

Newspapers Wade Into An Online-Only Future

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=102162128>, viewed 4-8-2009

by [David Folkenflik](#)



The online-only plan for newspapers remains an unproven financial model. iStockphoto.com

[All Things Considered](#), March 20, 2009 · As revenues wither for troubled newspapers, journalists and executives are looking for salvation in the very technology that's tearing their industry apart. But that salvation — still unproven — will demand exceptional change.

Earlier this week, the Hearst Co. [stilled the presses](#) at the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, leaving the rival *Seattle Times* as the only big daily in town. But it's not completely over for the *Post-Intelligencer* — the paper will continue to exist in an online-only form.

"Being the second newspaper in Seattle didn't work," says Hearst Newspapers President Steve Swartz. "We are very enthusiastic, however, about this experiment to create a digital-only business in Seattle with a robust community Web site at its core."

If you missed the word "newspaper" tucked in there, it wasn't your fault. The mission is being defined entirely differently. There were 135 journalists employed by the print version of the *Post-Intelligencer*, says Swartz. But the online-only [Seattlepi.com](#) held on to just two dozen journalists. And though reporters and columnists are focusing on local government, courts, transportation and sports, there is a lot they won't cover.

Instead, Swartz says the *Post-Intelligencer* will link to stories elsewhere — from sources that include the rival *Seattle Times* — and offer its readers commentaries from local civic leaders and photo galleries.

"Very few people come to our Web site and try to re-create the experience of reading a newspaper — in other words, spending a half-hour to 45 minutes and really reading most of the articles. We don't find people do that on the Web," says Swartz.

The online-only plan for newspapers remains an unproven financial model; there are great savings by scrapping printing and delivery costs, but even greater lost revenues, since advertisers pay far more money for print ads than online ads.

Joel Kramer, the CEO and editor of the online-only [MinnPost](#) in the Twin Cities, says it is simply not financially feasible to replicate a printed newspaper in a publication based only on the Web. Instead, says Kramer, the Web site tends to "pick our spots and write when we have something new to add."

"Most stories we don't cover every day," Kramer adds. "We are more like a newsmagazine — something closer to [Slate](#) or [Salon](#) than to a daily paper."

MinnPost competes with the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, the paper that Kramer used to edit and publish. But Kramer says the tone of the *MinnPosts*' coverage differs too.

"Our site is more engaged with the readers than we used to be in the newspaper business," he says. "Our writers have much more freedom to be analytical — they combine news with commentary."

Kramer operates *MinnPost* as a not-for-profit, which is funded by foundation grants, donations from readers and revenue from online ads.

In Denver, where the *Rocky Mountain News* recently closed down its operations, three entrepreneurs are attempting to help a group of the paper's former journalists launch a news site called *In Denver Times*. But a big question mark hovers over the project. The group says in order to start, it must persuade 50,000 people to pledge to pay at least \$4.99 each month for a subscription to the site by April 23. As a point of comparison, Colorado Public Radio, based in Denver, has about 35,000 dues-paying members. And unlike Colorado Public Radio, the proposed *In Denver Times* is set up as a for-profit enterprise.

Though links to breaking news stories would be free, only subscribers would be able to chat online with the site's reporters and columnists or to receive news updates on their iPhones and BlackBerrys.

"If the people truly believe that they want to hear multiple voices, multiple opinions, then they need to show us that they are willing to pay for it," says Kevin Preblud, one of the business executives backing the project. "Good journalism requires a commitment and investment in these writers."

The brief record of online-only news sources — even those that started as conventional, printed newspapers — suggests they shouldn't really be considered online *newspapers*. Two years ago, the Scripps Co. (which owns the recently shuttered *Rocky Mountain News*) killed the *Cincinnati Post* and launched [KYPost.com](#), an online-only version of the paper focusing on the nearby suburbs in Northern Kentucky. It features stories about the region done by staffers for the Scripps-owned television station in Cincinnati and also gives concise updates of a lot of very local news — such as community events, honors and scores. But Managing Editor Kerry Duke says a lot of aspects of the old printed *Post* just aren't there.

"I'll get phone calls from people who were newspaper readers and they'll ask, 'Where are the classifieds?' Well, we don't have a classifieds section," says Duke.

The Post was by far the smaller of two dailies for Cincinnati, and it yielded to the stronger *Enquirer*, which is owned by the Gannett Co. Even so, a new Princeton University study connected a recent drop in voting in those Kentucky counties to the disappearance of the printed *Post*, which had acted as a constant watchdog on elected officials.

It's worth remembering that in each of these big cities — Seattle, Minneapolis, Denver, Cincinnati — a dominant daily is still limping along. Perhaps the real test for the value of these online news sites will arrive once the final edition of the last big paper in town rolls off the presses.

Hearst Ends Seattle Newspaper's 146-Year Run

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=101986519>, viewed 4-8-2009

by Wendy Kaufman

Web Resources

- [See The Newspaper's Coverage Of Its Transition](#)
- [Member Station KPLU's Series On The Loss Of The Seattle Newspaper](#)

[Morning Edition](#), March 17, 2009 · The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* is the latest casualty in the American newspaper industry. The final edition of the city's oldest daily hits newsstands Tuesday. But the *P-I* isn't disappearing entirely; it'll be published online only.

Everyone in the newsroom and readers across the city knew the paper's demise was imminent. Its owner, Hearst Corp., said two months ago that the *P-I* would be put up for sale, adding that the city's No. 2 paper would close if no buyer were found. On Monday, Hearst made it official, announcing that the next day's edition would be the last to roll off the presses.

Joel Connelly, a veteran *P-I* columnist and political writer, said that when he came to the paper in the early 1970s, it was blowing the whistle on a gambling payoff system that reached deep and high, into the courthouse and city hall.

"Nearly 40 years later, I see the paper blowing the whistle on the golden parachute for the managing director of the port of Seattle, so there's a continuity of what this paper has stood for, what this paper has fought for," Connelly said.

David McCumber, the paper's managing editor, calls it an amazing, wild and enterprising place. McCumber, who has been in journalism for the better part of 40 years, says he is grateful for his time at the paper.

"This staff is like family; it really is like family," he said.

Walking through the newsroom and watching journalists do what they love brought him joy; now, he says, there's the pain of losing talented staff.

"I'm sad for the industry," he said. "It's not just us — it's that the industry can't seem to find a way to make journalism work, and people need it — democracy needs it."

The newspaper industry is struggling financially. The advertising-fueled revenue model no longer works. People and ad dollars are migrating to the Web. So Hearst will launch an experiment — making the *P-I* an online-only format.

University of Washington journalism professor David Domke suggests that it makes sense to try it in Seattle, a city that is highly wired and highly literate.

"*P-I* is going to be a test case for major metro," Domke said. "Daily newspapers: Can they go online? Can they survive and maybe even thrive if they change the kind of news and their definition of news that they deliver to the public?"

Only about 20 newsroom staffers are moving to the new venture — a couple of others will provide sports columns on a regular basis. Along with staff reports on hard news, there will be lifestyle content from Hearst-owned magazines and a lot of blogs. Long investigative pieces probably won't find a home. In short, its content won't resemble that of the hard-copy newspaper.

P-I reader Bill Laub is one of many customers dining at the Elliott Bay Cafe who said they were saddened by the demise of the 146-year-old newspaper.

"It seems tragic that we are heading toward a world of *USA Today* and generic papers that don't have a local flavor — that don't have the voice and the flavor of local communities guiding them," he said. "It's just crazy." He added that he doesn't intend to read the online edition.

The demise of the *Post-Intelligencer* is not expected to do much to bolster the finances of the *Seattle Times*, the city's surviving daily newspaper. It, too, is in serious financial trouble.

Seattle Post-Intelligencer To Go Web Only

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=101950394>

[NPR.org](http://www.npr.org), March 16, 2009 · Seattle will be a one-newspaper town after Tuesday, when the 146-year-old *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* prints its last edition.

The *P-I* will continue to live on the Internet with a much smaller staff.

Parent company Hearst Corp. says it has failed to find a buyer for the newspaper, which it put up for sale in January after nine years of financial losses.

The end of the print edition leaves *The Seattle Times* as the only major daily in the city.

The announcement comes about two weeks after Denver's *Rocky Mountain News* published its final edition.

Chronicling The Death Of American Newspapers

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=101237069>, viewed 4-8-2009

by [Linton Weeks](#)



[Enlarge](#)

Justin Sullivan

A pedestrian walks by the *San Francisco Chronicle* building. After posting losses of more than \$50 million in 2008, parent company Hearst Corp. announced that unless it can negotiate cutbacks with unions, it may sell or close the 144-year-old newspaper. Getty Images

[NPR.org](#), March 2, 2009 · In a way, Jim Romanesko has become a newspaper obituary writer — except he doesn't write obituaries of people, he chronicles the demise of American newspapers.

It's Romanesko's job to cull through the news of the media industry and post stories of interest. Because of the acceleration of dead and dying dailies in the country, [Romanesko's blog](#) has turned into a scrolling roll call of bad news. He links to story after story describing the shifting journalistic landscape.

For many readers who love newspapers, it's a sad state of affairs. If you clicked on Romanesko — as the blog is popularly known — over the past few days, here is essentially what you saw: "*Washington Post* profit falls 77% in fourth quarter," "Will Rupert Murdoch end up owning the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*?" "Hearst says it will sell or close the *San Francisco Chronicle* if cuts aren't made in a hurry," "*Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Daily News* owner files for bankruptcy protection." And that's only a few of the entries.

Sprinkled among the list of sick-and-shut-in big-city newspapers were notices of others that are ailing and failing, such as the 150-year-old *Rocky Mountain News*, which published its last issue Friday. And an announcement that the American Society of Newspaper Editors has canceled its 2009 convention in April because of stress within the industry. And a slew of raging debates about whether newspapers can be saved, where news will come from in the future and how it will be delivered.

And also occasionally in the mix, suggestions for solutions and even, every great once in a while, some hope that readers will still be able to find solid journalism — though it may only be available online.

Possible Solutions

In shorthand, the major problem: Swiftly moving competition from emerging Web sites has hastened the downfall of newspapers. As more people turn to the Internet for news — even, ironically, to the newspapers' own Web sites — fewer subscribe to news printed on paper. As circulation dwindles, so does advertising revenue. And without the same amount of advertising revenue, newspapers can no longer afford large, comprehensive, news-gathering operations. So the newspaper shrinks, attracting fewer readers, leading to a decline in advertising revenue, and the death spiral continues.

Newspapers have tried, with varying degrees of success, to migrate to the Web and hold on to their readers. But the advertising revenue is dramatically less than it was for the print version. (Many advertisers have their own economic problems to solve.) Consequently, newsrooms are having to contract — through buyouts, layoffs, combining or closing certain sections and even shutting down the presses altogether. There seems to be a general consensus that the kind of print and photographic journalism supported by large newsrooms and substantial resources is teetering on extinction.

Many experts weigh in with possible answers. They are convinced that the First Amendment, government accountability and other lofty ideals hang in the balance. Among the suggestions to save the newsroom: the [establishment of collegelike endowments](#); [micropayments](#) (10 cents for every article you read, for instance) or a [finely honed hybrid](#) of advertising, donations and user payments.

The cumulative effect of the bleak stories amassed on Romenesko's site — amid the reality of massive buyouts and layoffs — has led to deep soul-searching in the journalistic world. The sea change is in-your-face obvious. Some media watchers harbor hope for the fate of newsgathering organizations. But for others, it's easy to feel that the Dark Ages are approaching.

Worst And Best Scenarios

Rick Edmonds, media business analyst at the Poynter Institute, spends his days contemplating the future of news gathering and reporting. He says the worst-case scenario looks like this: "This year, 2009, is worse than 2008. We have fresh financial shocks and failures in many aspects of the business. The damage to the advertising base gets worse and worse. Many metro newspapers stop being profitable and go out of business."

The result is a conglomeration of blogs, some driven by altruism, some by greed. And a range of nonpaper sites that give you the news. "What you end up with is not as good as a newspaper," Edmonds says. "It lacks common strands."

Eventually, if newspapers with national followings — and their Web sites — also go out of business, Edmonds says, "You'll get your political news from Politico, world news from the BBC, entertainment news from *Entertainment Weekly* and your sports news from ESPN."

He says, "We are already beginning to see the outline of something like that scenario."

To counter his worst-case scenario, Edmonds says there is a best-case scenario. Here it is: "Newspapers are able to get through this difficult time with a little more, but not much more damage, to their newsrooms," he says. "The recession begins to make a turn later this year. The stimulus kicks in. Newspapers

are successful at bolstering print. They find new advertising streams. They send digital editions to Kindle. And mobile devices."

And some kind of mutated news-gathering organizations — print and online and other things — emerge from the swamp. But newspaper journalism, he says, "will never be as big again as it was in the golden years of the '80s and '90s."

Moving From Library To Coffee Shop

Romenesko has witnessed the implosion of the American newsroom firsthand. "When I started in the business at *The Milwaukee Journal*" in 1977, he says, "the newsroom was packed with reporters keeping very close watch on every institution in town. They had two reporters covering city hall, three reporters covering the police building, and even a reporter covering the local ballet on a full-time basis. No more."

Though Romenesko's blog is nurtured by the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Fla., the man himself lives in the Chicago suburbs. A peripatetic worker, he is a newsroom on wheels — roving each weekday from coffee shop to library to any place with Wi-Fi access. He sits with a laptop, reading media stories and sorting through the various e-mails and leaked memos that Romenesko followers send him. He is exactly the kind of agile, new-breed, Internet-dependent journalist he sometimes features on his site. "By day's end," he says, "I've probably parked myself at five or six different places. I'm online by 6:15 a.m. and wrap things up by 5 p.m."

For cosmic relief Romenesko also runs a nonjournalistic site called StarbucksGossip.com, but most of his working hours are spent aggregating stories about the news business.

One noteworthy aspect of the death-of-newspapers story is its effect on aggregator sites, such as the Drudge Report and Romenesko's own. If mainstream print media and their Web sites fade away, serious news aggregators may have to work and search and cull and delve harder to provide a variety of reliable news to readers. "There will always be journalism," Romenesko says. "So I think my job is safe. I'll just have to shift the site's focus."

Drew Curtis is founder and chief curator of snarky Fark.com, a rolling roster of quirky stories — news, entertainment, bizzareties. Curtis agrees with Romenesko. "I don't think media consolidation does us any favors" and is quite possibly "harmful to society as a whole," he says.

But from an aggregator standpoint, Curtis says, "the vast majority of Fark links come from two places: wire services and small local papers. The decline seems to be hitting midmarket areas the hardest."

And, he says, "We don't tend to use them much for anything."

The Fate Of Newsrooms

[What Leonard Downie fears](#) is the death not of the newspaper but of the newsroom. The former executive editor of *The Washington Post*, Downie recently told the Annenberg School for Communication, "I'm not concerned about the fate of the printed newspaper. I'm concerned about the fate of newspaper newsrooms. Because those are the newsrooms that are doing the reporting that no one else is doing."

He said, "So many people who are either afraid about the future of newspapers or are gleeful about the future of newspapers are missing the point. It's not the way in which it's presented; it's the news itself that matters."

And the jury is still out on whether enterprising and conscientious journalists will be able to gather and report news — hard-hitting and essential news — using the ever expanding palette of new technologies.

Meanwhile, Romenesko says the onslaught of bad news gets to him sometime, yet he remains somewhat hopeful. "On some days," Romenesko says, "I'm overwhelmed by memos about layoffs, buyouts, etc., and I suspect that will continue for some time."

But it's interesting, he says, "to document the transition to online. I'll be of retirement age — 62 — in about six years, and I'm not sure what the media landscape will look like then. I suspect few papers will have print editions seven days a week, and many will follow the *Christian Science Monitor* and be online only by then."

But, he says, there are some facets of the new world that he looks forward to: "As a tech-toy lover," Romenesko says, "I'm hoping there will be a *Minority Report*-like flexible, constantly updated LCD-style newspaper." Maybe, he says, by 2015.

The priceless question is: What will be the quality, and reliability, of the journalism that Romenesko will be receiving on his newfangled gadget?

Linton Weeks was an editor and reporter at The Washington Post for 19 years until he took a buyout in the summer of 2008 and joined NPR.