

21 Types Of News

IN THE FIRST SEVERAL CHAPTERS, we saw media systems in flux. Fewer newspaper journalists but more websites, more hours of local TV news but fewer reporters, more “news/talk” radio but less local news radio, national cable news thriving, local cable news stalled.

But what matters most is not the health of a particular sector but how these changes net out, and how the pieces fit together. Here we will consider the health of the news media based on the region of coverage, whether neighborhood, city, state, country, or world.

Hyperlocal

The term “hyperlocal” commonly refers to news coverage on a neighborhood or even block-by-block level. The traditional media models, even in their fattest, happiest days could not field enough reporters to cover every neighborhood on a granular level.

As in all areas, there are elements of progress and retreat. On one hand, metropolitan newspapers have cut back on regional editions, which in all likelihood means less coverage of neighborhoods in those regions.

But the Internet has revolutionized the provision of hyperlocal information. The first wave of technology—LISTSERV® and other email groups—made it far easier for citizens to inform one another of what was happening with the neighborhood crime watch or the new grocery store or the death of a beloved senior who lived on the block for 40 years. More recently, social media tools have enabled citizens to self-organize, and connect in ever more dynamic ways. Citizens can now snap pictures of potholes and send them to city hall, or share with each other via Facebook, Twitter or email. New tools allow citizens to mine citywide information in ways that create hyperlocal stories: a database on restaurant health violations becomes a story about a diner down the block. Hyperlocal blogs—presenting a mix of reporting, commentary, and aggregation—are popping up throughout the country. They will not, for the most part, become successful businesses—but *they do not have to*. Volunteers can operate hyperlocal media just as volunteers organize clean-up days for the block.

These tools not only help the purely volunteer-based media but have given opportunities to commercial Internet ventures too. Many local TV stations have added hyperlocal areas to their websites. AOL’s Patch, Examiner.com, and Everyblock each rely on community members to contribute content for free or for a small fee.

Two unknowns: so far, hyperlocal print weeklies have fared reasonably well in the new media economy (See Chapter 1, Newspapers.) But they will likely feel increasing pressure as online classifieds services, like Craigslist, and sites like Examiner.com and Patch, extend their reach into smaller communities and as locally originated sites are launched and/or expand.

Finally, recent legislation allowing for the growth of low-power FM may bring a wave of hyperlocal radio stations, especially in urban areas. These stations have only enough power to broadcast on a neighborhood basis, but it is unclear how they will be utilized. (See Chapter 11, Low Power FM.)

City and State

Local metropolitan and state-level coverage represent the areas of greatest concern—especially when it comes to how often and how thoroughly journalists report on powerful institutions such as city hall, the school board, the state-house, and the local hospital. Almost every sector of media that covered these beats in the past has been shaken and transformed. Throughout Part One we looked at the positive and negative developments. To summarize:

➤ Newspapers, which had been the main source for this kind of reporting, have cut back staff. There are strong signs that these cutbacks have weakened coverage of schools, health care issues, city government, state legislatures, religion, and other important topics. Although many newspapers have become quite innovative online in the past couple of years, it generally has resulted in an increase in the ways news is presented, but not in the number of reporters gathering news. Even when beats have not been eliminated entirely, beat reporters have become responsible for covering more territory and “feeding the beast” by tweeting and writing blog posts in addition to their regular stories. These days, many newspaper reporters spend less time interviewing sources and more time producing copy. They have less time for enterprise journalism of the sort that anticipates problems and uncovers information that those in power want to conceal.

➤ Local radio has not stepped in to fill the void. In fact, the number of cities that had all-news radio stations dropped from 50 in the 1980s to 30 in 2010. Robert Papper, who surveys radio station news directors for the Radio Television Digital News Association, says:

“I can say this without a doubt—there are far fewer stations doing news than 10 years ago, there are far fewer people hired by commercial radio to work in the newsrooms, and the median number of people employed in a commercial radio newsroom has been ‘one’ for quite a few years.”¹

Although there are notable exceptions around the country, it’s not realistic to expect that radio will counteract the loss of newspaper jobs.

➤ Local TV has, in some ways, expanded its role in the local news ecosystem. The number of hours of news aired has grown, and increasing numbers of stations are making full use of social media to enliven and enhance the quality of broadcasts. For instance, many stations now incorporate user videos, photos, and commentary to enhance coverage of natural disasters. Some stations continue to produce high-quality investigative journalism, as well. But on balance, stations have not increased their reportorial capacity, and in many cases they have cut it back. As a result, several long-standing maladies of local news have persisted, or even worsened, including: minimal coverage of local government, insufficient in-depth reporting, and a strong emphasis on crime coverage. Although they are not in the majority, a disturbing number of stations have allowed advertisers to dictate news content or in other ways blurred the lines between journalism and advertorial. In short, many stations are doing excellent work—and many more have the capacity to do even better—but, as yet, most stations have not been fielding enough reporters to fill the vacuum left by local newspapers.

“The tired idea that born-on-the-web news sites will replace traditional media is wrong-headed, and it’s past time that academic research and news reports reflect that,” said Michele McLellan after studying news websites.

➤ Cable TV, like radio, is thriving nationally (financially and in terms of audience), offering more national and business news programming than ever. But locally focused models have stalled, with local cable news efforts currently reaching only about 20 to 30 percent of the population. There are some hopeful signs—for instance, Time Warner and NBC/Comcast have announced plans to expand their local news efforts—but most other cable operators seem more inclined to freeze or cut back their local operations, as they are costly to maintain.

➤ Satellite TV has technological limitations and financial disincentives that make it an unlikely platform for increased local public affairs programming.

At first blush, it seems that there is more than enough exciting Internet-based activity to make up for the aforementioned gaps. But on closer inspection, it appears that in this one area—local accountability reporting—Internet-based properties have made insufficient progress. (See Chapter 4, Internet.)

Several studies—of Chicago, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and other cities—have found that Internet sites have not yet filled the gap. (See Chapter 4, Internet.)

Most of these hyperlocal blogs will not become successful businesses—but they do not have to. Volunteers can operate hyperlocal media just like volunteers organize clean-up days for the block.

A survey of 66 local news websites found that half of them had annual income of less than \$50,000, and three-quarters had annual income of less than \$100,000.² That is not enough to ensure these organizations' survival, much less finance labor-intensive journalism.

"The tired idea that born-on-the-web news sites will replace traditional media is wrong-headed, and it's past time that academic research and news reports reflect that,"³ says Michele McLellan, who has done a comprehensive study of the new breed of news websites for the University of Missouri School of Journalism. While many of these organizations are providing services that never existed before—such as neighborhood-centric news—she makes clear that that does not compensate for the decrease in accountability reporting that was done by traditional newspapers.

What about national Internet companies that focus on local matters? These efforts *are* providing useful information on a wide range of topics, but, so far, they are not coming close to filling the gaps in accountability journalism. Examiner.com has hired thousands of local contributors, but its focus is on entertainment, sports, and shopping. Patch has hired 800 staff but has only one editor/reporter per community, and only covers small-to-medium-size affluent communities. At this point, Patch is more aptly seen as an element in the rise of hyperlocal information than as a solution to the deficiencies in municipal and state accountability reporting.

Some media companies have attempted to create "converged" models that use a combined newsroom to produce print, digital, and TV content. The hope is that by eliminating duplication and increasing reach, these entities will develop more robust business models. In Washington, Allbritton's combined newsroom launched a local TV station, a local all-news cable network, and a local website.⁴ In Tampa, Media General has merged the operations of its newspaper and TV station. But while these efforts may have positive financial results for the companies, there is little evidence that they lead to the hiring of additional reporters. The merging of operations of the *Deseret Morning News*, KSL TV, and KSL Radio in Salt Lake City prompted media analyst Ken Doctor to note that both of these headlines could accurately describe the situation: "Salt Lake City Paper Axes 43% of its Staff" *and* "Deseret News a Model of Growth and Innovation for the Entire Industry." The mergers eliminate duplication, introduce efficiencies, and update technology—but have not necessarily led to more or better quality journalistic resources.⁵

Another collaborative model can be found in Ohio, where the eight largest newspapers joined forces to create the Ohio News Organization, which collectively fields reporters to cover the state.⁶ They even produce some investigative projects—including an effort that found 32,000 public employees receiving pensions while still on the payroll.⁷

Is the nonprofit sector filling the gaps? Public TV stations do not do much in the way of local news: only 8 percent offer 30 minutes or more of local news per day. Public radio does a bit more and has tried in the past year to increase its investment in this area, but so far the scale is still small. (See Chapter 6, Public Broadcasting.)

In a handful of states, state public affairs networks (SPANs) have played an important role, not only providing live coverage of legislative sessions but hosting candidate debates, issues forums, and other civically oriented types of coverage. But they exist only in 23 states. Some public, educational, and governmental access (PEG) channels have launched citizen journalism shows but most have not, and the PEG system in general faces funding challenges. (See Chapter 7, Public Access Channels.)

Journalism schools have begun to have their students contribute to local reporting efforts, but their ability to sustain these efforts will depend greatly on whether they can raise the funds to hire additional permanent staff to manage the students.

Nonprofit websites, as noted above, have made great progress but are small in scale. For instance, the top 12 nonprofits represented at a recent conference on local journalism field only 88 reporters in total; they are making a useful contribution to be sure, but it is not nearly enough to fill the void left by the roughly 15,000 journalists who lost their jobs at newspapers in the last decade. (See Chapter 12, Nonprofit Websites.)

To be clear, the shortage is not in “news” or “information,” per se, but in a very specific kind of journalism: labor-intensive reporting on civically important topics. Two surveys found that consumers are quite satisfied with some of their information choices while perceiving gaps in others. In a Pew Internet Project survey of residents of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Macon, Georgia; and San Jose, California, 62 percent said that they were very confident that they could find local information about medical and health problems. But only 24 percent said they were very confident that they could find information to “assess [whether] local politicians were doing their jobs.”⁸ In another study, 79 percent of Chicagoans surveyed said that they are “pretty well informed” about “issues affecting the Chicago area”—yet 51 percent said that they don’t know enough about candidates or issues to vote, 48 percent “think local media does not do a good job keeping watch on state and local government,” and 49 percent said “nobody covers what happens in my community very well.” The study found that the gaps affected not only certain types of information but particular groups of citizens. The groups that had the most trouble “navigating the ecosystem” were those with less education or income and were Latino and African-American.⁹

Among the websites in Toledo, 56% were traditional national media (TV, newspapers)—and none were local Internet-only sites.

There is an enormous caveat: These are snapshots of the landscape at a particular moment. A tremendous amount of creative energy is going into improving local reporting through a variety of models. There is much debate about whether the current obstacles will endure (See Chapter 25, *How Big is the Gap and Who Will Fill It?*) For now, all we can say is: local accountability reporting is down, and communities are likely suffering as a result. In another recent survey, while Americans reported that they were satisfied with the amount of press coverage they were getting in many areas, there was one they felt dissatisfied with: 53 percent said that they wanted more coverage of state and/or local news.¹⁰

The Advantages of Incumbency

When all of these media are assessed on a local level, something else becomes clear: for all the talk about new players, the legacy media—the long-standing newspaper and TV companies—still enjoy tremendous advantages. This matters for several reasons. Some had hoped that the shortcomings of the old media would be made up for by vibrant, newly created Internet companies. But as it turns out, much new media news content is being produced by the “old media.” Staffing decisions at newspapers and TV stations no longer manifest themselves just in their print and on-air products. At this point, newspapers and TV stations are the primary sources of online news and information too, so their staffing decisions—not only how many people they hire but how they prioritize their time—affect not only the old media platforms but the new as well.

To determine the dominant sources of local news, FCC analysts studied web traffic in three randomly chosen sample markets.¹¹ First, we looked at Toledo, Ohio. Applying a variety of filters designed to find sites that were focused on local topics, we homed in on the five sites that appear to be the top destinations for local Toledo news.¹² Each of the sites, it turns out, is owned by a traditional media company, and not one is an Internet-based local news site.

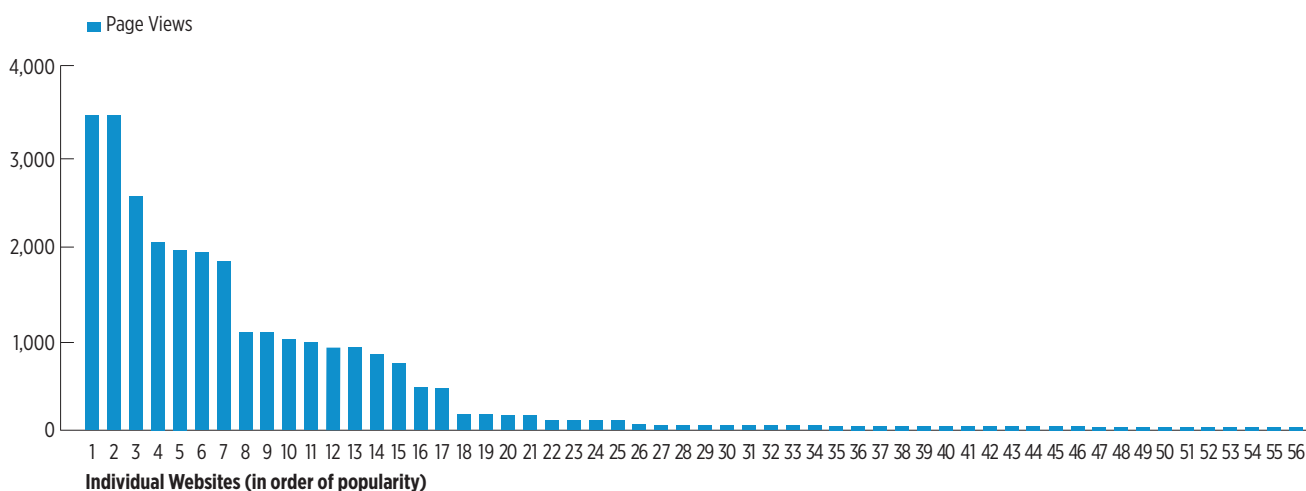
- > ToledoBlade.com, the website of the largest area newspaper, is owned by Block Communications Inc.
- > WTOL.com, the CBS affiliate, is owned by Raycom Media Inc.
- > 13ABC.com is owned by the Walt Disney Company.
- > FOXToledo.com is owned by LIN TV Corp.
- > lenconnect.com, run by the *Daily Telegram* of Adrian, Michigan, is owned by GateHouse Media Inc.

To account for the likelihood that some Toledoans might be getting news from national websites that provide a mix of national and local news, we also studied the full dataset of web traffic in the news and information category, which produced a slightly different list, with Yahoo! News drawing significant local traffic. It is impossible to know to what extent Toledoans went to Yahoo! News for national versus local news. But if they did go for local news, they would be reading material provided by the traditional media of the area. Yahoo! lists four primary sources for its

Toledo-centric content: the *Toledo Blade*, WTVG-TV, WTOL 11, and FOX Toledo. When it comes to news, Yahoo! is primarily an aggregator, relying on old media sources to provide the reporting. Thus, the reportorial health of the old media is determining the quality of the news consumed via the Internet.

We considered that while the top five news sites are dominated by traditional media players, a look farther down the list might reveal that Toledoans are actually getting news from a wider variety of new players. But the data indicates that traffic was heavily concentrated among the top sites. More than half of page views were on the websites of only six web entities, and nearly 75 percent of page views were on the websites of just 10 web entities.

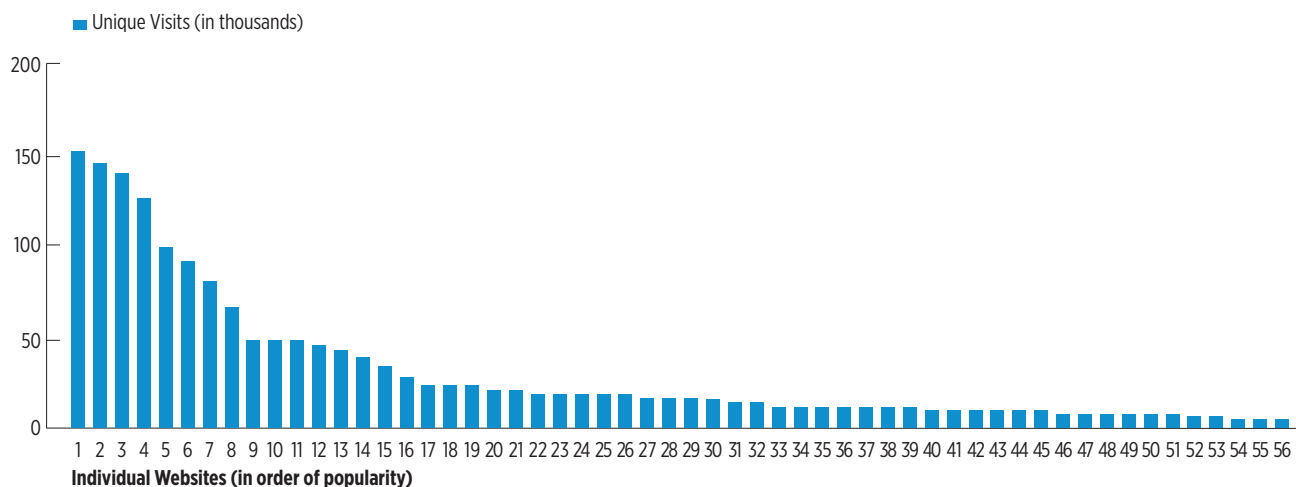
DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS AND INFORMATION WEB TRAFFIC IN TOLEDO (PAGE VIEWS—APRIL 2010)



Source: FCC staff analysis of ComScore, Local Market Internet Site Visitation Data, April 2010

If one looks at a different commonly used web metric—unique visitors, rather than page views—the same pattern is evident. Of the 56 websites visited by Toledoans for news, only four were estimated to have received more than 100,000 unique visitors per month, and approximately two-thirds were estimated to have received less than 20,000 monthly unique views. Again, traffic was concentrated among the traditional media companies’ websites.

DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS AND INFORMATION WEB TRAFFIC IN TOLEDO (UNIQUE VISITS—APRIL 2010)



Source: FCC staff analysis of ComScore, Local Market Internet Site Visitation Data, April 2010

The pattern was the same in Richmond, Virginia. Most traffic observed in the local filter analysis went to just a few sites—all of which are run by traditional media companies.

- TimesDispatch.com, the main local daily newspaper, is owned by Media General Inc.
- NBC12.com, the NBC affiliate, is owned by Raycom Media Inc.
- WRIC.com, the ABC affiliate, is owned by Young Broadcasting Inc.
- Richmond.com, a lifestyle website, is owned by Media General Inc.
- Progress-Index.com, the newspaper of Petersburg, Virginia, is owned by Times-Shamrock Communications.

What about Seattle? It would seem that a web start-up would have the best chance in a well-educated, tech-savvy city like Seattle. Yet again our analysis found that most traffic was concentrated among a few sites, most of them owned by traditional media companies.

- SeattleTimes.com, the local newspaper, is owned by the Seattle Times Company.
- seattlepi.com, formerly a major print newspaper, is owned by Hearst Communications Inc.
- KOMOnews.com, the ABC affiliate, is owned by Fisher Communications Inc.
- TheNewsTribune.com, the newspaper of Tacoma, Washington, is owned by the McClatchy Company.
- HeraldNet.com, the *Everett (WA) Daily Herald* website, is owned by the Washington Post Company.

One of the top Seattle sites—seattlepi.com—is a web-only site, however, it is a bit of a special case, because it was originally the website of the former print publication, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, and it is owned by a national media company, Hearst. If seattlepi.com succeeds, it could provide a model for struggling newspapers to ultimately run sustainable (albeit far smaller) web-only operations. The site receives about 4.2 million monthly page views, which may be enough to generate revenue to support a small reportorial staff, particularly if costs are borne by a large media company. On the other hand, seattlepi.com clearly has benefited from the brand established by the print paper over many years, and by being part of a large company. In other words, the success of a web-based arm of a national corporation does not necessarily offer much hope to newly created local websites.

Our findings in these three cities gibes with those of other studies. An analysis conducted in early 2010 by the Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Pew Internet & American Life Project concluded that the websites of “legacy” news organizations—mainly major newspapers and cable television stations—dominate online news space in both traffic and loyalty. “Of the top 199 sites in our analysis, 67 percent are from legacy media, and they account for 66 percent of the traffic. In all, 48 percent are from newspapers, and 19 percent from all other legacy media,” the study reported.¹³ A 2007 Free Press study of web traffic patterns in 11 cities found that local newspaper websites drew more than 9.4 million monthly unique visitors and local TV station websites drew 1.2 million—while independent city-specific websites drew only 693,000.¹⁴

Given all the struggles newspapers and TV stations are facing under their old business models, how has it come to pass that they are dominating local online news? When there are many potential sources of news, strong brands have an advantage over start-ups in terms of marketing their sites, building traffic, and drawing advertisers. In local markets, TV stations and newspapers can use their existing platforms to promote their websites. They can use their standing in the community to create preferential business deals. They can afford state-of-the-art web designs and tools by sharing that cost with the larger corporation that runs them. They can use their capital to purchase search-based advertising. And they can use existing reporting pools to create robust content that attracts and retains audience.

Newspapers and TV stations are the primary sources of online news and information. So their staffing decisions affect not only the news on old media platforms but the new.

In part because the big regional newspapers have slashed Washington bureaus, most regulatory agencies—institutions whose job is to protect Americans from food poisoning, banking collapse and mine explosions—are receiving less coverage.

National News

On balance, we are more optimistic about the economic vitality of national news models than we are about local or international news. It is certainly not a uniformly encouraging picture—and everyone no doubt has their gripes about particular national news organizations and practices—but we found great dynamism in terms of innovation and business model development.

National Newspapers and Websites

Thirty years ago, there were no general interest national newspapers. *USA Today* didn't exist; *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were more locally focused; and *The Wall Street Journal* was primarily a business publication. Now, each offers a broad diet of news to a national audience. In addition, Bloomberg has become an important national force, too, having significantly increased its Washington and overseas bureaus. And now, the Huffington Post, the self-described “Internet newspaper,” has reached massive scale and financial success, and the Daily Caller offers a mix of commentary and original reporting.

Despite all intimations two years ago that *The New York Times* might be a dying dinosaur, it arguably has greater reach than ever. In May 2010, NYTimes.com had 32 million unique visitors, equivalent to about a quarter of all the visits (123 million) to newspaper websites that month. By contrast, the weekday circulation of the newspaper from April through September that same year was 876,638, which means the print paper represented less than 2 percent of overall newspaper circulation.¹⁵

The economics may work better for national media than local, because they can operate on a large enough scale to generate significant revenue. This factor has also made possible the growth of websites that cover niche topics but reach a national audience. Scores of subject-specific blogs—such as SCOTUSBlog, which covers the U.S. Supreme Court, and the *New England Journal of Medicine's* The Health Care Blog, which covers health care policy—have brought meaty analysis to the blogosphere. Politico can reach a large scale by attracting political junkies from around the country.

National Investigative Reporting

There are no doubt fewer national newspapers and TV stations devoting resources to investigative reporting than there were in the past, but that contraction has been partly offset by a combination of two factors: the biggest newspapers have maintained their commitment to investigative reporting, and nonprofit organizations have increased their commitment to it.

Explaining the increase in *The New York Times's* investigative staff, editor Matthew Purdy, said, “The whole notion is that we need to present people with stories they can't get elsewhere.” The *Times* can do that, he acknowledges, because “we have the incredible luxury of talent, time and space.”¹⁶

As a result of both the contraction of investigative reporting at local and regional newspapers and the renewed commitment of some national entities, the lion's share of Pulitzer Prizes now goes to a handful of nationally-oriented newspapers. “Until about 10 years ago, the honors were spread widely among papers throughout the country,” the *American Journalism Review* reported in September 2010:

“The *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* typically appeared only once—or not at all—as a winner or finalist for an investigative story each year. However, in the past decade, those two papers plus the *Los Angeles Times* have eclipsed all others combined, sometimes accounting for more than half of all investigative stories that were honored. Papers that once appeared with some frequency on the list seem now to have lost either the will or the wherewithal to mount major investigations.”¹⁷

Several nonprofit organizations, buoyed by foundation money, have become significant players. (See Chapter 12, Nonprofit Websites.) Launched in 2008, ProPublica has now won two Pulitzers in two years. Other significant nonprofit investigative operations include the Center for Investigative Reporting and the Center for Public Integrity. National Public Radio (NPR) has created a new eight-person investigative unit.¹⁸

One of the most controversial new players is Wikileaks. While it clearly has many serious shortcomings, it is clear that this sort of web-based vessel for leaks and disclosures has become an important part of the news system. Media organizations of all shapes and sizes are still contemplating what role Wikileaks and organizations like it should play in newsgathering, but there is no debating that it has had a dramatic impact.

National Radio

The flip side of the de-localization of commercial radio is that there is more national news. The news-talk format has grown (See Chapter 2, Radio.) Meanwhile, NPR has increased its national and international bureaus, and in 2010 it deployed more than 1,400 reporters, editors, and producers in 21 domestic and 17 foreign bureaus.¹⁹ As traditional media have struggled, NPR's audience has grown 56 percent since 1986, and its web audience is now a substantial 18 million visitors each month.²⁰ (See Chapter 6, Public Broadcasting.)

On the other hand, there are several national media areas of some concern.

Newsmagazines

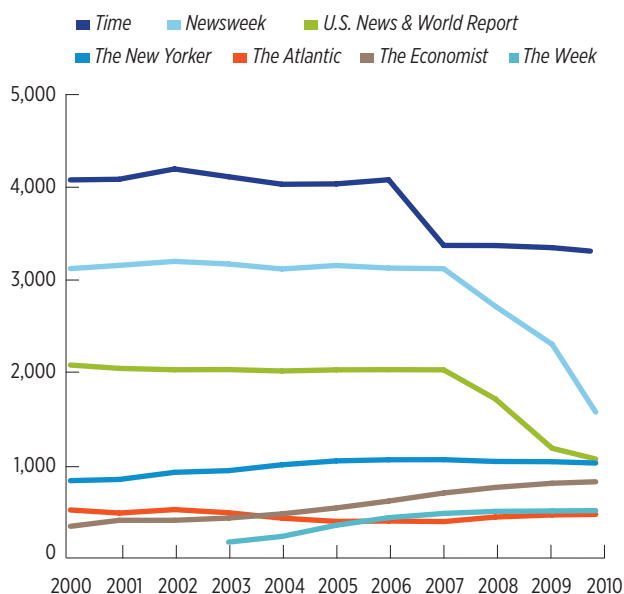
Not long ago, newsmagazines helped set the agenda for national discourse and employed some of the best reporters in the country, staffing an elaborate system of bureaus around the world. In 1989, the big three newsmagazines (*Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*) together sold almost 10 million copies a week.²¹ Between 1994 and 2009 *Time* and *Newsweek* cut their staffs by about half.²² In December 2010, *U.S. News & World Report* eliminated its regular print edition (limiting its print product to industry ranking guides), and in August 2010 *Newsweek* was sold for \$1 after its corporate parent decided it no longer wanted to cover its massive financial losses.²³ By 2010, the combined circulation of the big three newsmagazines was down to around 6 million.²⁴

In large part, because their weekly publication schedule meant that newsmagazines could not hope to be quite as current as TV or newspapers, they featured some of the best in-depth hard news reporting in the business. Often, their approach was to “flood the zone” by sending multiple correspondents into the field to cover various aspects of a single story. After 9/11, *Newsweek*'s Paris correspondent could address the exiled terrorist factions in Europe; the Mideast correspondent could listen for what was being said in Tehran, Jerusalem, Cairo, and Beirut; the correspondents in south Asia could send in details from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The final article could pull together all these “threads” to show readers connections that would not necessarily be made, let alone analyzed, in the daily paper.²⁶

Newsweeklies often undertook labor-intensive reporting projects that produced major scoops. In 2006, *Time* magazine broke the story of U.S. Marines deliberately killing 24 Iraqis in the town of Haditha, contradicting the military's initial reporting that they had been the victims of

NEWS MAGAZINE CIRCULATION (2000–2010)

Average Circulation of *Time*, *The Economist*, *The Week*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker* and *U.S. News* Over Time (in thousands)



Source: Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011 State of the News Media²⁵

a roadside bomb. It took foreign correspondent Tim McGirk 10 weeks of reporting in Iraq and Washington to piece together the true story.²⁷ *Newsweek* magazine's investigative reporter Michael Isikoff is credited with breaking the Monica Lewinsky story, after years of relentless digging.²⁸

As newsmagazines' finances have declined, the deepest cuts have impacted "correspondents," reporters in the field. At *Time* their numbers fell from 83 in 1998 to 35 in 2008, and the number of cities with bureaus went from 28 in 1998 to 18 in 2008.²⁹ *Time* and *Newsweek* reduced staff in bureaus (foreign and domestic) from 710 in 1983 to 297 in 2009.³⁰

Still, *Time* and *Newsweek* (now combined with the website, TheDailyBeast.com) may well survive and devise compelling new formulas for readers—perhaps emphasizing provocative thought-pieces, or news-of-the-week summaries, or great photography. (The magazine industry oversaw a 2.6 percent increase in revenue during the first three-quarters of 2010 over that period the year before.)³¹ But it is unlikely that these magazines will emphasize original reporting as much as they did in the past. "[*Time* magazine is] moving away from reporting and toward something else, something that is more commenting on the news rather than gathering it," says Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism.³² Indeed, other print magazines that follow a similar model—some reporting but more commentary or aggregation—have succeeded. *The Economist*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Week* actually posted modest gains in circulation in 2010.³³ In several cases, it appears that magazines have succeeded when they have leveraged their brand to develop additional revenue streams rather than relying solely on advertising. *The Atlantic* turned a profit in 2010 for the first time in years, in part because it earns money by holding conferences on policy issues. *National Journal* has been hiring reporters aggressively—including for a free website—in part, because its limited-circulation publication charges high subscription prices to lobbyists and lawyers in Washington.

After an explosion killed 29 coal miners in West Virginia, journalists found that regulators had cited the mine for 1,342 safety violations. The problem: the stories came after the disaster.

Coverage of Regulatory Agencies

Cutbacks have also led many news companies to eliminate or reduce their Washington bureaus. As a result, fewer reporters cover regulatory agencies—institutions whose job is to protect Americans from food poisoning, banking collapse, mine explosions, and countless other hazards. In the *American Journalism Review*, Jodi Enda illustrated the consequences:

"After an explosion killed 29 coal miners in West Virginia in early April, the Washington Post and the New York Times quickly produced lengthy exposés detailing a plethora of safety breaches that preceded the nation's worst coal mining disaster in a quarter century. The Times reported that mining companies thwarted tough federal regulations enacted after a spate of deaths four years earlier simply by appealing citations. The Post wrote that federal regulators had cited the Upper Big Branch mine for a whopping 1,342 safety violations in the past five years, 50 times in the previous month alone."³⁴

The problem is that these stories were published after the disaster, not before—even though many of the records had been there for inspection.

A similar pattern could be seen with the Toyota malfunctions that killed 19 people. After the tragedies, reporters discovered that more than 1,000 Toyota and Lexus owners had complained to the government. " 'You simply need to have journalists who are willing to pull teeth,' [Clarence Ditlow of the Center for Auto Safety] says. 'Could Toyota have been discovered earlier? I think so... ' "³⁵ Enda stated that not one newspaper now has a reporter working in the newsroom of the Department of Agriculture, which is in charge of farm policy and food safety:

"Newspaper reporters who remain in the capital tend to focus on the big issues of the moment (health care, Wall Street), their congressional delegations and politics. Scoops are measured in nanoseconds and posted online the moment they are secured (and sometimes prior to that)..."

" 'Dealing with agencies can be very time-consuming,' says Bill Lambrecht, the lone reporter remaining in the once-exalted Washington bureau of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, a Lee Enterprises-owned newspaper. 'The kind of source work that you need to do—calling people at night, filing FOIAs [Freedom of Information Act requests]—to bird-dog the agencies that

invariably try to put up obstructions to giving you what you should get takes a lot of time....’ He has had to scale back on the type of hard-hitting stories he previously wrote about the Environmental Protection Agency, the Agriculture Department and the Food and Drug Administration, to name a few....

“‘It’s changed dramatically, and all for the worse,’ George Condon, former Washington bureau chief for Copley News Service, says of Washington journalism. Condon was forced to close down the bureau in November two years after its reporters won a Pulitzer...for revealing that Rep. Randy ‘Duke’ Cunningham, a California Republican, had taken millions in bribes.”³⁶

Most newspapers cover the agencies only when particular issues burst to the surface but that approach leads to a paucity of what the *Washington Monthly* founder Charles Peters calls “preventive journalism”³⁷: reportage that prevents tragedy.

Taken together, it appears that nationally oriented news producers have had greater success developing business models—and where they fall short, nonprofit media has stepped in and made significant contributions. That is not to say that national media is without problems. We have pointed to a few, and no doubt readers might offer their own concerns about the media. But compared with local news coverage, there are more reasons to be optimistic about national news evolving in a positive direction.

International News

As the nation fights two wars and suffers from a global recession, coverage of international news by most traditional media appears to have declined.

For newspapers, the greatest drop in foreign coverage has been at the big regional and city dailies. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Newsday* won five Pulitzers for foreign coverage between 1979 and 2005, and by 2010 they had no overseas bureaus at all.³⁸ In a count of 28 newspapers, the total number of foreign newspaper bureaus fell from 145 in 1998³⁹ to 58 in 2010.⁴⁰ The *American Journalism Review* documented how these shifts rippled through a representative sample of newspapers—resulting in a 53 percent decline in foreign coverage since 1985 (see chart).

In 2008, nearly half (46 percent) of media managers reported cutting resources devoted to foreign coverage, and 64 percent said they devoted less space to foreign news.⁴² The reason is obvious: The cost of fielding a single

foreign correspondent—between \$250,000 and \$500,000, and more in a security-sensitive war zone—can equal the price of five hometown newspaper reporters.⁴³ And only 10 percent of editors said that they considered foreign coverage “very essential” to their audience.⁴⁴

Network television news coverage of international affairs has waxed and waned according to external events. The initial coverage of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars was aggressive, but it faded over time.⁴⁵ In 2008, American fatalities for the year in both wars combined were about the same as in 2003 (469 and 534, respectively),⁴⁶ but network news coverage of the wars was 78 percent lower.⁴⁷ Though still nowhere near the coverage levels at the beginning of the Iraq war, overseas coverage

FOREIGN COVERAGE OVER TIME (1985 VS. 2010)						
	1985	2010	Total Stories	Staff-Written	Page 1	
Philadelphia Inquirer	101	62	26	2	15	6
Providence Journal	75	38	13	2	7	0
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	92	24	15	3	8	4
Cincinnati Enquirer	57	33	7	0	5	0
Dallas Morning News	75	59	18	4	6	6
Tampa Tribune	96	33	4	1	8	1
The Oregonian	115	41	11	2	8	1
Fresno Bee	78	31	8	0	6	1
Total	689	321	102	14	63	19

Source: “Shrinking Foreign Coverage,” by Priya Kumar, *American Journalism Review*, 2011⁸⁴

bounced back a bit after President Obama’s decision to increase troops in Afghanistan, with most news operations increasing their coverage simply by shifting reporters from other parts of the world.

To make up for staffing cuts, some news operations have shifted away from expensive permanent bureaus, preferring to hire “MOJOs”—mobile journalists—who drop into an area when news breaks.⁴⁸ Andrew Tyndale, a TV news analyst, says this has been made possible by technology improvements, including light and tolerant cameras, directional microphones, easy uplinks, remote editing, online research, and social-network sourcing, among other advances. “Video newsgathering these days is so much more nimble, versatile and ubiquitous that ever so many fewer

traditional bureaus need to be established as bases from which correspondents can be dispatched,” Tyndale wrote.⁴⁹ For instance, in 2007, ABC News opened seven new bureaus, most in Asia, staffed with one employee each.⁵⁰ The staffer serves as both reporter and producer, and writes, shoots, edits, and feeds material from a laptop via a broadband Internet connection to New York. Other networks have adopted the same model.

Bright Spots

Although most news outlets have reduced their overseas presence, a few have increased it: Bloomberg now has a staff of 2,300 in 146 bureaus in 72 countries (more than half of Bloomberg’s audience lives overseas).⁵¹ The *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* continue to have large overseas bureaus.⁵²

Cable news networks, especially CNN, have substantial overseas presence. In 2009, CNN had 33 foreign bureaus, FOX had nine, and MSNBC had 11. That year, CNN devoted 23 percent of its coverage to foreign news (18 percent to events involving the U.S. and 5 percent to strictly foreign stories), FOX News did 18 percent foreign news, and MSNBC offered 13 percent.⁵³

Associated Press and Reuters continue to field thousands of overseas reporters. NPR has added 11 bureaus in 10 years⁵⁴ and now has reporters in London, Rome, Berlin, Moscow, Istanbul, Jerusalem, Cairo, Baghdad, New Delhi, Beijing, Shanghai, Dakar, Kabul, Nairobi, Islamabad, Jakarta, and Bogota.⁵⁵ In the television world, only CNN has more.⁵⁶ And there has been some extraordinary coverage when crisis strikes, as was seen in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake.

Foundations and nonprofits, such as the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting and the International Reporting Project (IRP), offer grants to fund overseas freelance projects. John Schidlovsky of IRP says he receives 300 applications for about 40 grants a year; the program has sent 174 reporters overseas to a total of 92 countries in the past dozen years. The Pulitzer Center, with a budget of \$1.7 million, produces about 50 or 60 projects per year, usually in collaboration with national entities such as the *Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, and *PBS NewsHour*.⁵⁷

Just as important, the Internet has made it much easier for citizens who want more foreign information than TV or newspapers provide. Americans now have easy access to foreign media such as the BBC, the *Guardian*, *Haaretz*,

Le Monde, and Al Jazeera, as well as to specialized sites like that of *Foreign Policy* magazine. In addition, those seeking a wider range of information on particular regions can turn to a myriad of international sites: GlobalVoices, a community of more than 300 bloggers and translators, delivers reports from blogs and citizen media worldwide with an emphasis on “voices that are not ordinarily heard in international mainstream media”⁵⁸ and GlobalPost.com, an online news outlet operating out of the United States, offers original reporting from about 50 journalists working in as many countries.⁵⁹

The Internet also enables ordinary citizens around the world to report information to the rest of the planet. While professional photographers produced the searing images of Vietnam that shaped public perceptions, it was an amateur Iranian doctor who drew American attention to the Iranian government crackdown following elections in 2009 with his cell phone video of a woman who was shot during the protests. Coverage of the Egyptian protests was

immeasurably enhanced by citizen reporting, as well as by U.S. access to foreign sources such as Al Jazeera. “The low cost of creation, transmission, and distribution means that a web user in the U.S. today has more raw data available on some foreign crises than a television producer for a network news program had ten years ago,” writes James Hamilton of Duke University.⁶⁰

The Nature of the Reporting

Still, many experts argue that these gains have not offset what has been lost—not just in volume but also in quality. The emphasis on crisis coverage has meant that large parts of the world are off the radar until disaster strikes. For example, in 2009, ABC and FOX News had no bureaus in Africa, and NBC had a presence only in Cairo. In Latin

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America, although ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC, and MSNBC all listed bureaus in Havana, only ABC (with a Mexico City bureau) and CNN (with four more bureaus in Latin American countries) reported a broader presence in the region. FOX had no Latin American bureaus.⁶¹

If media outlets react only after a crisis hits, that coverage obviously cannot help *prevent* catastrophe. Roy Gutman, foreign editor for McClatchy, argues that failure to cover Afghanistan before 9/11 is “one of the great lapses in the modern history of the profession.” He notes there had been almost no media reporting of the humanitarian crisis or Osama bin Laden’s “fire-breathing threats” from his Afghan base prior to 9/11.⁶²

Without trusted staff on the ground, news editors are hard put to detect, let alone highlight, an emerging situation before it turns into a crisis. Andrew Stroehlein, communications director of the International Crisis Group, a nonprofit, non-governmental organization,⁶³ noted that fewer media operations have a source on the ground who can call the newsroom and say, “In all my years in this country, I’ve never seen anything like this before,” or “This is news: we need to cover it.”⁶⁴

Reporters who parachute into a region at the last minute rarely have as full an understanding of the area as do permanently stationed correspondents. Pew’s *State of the News Media 2004* report found that much international network coverage was “actually camera work shot by freelancers with voiceover from a correspondent at the nearest bureau.”⁶⁵ In other words, the reporters narrating the story did not observe the scenes they were describing and were not on scene to interview eyewitnesses and other important sources. In addition, if correspondents have not been on the ground long enough to build source relationships, they are that much more dependent on information the government puts out and on what they can observe with their own eyes.

The decline of overseas bureaus also has made Americans more dependent on foreign-owned news outlets. This has advantages and disadvantages. Foreign media may have deeper understanding of an area, more sources, and perhaps more clout with local citizens. During the unrest in Egypt, American journalists and citizens often found that some of the best coverage came from Al Jazeera. Blogger Jeff Jarvis started a campaign to get more U.S. cable operators to carry the service.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the BBC’s U.S. website draws more traffic than all but a few U.S. newspapers.⁶⁷ On the other hand, some foreign-run news services are actually state owned and are more likely to offer a perspective that serves that country’s interests. Steve Randall, a senior analyst at Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), a conservative group, notes with concern that millions of Americans are watching such channels as Russia Today, Al Jazeera, CCTV of China, and Press TV of Iran via cable and satellite.⁶⁸ These may offer valuable perspectives, he says, but they certainly should not be viewed as a complete replacement for American media coverage.

What are the repercussions? In his book *Uninhibited, Robust and Wide Open*, Columbia University president Lee Bollinger, argued, “The need for news about international and global issues is greater than ever,” with America “at risk of intellectual isolationism, at least as grave a problem for the nation as economic protectionism.”⁶⁹

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