed the reviewer's book. The reviewer was caught and soon lost her gig. The blogger's reaction: "Storm in a teacup to me.... Life in New York. Hey ho."

In 2006 a feminist in Texas who writes the blog I Blame the Patriarchy made great fun of the fuss she had stirred up among other feminists by opining that fellatio is "gross." She softened her attack with an apology, false of course:

I am chastened. I'd forgotten that when it comes to sex, it is the duty of the radical feminist to shut the fuck up.... I must have been insane to question the degrading sexual theatrics that are every woman's birthright, when the mastery of these theatrics is her invitation to life's rich feast. It is a well-known fact that most women spring from their beds every morning singing, "O I hope I can blow some dude today!"

Of course I can't prove it, but I'm pretty sure that bloggers have fouler mouths, tougher hides, and cooler thesauruses than most of the people I've read in print. Here's a sampling of words gleaned from some of my favorite blogs:

anyhoo, bitchitude, fan-fucking-tabulous, hole-esque, nastified, alternapop, coffin-snatching, YouTube-ization, touzing, Daddio, manky, nutters, therapised, Boo-Ya Nation, dildopreneur, dudely, flava, haz-mat, nut sac, sexbot, underwearian, fugly, vomit-y, consciousness-jumped, tear-assed, fetbryo, grapetastically, mommyblogdaciousness, Nero-crazy, Engrish, pidginized, votenfreude, angsty, malgovernment, bejesus, JumboTron, man-dresses, babe-aliciousness, droit de senny.

Bloggers give new, Web-inflected meanings to old words. A "troll" on the Web is someone who posts provocative things just to cause an outcry. "Astroturfing" is creating a fake grassroots movement. Bloggers also sprinkle their blogs with expressions like WTF (translation: "What the fuck?"), lol (laugh out loud), and meh (a verbal shrug). They willfully misspell—like "teh" for "the." They call the Internet "the internets," cutely following George W. Bush's slip. If people wrote like this for publication, they'd be fired. And, indeed, there is a term for getting canned because of your blog: "dooiced," named for the blogger Dooce, now a stay-at-home-mother (SAHM) or, as she puts it, a "Shit Ass Ho Motherfucker," who got fired for blogging about her employer.

Writing like this might seem easy, but just try it. Geoffrey Nunberg, a linguist at Stanford who writes for newspapers and radio and sometimes contributes to the blog Language Log, admitted on NPR back in 2004, "I don't quite have the hang of the form." And, he added, many journalists who get called upon by their editors to keep blogs are similarly stumped: "They fashion engaging ledes, they develop their arguments methodically, they give context and background, and tack helpful IDs onto the names they introduce." Guess what? They read like journalists, not bloggers.

Bloggers are golden when they're at the bottom of the heap, kicking up. Give them a salary, a book contract, or a press credential, though, and it just isn't the same. (And this includes, for the most part, the blogs set up by magazines, companies, and newspapers.) Why? When you write for pay, you worry about lawsuits, sentence structure, and word choice. You worry about your boss, your publisher, your mother, and your superego looking over your shoulder. And that's no way to blog.

Blogging at its freest is like going to a masked ball. You can say all the spiteful, infantile things you wouldn't dream of saying if you were in print or face to face with another human being. You can flirt with anyone, or try to. You can tell the President exactly what you think of him. You can have political opinions your friends would despise you for. You can even libel people you don't like and hide behind an alias. (It's very hard to get back at anonymous bloggers who defame you because, by an act of Congress, Web site administrators aren't liable for what's written on their sites.[3] And erasing anything on the Web is almost impossible.) You can assume a new identity and see how it flies—no strings attached.

A blogger called El Guapo, who liberally uses Spanglish and signs every post with "Mucho Amor," is adamant about keeping his true identity a secret. (I tried and failed to figure out who he was for my anthology.) He writes as a twenty-nine-year-old Guatemalan-American living in Washington, D.C., about such things as helping an oversexed friend shop for bulk condoms at Costco and fending off a gang of muggers with the phrase "Yo Quiero Taco Bell." I desperately wanted it to be memoir. But who cares? In a book, you can get in trouble for writing under false pretenses or writing a false memoir (right, James Frey?). In a blog you can't.

Well, not much trouble anyway. In 2006 Lee Siegel, a culture critic and New Republic editor (who by the way coined the term "blogofascism" to describe bloggers' attempts to control their critics) was caught on The New Republic's blog using a "sock puppet," an alias named Sprezzatura, to rein in his own critics. He praised himself as "brave" and "brilliant" and labeled his detractors "abusive sheep." As he himself put it, he "got down in the mud" with them. When someone tried outing him, Sprezzatura responded: "I'm not Lee Siegel, you imbecile. If you knew who I was you and your n+1 buddies would crap in your pants." The New Republic suspended Siegel. Now he's back and has just published a book about blog culture, *Against the Machine*.

While putting together my anthology of blogs, I marveled many times at the large numbers of bloggers obsessed with masked superheroes. (Off the bat I can think of posts about Superman, Spiderman, and the Green Lantern.) Here, for instance, is a post about the movie *Superman Returns* that I found on a blog called *Johnny i hardly knew you*:

so i saw superman returns last night, btw [by the way].... i am sitting there hungrily devouring every signpost of clark kent mythology before i knew i was doing it: the corn fields, the farm, the old truck, the labrador retriever farm dog, the breaking sun over the plains....

but there was something else. something that knocked me on my ass. and it was brandon routh [the actor who played Superman]. and it was the flying.... seriously. it was as if this film had taken the exact blueprint of my movements, and speed and mapped them out of my dreams. the gentleness and impossible speed, the suspension of gravity. the strength i took from the sun's rays, how they entered my chest. the towering cloud formations, and gathering storms, lightning in the stratosphere and over horizons. everything....

i thought, what if we did have a hero like that? in this world. not a saviour, but a hero who could do those things.... we certainly don't. but somewhere, at least i do, i need to know that i've taken to the air, and i inhabit that source of power and hope (because that's what it is...) and i can see them mirrored in a superman's eyes, in his look when he says to himself and the dog next to him, quietly and with no inflection except some sadness and open ended resignation, but only just... "well, i'm back." (he doesn't say that, but that's the feeling) and the puppy is like, "dude. the ball."

Finally, I think I get the superhero fixation. It's the flying. It's the suspension of punctuation and good manners and even identity. Bloggers at their computers are Supermen in flight. They break the rules. They go into their virtual phone booths, put on their costumes, bring down their personal villains, and save the world. Anonymous or not, they inhabit that source of power and hope. Then they come back to their jobs, their dogs, and their lives, and it's like, "Dude, the ball."

Blog writing is id writing—grandiose, dreamy, private, free-associative, infantile, sexy, petty, dirty. Whether bloggers tell the truth or really are who they claim to be is another matter, but WTF. They are what they write. And you can't fake that. ;-)

Notes

[1] In fact, I did it. See my *Ultimate Blogs: Masterworks from the Wild Web* (Vintage, 2008).

[2] See James Goodale, "The Flawed Report on Dan Rather," *The New York Review*, April 7, 2005.

[3] See James Goodale, "Yale Law Students May Be Out of Luck," *New York Law Journal*, December 7, 2007.

The newspaper industry

More media, less news

Aug 24th 2006 □ From *The Economist* print edition

Newspapers are making progress with the internet, but most are still too timid, defensive or high-minded

THE first thing to greet a visitor to the Oslo headquarters of Schibsted, a Norwegian newspaper firm, is its original, hand-operated printing press from 1856, now so clean and polished it looks more like a sculpture than a machine. Christian Schibsted, the firm's founder, bought it to print someone else's newspaper, but when the contract moved elsewhere he decided to start his own. Although Schibsted gives pride of place to its antique machinery, the company is in fact running away from its printed past as fast as it can. Having made a loss five years ago, Schibsted's activities on the internet contributed 35% of last year's operating profits.

News of Schibsted's success online has spread far in the newspaper industry. Every year, says Sverre Munck, the executive vice-president of its international business, Schibsted has to turn away delegations of foreign newspaper bosses seeking to find out how the Norwegians have done it. "Otherwise we'd get several visits every month," he says. The company has used its established newspaper brands to build websites that rank first and second in

Scandinavia for visitors. It has also created new internet businesses such as [Sesam](#), a search engine that competes with Google, and [FINN.no](#), a portal for classified advertising. As a result, 2005 was the company's best ever for revenues and profits.

Unfortunately for the newspaper industry, Schibsted is a rare exception. For most newspaper companies in the developed world, 2005 was miserable. They still earn almost all of their profits from print, which is in decline. As people look to the internet for news and young people turn away from papers, paid-for circulations are falling year after year. Papers are also losing their share of advertising spending. Classified advertising is quickly moving online. Jim Chisholm, of iMedia, a joint-venture consultancy with IFRA, a newspaper trade association, predicts that a quarter of print classified ads will be lost to digital media in the next ten years. Overall, says iMedia, newspapers claimed 36% of total global advertising in 1995 and 30% in 2005. It reckons they will lose another five percentage points by 2015.

Even the most confident of newspaper bosses now agree that they will survive in the long term only if, like Schibsted, they can reinvent themselves on the internet and on other new-media platforms such as mobile phones and portable electronic devices. Most have been slow to grasp the changes affecting their industry—"remarkably, unaccountably complacent," as Rupert Murdoch put it in a speech last year—but now they are making a big push to catch up. Internet advertising is growing rapidly for many and is beginning to offset some of the decline in print. Newspapers' complacency is perhaps not as remarkable as Mr Murdoch suggested. In many developed countries their owners have for decades enjoyed near monopolies, fat profit margins, and returns on capital above those of other industries. In the past, newspaper companies saw little need to experiment or to change and spent little or nothing on research and development.

Set in print

At first, from the late 1990s until around 2002, newspaper companies simply replicated their print editions online. Yet the internet offers so many specialised sources of information and entertainment that readers can pick exactly what they want from different websites. As a result, people visited newspaper sites infrequently, looked at a few pages and then vanished off to someone else's website.

Another early mistake was for papers to save their best journalists for print. This meant that the quality of new online editions was often poor. Websites hired younger, cheaper staff. The brand's prestige stayed with the old medium, which encouraged print journalists to defend their turf. Still today at *La Stampa*, an Italian daily paper owned by the Fiat Group, says Anna Masera, the paper's internet chief, print journalists hesitate to give her their stories for fear that the website will cannibalise the newspaper.

For most newspaper companies in the developed world, 2005 was miserable

For the past couple of years, however, newspapers have been thinking more boldly about what to do on the internet. At its most basic, that means reporting stories using cameras and microphones as well as print. The results can be encouraging. America's Academy of Television Arts & Sciences has introduced a new Emmy award for news and documentaries on the internet, mobile phones and personal media players. Five of the seven nominations for this September have gone to reports by [nytimes.com](#) and [washingtonpost.com](#).

It also means being more imaginative. In the late 1990s, the early years of the *Wall Street Journal's* [website](#), one of the paper's journalists came up with the novel idea of posting online a 573-page document that backed up an article. "It wasn't the most compelling content," remembers Neil Budde, its founding editor and now general manager of news at Yahoo!, an internet portal. But it was a start. Now newspapers have a better idea of what works online. This is not always traditional journalism as taught in journalism school. Brian Tierney, who became owner of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* after Knight Ridder sold it last year, noticed that a popular item on the paper's [website](#) has been a video of Mentos mints causing a 2-litre bottle of Diet Coke to explode into the air. "We should do more of that," he says.

More newspaper companies are likely to treat their websites as a priority these days. "Before, newspapers used their second- and third-rate journalists for the internet," says Edward Roussel, online editorial director at Britain's Telegraph Group, "but now we know we've got to use our very best." Many companies are putting print journalists in the same room as those who work online, so that print writers are working for the website and vice versa. Some insist that this is a mistake. "It is completely wrong not to separate web and paper operations," says Oscar Bronner, publisher of *Der Standard*, a daily paper in Austria. Print journalists don't have time to reflect and analyse properly if they also have to work for the website, he argues.

Running to stand still

How impressive are the results of these online experiments? At lots of newspaper companies, internet advertising is growing by at least 30% a year, and often more. At *la Repubblica* in Italy, for instance, the paper's [website](#) gets about 1m visitors a day, nearly double the circulation of the printed paper. The value of online ads grew by 70% in the first half of 2006. For the first three months of 2006, the Newspaper Association of America announced that advertising for all the country's newspaper websites grew by 35% from the same period in 2005, to a total of \$613m. But to put that in perspective, print and online ads together grew by only 1.8%, to \$11 billion, because print advertising was flat. At almost all newspapers the internet brings in less than a tenth of revenues and profits. At this point, says Mr Chisholm, "newspapers are halfway to realising an audience on the internet and about a tenth of the way to building a business online."

The big problem is that readers online bring in nowhere near the revenues that print readers do. All but a handful of papers offer their content free online, so they immediately surrender the cover price of a print copy. People look at fewer pages online than they do in print, which makes web editions less valuable to advertisers. Gavin O'Reilly, president of the World Association of Newspapers in Paris, says that print readers are much more valuable than online readers, who use newspaper websites in a "haphazard and fragmented way". Vin Crosbie, of Digital Deliverance, a consulting firm, recently estimated that newspapers need between 20 and 100 readers online to make up for losing just one print reader. Many newspaper bosses would say this is too pessimistic: one British paper, for instance, reckons that one print reader is worth ten online. But even that is a daunting multiple.

Newspapers today concentrate on only two parts of the market for internet advertising. They earn little or nothing from internet search, which is bigger than either display or classified ads. Especially in America, newspapers rely heavily on classified ads online and have fewer display ads, says Mr Crosbie. Elsewhere, the pattern may be reversed, but newspapers still lack a broad base of internet-advertising revenue; for instance, Juan Luis Cebrián, chief executive of Grupo PRISA, the owner of *El País*, says the Spanish newspaper is enjoying strong growth in display advertising, but has few online classified ads.

On the other hand, newspapers' websites have higher profit margins than print does, because they have no newsprint or distribution to pay for. The *Wall Street Journal* is one of the few papers that charges for its content online. Others may follow suit, especially if growth in advertising slows. The online business model is still in flux, argues Richard Zannino, chief executive of Dow Jones & Company, publisher of the *Wall Street Journal*. The average price of ad space in the printed paper is now only three times higher than on Wall Street Journal Online, says Mr Zannino, compared with six to seven times for the industry as a whole in America. He expects the relative price of an internet ad to rise.

The secret of making money online, according to Schibsted, is not to rely on news aggregators like Google News and Yahoo!. Three-quarters of traffic to the websites for Schibsted's *VG* and *Aftonbladet* comes through their own home-pages and only a quarter from other websites. "If visitors come from Google to stories deep in the paper and then leave," explains Mr Munck, "Google gets the dollars and we get only cents, but if we can bring them in through the front page we can charge €19,000 [\$25,000] for a 24-hour banner ad." In spite of this, most newspapers still depend on news aggregators.

Readers online bring in nowhere near the revenues that print readers do

The danger for newspapers is that all their efforts on the internet may only slow their decline. Doing the obvious—having excellent websites and selling ad space on them—may not be enough. The papers with the best chance of seeing their revenues grow are those experimenting with entirely new businesses online and off.

Some are launching profitable new ventures that are only indirectly related to journalism. Schibsted, for instance, has started an online slimming club, called Viktklubben.se, using its *Aftonbladet* newspaper brand. Viktklubben.se charges its 54,000 members €50 each every three months. The Telegraph Group in Britain uses the *Daily Telegraph* to sell readers everything from goose-down pillows to Valentine's Day topiary baskets to insurance. The division now contributes close to a third of the firm's total profits, according to an executive at the company. "Newspapers will have to get into new businesses and extract more value from their audience," says Paul Zwillenberg, global head of media and entertainment at OC&C Strategy Consultants in London. Examples like these are fairly rare, though. Most newspaper companies still insist that producing high-quality journalism and distributing it in new ways will be enough to keep them growing.

It's the journalism, stupid

Consultants advising newspaper groups argue that they need to adjust their output. Research into the tastes of mainstream newspaper readers has long shown that people like short stories and news that is relevant to them: local reporting, sports, entertainment, weather and traffic. On the internet, especially, says Mr Chisholm, they are looking to enhance their way of life. Long pieces about foreign affairs are low on readers' priorities—the more so now that the internet enables people to scan international news headlines in moments. Coverage of national and international news is in any case a commodity often almost indistinguishable from one newspaper to the next. This impression is exacerbated as papers seek to save money by sacking reporters and taking copy from agencies such as Reuters. "Our research shows that people are looking for more utility from newspapers," says Sammy Papert, chief executive of Belden Associates, a firm that specialises in research for American newspapers. People want their paper to tell them how to get richer, and what they might do in the evening.

Few newspaper companies like to hear this and they tend to ignore the research they have paid for. Most journalists, after all, would rather cover Afghanistan than personal finance. But some are starting to listen. Gannett, the world's biggest newspaper group, is trying to make its journalism more local. It has invested in "mojos"—mobile journalists with wireless laptops who permanently work out of the office encamped in community hubs. Morris Communications, based in Augusta, Georgia, recently launched a new home-delivered free paper for Bluffton, a fast-growing area of Beaufort, South Carolina, called *Bluffton Today*, with a page of national news, one of international and the rest "hyper-local". Its website has pictures and blogs from readers and detailed community information. "Back in the 1940s and 1950s papers used to be full of what we call 'chicken-dinner news'—the speakers at civic clubs and whose daughter won a blue ribbon in canoeing," says Will Morris, the firm's president. "But then newspapers started to lose touch with their readers."

The more adventurous newspaper companies, like Morris Communications, are showing themselves willing to embrace content and opinions from readers. Rather like [OhmyNews](#), a Korean “citizen-journalism” operation that many people think heralds the future for news-gathering, Schibsted exhorts its readers to send information and photographs. When a mentally disturbed man ran amok and killed people on a tram in Oslo in 2004, it was a reader with a mobile-phone camera who sent *VG* its front-page picture of the arrest. At *Zero Hora*, a Brazilian paper owned by RBS Group, the circulation department asks 120 readers what they think of the paper every day and Marcelo Rech, the editor, receives a report at 1pm. “They usually want more of our supplements on cooking and houses and less of Hizbullah and earthquakes,” says Mr Rech.

Still more changes to the content and form of newspapers are likely as businesspeople gain power at newspaper firms. “You won't be able to have many sacred cows...Newspaper companies will have to become more commercial,” says Henrik Poppe, a partner in McKinsey. Some leading titles, including the *Wall Street Journal*, have recently decided to put advertisements on the front page for the first time. For the moment, the trend towards greater commercialism is most evident in America, but is likely to spread elsewhere as newspaper companies struggle financially. At the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Mr Tierney, a former advertising executive, shocked people by announcing that he would bring in an advertising person to redesign the paper—traditionally a task strictly for editorial. In future, businesspeople are likely to insist that newspapers adopt practices that are already standard in other industries. Mr Tierney, for instance, says it is unreasonable to expect everyone from the age of 18 to 88 to buy the same product. The industry needs to sell papers for different age and demographic groups, he says.

The most shocking development for traditional newspapers has been the wild success of free dailies, which like the internet have proved enormously popular with young people. Roughly 28m copies of free newspapers are now printed daily, according to Metro International, a Swedish firm that pioneered them in 1995. In markets where they are published, they account for 8% of daily circulation on average, according to iMedia. That share is rising. In Europe they make up 16% of daily circulation. Metro calculates that it spends half the proportion of its total costs on editorial that paid-for papers do. In practice that means a freesheet with a circulation of about 100,000 employing 20 journalists, whereas a paid-for paper would have around 180. Metro's papers reach young, affluent readers and are even able to charge a premium for advertising in some markets compared with paid-for papers.

“The biggest enemy of paid-for newspapers is time,” says Pelle Törnberg, Metro's chief executive. Mr Törnberg says the only way that paid-for papers will prosper is by becoming more specialised, raising their prices and investing in better editorial. People read freesheets in their millions, on the other hand, because *Metro* and others reach them on their journey to work, when they have time to read, and spare them the hassle of having to hand over change to a newsagent.

Some traditional newspaper firms dismiss free papers, saying they are not profitable. Carlo De Benedetti, chairman of Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso, publisher of *la Repubblica*, for instance, says that Metro loses money in Italy and that other freesheets are struggling. Globally, however, Metro has just become profitable.

Consultants say that lots of traditional newspaper companies are planning to hold their noses and launch free dailies. In France, for instance, *Le Monde* is planning a new free daily, and Mr Murdoch's News International is preparing a new free afternoon paper for London, to be launched next month. Deciding whether or not to start a freesheet, indeed, perfectly encapsulates the unpalatable choice that faces the paid-for newspaper industry today as it attempts to find a future for itself. Over the next few years it must decide whether to compromise on its notion of “fine journalism” and take a more innovative, more businesslike approach—or risk becoming a beautiful old museum piece.