



# We Media

*How audiences are shaping the future of news and information*

**By Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis**

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Edited by J.D. Lasica

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### **About The Media Center**

The Media Center is a non-profit research and educational organization committed to building a better-informed society in a connected world. The Media Center conducts research, educational programs and symposia and facilitates strategic conversations and planning on issues shaping the future of news, information and media.

The Media Center helps leaders, organizations and educators around the world understand and create multimedia futures. Its programs and engagements provide innovation, knowledge and strategic insights for personal, professional and business growth.

A division of The American Press Institute, The Media Center was established in 1997 to help the news industry devise strategies and tactics for digital media. In September 2003 it merged with New Directions for News, an independent think tank. The merger created a global, multi-disciplinary network of researchers and leading thinkers focused on the future of media and the behaviors of consumers in a media-centric world.

For more on The Media Center's programs, research and services, go to [www.mediacenter.org](http://www.mediacenter.org).

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## Introduction

There are three ways to look at how society is informed.

The first is that people are gullible and will read, listen to, or watch just about anything.

The second is that most people require an informed intermediary to tell them what is good, important or meaningful. The third is that people are pretty smart; given the means, they can sort things out for themselves, find their own version of the truth.

The means have arrived. The truth is out there.

Throughout history, access to news and information has been a privilege accorded to powerful institutions with the authority or wealth to dominate distribution. For the past two centuries, an independent press has served as advocate for society and its right to know — an essential role during an era of democratic enlightenment.

It feels like a new era has been thrust upon us — an era of enlightened anxiety. We now know more than ever before, but our knowledge creates anxiety over harsh truths and puzzling paradoxes. What is the role of the storyteller in this epoch? How will an informed, connected

society help shape it? How does the world look when news and information are part of a shared experience?

For more than 15 years, NDN and The Media Center have provided prescient insights about the changes confronting news, information and media. We commissioned *We Media* as a way to begin to understand how ordinary citizens, empowered by digital technologies that connect knowledge throughout the globe, are contributing to and participating in their own truths, their own kind of news. We asked seasoned, visionary journalists — innovators like Dan Gillmor, technology columnist for *The San Jose Mercury News*, and news media editor-author JD Lasica — to help frame a conversation about the promise and pitfalls of citizen-based, digital media in an open society.

The conversation is just beginning. I have always believed that a good story gets around.

At some level, *We Media* will reveal something about society and the way people learn from each other.

— Dale Peskin  
Co-Director, The Media Center

## Foreword

In March 2002, at the annual PC Forum conference in suburban Phoenix, a telecommunications chief executive found himself on the receiving end of acerbic commentary from a pair of weblog writers who found his on-stage comments wanting. Joe Nacchio, then the head of Qwest Communications, was complaining about the travails of running his monopoly. Doc Searls, a magazine writer, and I were posting on our blogs via the wireless conference network. A lawyer and software developer named Buzz Bruggeman, “watching” the proceedings from his office in Florida, e-mailed both of us a note pointing to a Web page showing Nacchio’s enormous cash-in of Qwest stock while the share price was heading downhill. We noted this in our blogs, and offered virtual tips of the hat to Bruggeman. Many in the audience were online, and some were amusing themselves reading our comments. The mood toward Nacchio chilled.

Were we somehow responsible for turning the audience against Nacchio? Perhaps the blogging played a small role, though I’m fairly sure he was more than capable of annoying the crowd all by himself. But the incident was a wakeup call. It reflected the power of blogs, a form of participatory journalism that has exploded into popularity in recent years. And it showed how these techniques are irrevocably changing the nature of journalism, because they’re giving enormous new power to what had been a mostly passive audience in the past.

I’ve been lucky enough to be an early participant in participatory journalism, having been urged almost four years ago by one of the weblog software pioneers to start my own blog. Writing about technology in Silicon Valley, I used the blog to generate even more feedback from my audience.

That audience, never shy to let me know when I get something wrong, made me realize something: My readers know more than I do. This has become almost a mantra in my work. It is by definition the reality for every journalist, no matter what his or her beat. And it’s a great opportunity, not a threat, because when we ask our readers for their help and knowledge, they are willing to share it — and we can all benefit. If modern American journalism has been a lecture, it’s evolving into something that incorporates a conversation and seminar.

This is all about decentralization. Traditionally centralized news-gathering and distribution is being augmented (and some cases will be replaced) by what’s happening at the edges of increasingly ubiquitous networks. People are combining powerful technological tools and innovative ideas, fundamentally altering the nature of journalism in this new century. There are new possibilities for everyone in the process: journalist, newsmaker and the active “consumer” of news who isn’t satisfied with today’s product — or who wants to make some news, too. One of the most exciting examples of a newsmaker’s understanding of the possibilities has been the presidential campaign of Howard Dean, the first serious blogger-candidate, who has embraced decentralization to the massive benefit of his nomination drive.

Participatory journalism is a healthy trend, however disruptive it may be for those whose roles are changing. Some of the journalism from the edges will make us all distinctly uncomfortable, raising new questions of trust and veracity. We’ll need, collectively, to develop new standards of trust and verification; of course, the lawyers will make some of those new rules. And today’s dominant media organizations — led by Hollywood — are abusing copyright laws to shut down some of the most useful technologies for this new era, while governments increasingly shield their activities from public sight and make rules that effectively decide who’s a journalist. In a worst-case scenario, participatory journalism could someday require the permission of Big Media and Big Government.

But I’m optimistic, largely because the technology will be difficult to control in the long run, and because people like to tell stories. The new audience will be fragmented beyond anything we’ve seen so far, but news will be more relevant than ever.

NDN and The Media Center have put together an excellent overview on a topic that is only beginning to be understood. Participatory journalism is a big piece of our information future. We’re all in for a fascinating, and turbulent, ride in the years ahead. Welcome aboard.

— Dan Gillmor  
*The San Jose Mercury News*  
July 2003

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction to participatory journalism

In his 1995 book *Being Digital*, Nicholas Negroponte predicted that in the future, online news would give readers the ability to choose only the topics and sources that interested them.

“The Daily Me,” as Negroponte called it, worried many guardians of traditional journalism. To actively allow a reader to narrow the scope of coverage, observed some, could undermine the “philosophical underpinnings of traditional media.”<sup>1</sup>

The vision that seemed cutting edge and worrisome eight years ago seems to have come partly true. *The Wall Street Journal*, MSNBC.com, *The Washington Post* and CNN, to name a few, all offer readers some degree of personalization on the front pages of their sites.

Millions of Yahoo members customize their MyYahoo personal news portal with the same news wire reports that editors use in daily newspapers across the globe. Google’s news page uses a computer algorithm to select headlines from thousands of news sites — creating a global newsstand, of sorts.

And media outlets from Fox News and the Drudge Report to individual weblogs offer the kind of opinionated slant to the news that Negroponte envisioned.

But is the future of online news simply a continued extrapolation of this trend — news a la carte? Does greater personalization necessarily mean greater understanding for a democracy?

In the view of futurist and author Watts Wacker, the question is not about greater personalization but about greater perspectives. According to Wacker, the world is moving faster than people can keep up with it. As a result, there are fewer common cultural references that can be agreed upon. Ideas, styles, products and mores accelerate their way from the fringe to the mainstream with increasing speed.

To combat the confusion, consumers are seeking more perspectives, Wacker says.<sup>2</sup> They research an automobile for purchase by spending time online and reading both professional and amateur reviews alike.

But what are they doing when it comes to news?

And what will they be doing in the future?

To understand that, Wacker advises, you must seek out people from the future today and study them.<sup>3</sup> How do you find people from the future? Locate early adopters — people who are using and appropriating technology in new ways.

In South Korea, it looks like one future of online news has arrived a few years early.

OhmyNews.com is the most influential online news site in that country, attracting an estimated 2 million readers a day. What’s unusual about OhmyNews.com is that readers not only can pick and choose the news they want to read — they also write it.

With the help of more than 26,000 registered citizen journalists, this collaborative online newspaper has emerged as a direct challenge to established media outlets in just four years.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike its competitors, OhmyNews has embraced the speed, responsiveness and community-oriented nature of the Web.

Now, it appears, the vision of “The Daily Me” is being replaced by the idea of “The Daily We.”

## The rise of “we media”

The venerable profession of journalism finds itself at a rare moment in history where, for the first time, its hegemony as gatekeeper of the news is threatened by not just new technology and competitors but, potentially, by the audience it serves. Armed with easy-to-use Web publishing tools, always-on connections and increasingly powerful mobile devices, the online audience has the means to become an active participant in the creation and dissemination of news and information. And it’s doing just that on the Internet:

- According to the Pew Internet Project, the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, generated the most traffic to traditional news sites in the history of the Web. Many large news sites buckled under the immense demand and people turned to e-mail, weblogs and forums “as conduits for information, commentary, and action related to 9/11 events.”<sup>5</sup> The response on the Internet gave rise to a new proliferation of “do-it-yourself journalism.” Everything from eyewitness accounts and photo galleries to commentary



and personal storytelling emerged to help people collectively grasp the confusion, anger and loss felt in the wake of the tragedy.

- During the first few days of the war in Iraq, Pew found that 17 percent of online Americans used the Internet as their principal source of information about the war, a level more than five times greater than those who got their news online immediately after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks (3 percent). The report also noted that “weblogs (were) gaining a following among a small number of Internet users (4 percent).”<sup>6</sup>
- Immediately after the Columbia shuttle disaster, news and government organizations, in particular *The Dallas Morning News* and NASA, called upon the public to submit eyewitness accounts and photographs that might lead to clues to the cause of the spacecraft’s disintegration.<sup>7</sup>
- ABCNews.com’s *The Note* covers 2004 political candidates and gives each an individual weblog to comment back on what was reported.<sup>8</sup> In addition, presidential candidate Howard Dean guest-blogged on Larry Lessig’s weblog for a week in July 2003. (A future president of the United States might be chosen not only on his or her merits, charisma, experience or voting record but on the basis of how well he or she blogs.)
- College coaches, players and sports media outlets keep constant vigil on numerous fan forum sites, which have been credited with everything from breaking and making news to rumor-mongering. “You can’t go anywhere or do anything and expect not to be seen, because everyone is a reporter now,” says Steve Patterson, who operates *ugasports.com*, a Web site devoted to University of Georgia sports.<sup>9</sup>
- Before the Iraq war, the BBC knew it couldn’t possibly deploy enough photojournalists to cover the millions of people worldwide who marched in anti-war demonstrations. Reaching out to its audience, the BBC News asked readers to send in images taken with digital cameras and cell phones with built-in cameras, and it published the best ones on its Web site.<sup>10</sup>

### Weblogs come of age

The Internet, as a medium for news, is maturing. With every major news event, online media evolve. And while news sites have become more responsive and better able to handle the growing

demands of readers and viewers, online communities and personal news and information sites are participating in an increasingly diverse and important role that, until recently, has operated without significant notice from mainstream media.

While there are many ways that the audience is now participating in the journalistic process, which we will address in this report, weblogs have received the most attention from mainstream media in the past year.

Weblogs, or blogs as they are commonly known, are the most active and surprising form of this participation. These personal publishing systems have given rise to a phenomenon that shows the markings of a revolution — giving anyone with the right talent and energy the ability to be heard far and wide on the Web.

Weblogs are frequently updated online journals, with reverse-chronological entries and numerous links, that provide up-to-the-minute takes on the writer’s life, the news, or on a specific subject of interest. Often riddled with opinionated commentary, they can be personally revealing (such as a college student’s ruminations on dorm life) or straightforward and fairly objective (Romenesko). (*We discuss weblogs in greater detail in Chapter 3.*)

The growth of weblogs has been largely fueled by greater access to bandwidth and low-cost, often free software. These simple easy-to-use tools have enabled new kinds of collaboration unrestricted by time or geography. The result is an advance of new social patterns and means for self-expression. Blog-like communities like *Slashdot.org* have allowed a multitude of voices to participate while managing a social order and providing a useful filter on discussion.

Weblogs have expanded their influence by attracting larger circles of readers while at the same time appealing to more targeted audiences. “Blogs are in some ways a new form of journalism, open to anyone who can establish and maintain a Web site, and they have exploded in the past year,” writes Walter Mossberg, technology columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*.

“The good thing about them is that they introduce fresh voices into the national discourse on various topics, and help build communities of interest through their collections of links. For instance, bloggers are credited with helping to get the mainstream news media interested in the racially insensitive remarks by Sen. Trent Lott (R.-Miss.) that led to his resignation as Senate

majority leader.”<sup>11</sup>

Mossberg’s description of weblogs as a new kind of journalism might trouble established, traditionally trained journalists. But it is a journalism of a different sort, one not tightly confined by the traditions and standards adhered to by the traditional profession.

These acts of citizen engaging in journalism are not just limited to weblogs. They can be found in newsgroups, forums, chat rooms, collaborative publishing systems and peer-to-peer applications like instant messaging. As new forms of participation have emerged through new technologies, many have struggled to name them. As a default, the name is usually borrowed from the enabling technology (i.e., weblogging, forums and usenets).

The term we use — *participatory journalism* — is meant to describe the content and the intent of online communication that often occurs in collaborative and social media. Here’s the working definition that we have adopted:

***Participatory journalism:*** The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires.

Participatory journalism is a bottom-up, emergent phenomenon in which there is little or no editorial oversight or formal journalistic workflow dictating the decisions of a staff. Instead, it is the result of many simultaneous, distributed conversations that either blossom or quickly atrophy in the Web’s social network (see *Figure 1.1 – Top-down vs. Bottom-up*).

While the explosion of weblogs is a recent phenomenon, the idea of tapping into your audience for new perspectives or turning readers into reporters or commentators is not. Many news organizations have a long history of tapping into their communities and experimenting with turning readers into reporters or commentators. In the early 1990s, newspapers experimented with the idea of civic journalism, which sought participation from readers and communities in the form of focus groups, polls and reaction to daily news stories. Most of these early projects centered around election coverage. Later, news-

papers sought to involve communities in major deliberations on public problems such as race, development and crime.

According to a report from the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, at least 20 percent of the 1,500 daily U.S. newspapers practiced some form of civic journalism between 1994 and 2001. Nearly all said it had a positive effect on the community.<sup>12</sup>

Civic journalism has a somewhat controversial reputation, and not everyone is convinced of its benefits. While civic journalism actively tries to encourage participation, the news organization maintains a high degree of control by setting the agenda, choosing the participants and moderating the conversation. Some feel that civic journalism is often too broad, focusing on large issues such as crime and politics, and not highly responsive to the day-to-day needs of the audience.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, the seed from which civic journalism grows is dialogue and conversation. Similarly, a defining characteristic of participatory journalism is conversation. However, there is no central news organization controlling the exchange of information. Conversation is the mechanism that turns the tables on the traditional roles of journalism and creates a dynamic, egalitarian give-and-take ethic.

The fluidity of this approach puts more emphasis on the publishing of information rather than the filtering. Conversations happen in the community for all to see. In contrast, traditional news organizations are set up to filter information before they publish it. It might be collaborative among the editors and reporters, but the debates are not open to public scrutiny or involvement.

John Seely Brown, chief scientist of Xerox Corp., further elaborates on participatory journalism in the book *The Elements of Journalism*: “In an era when anyone can be a reporter or commentator on the Web, ‘you move to a two-way journalism.’ The journalist becomes a ‘forum leader,’ or a mediator rather than simply a teacher or lecturer. The audience becomes not consumers, but ‘pro-sumers,’ a hybrid of consumer and producer.”<sup>14</sup>

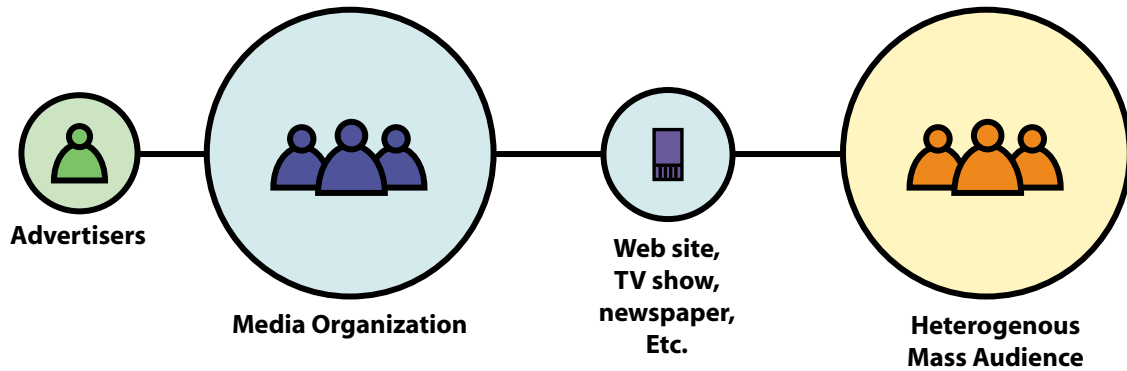
Seely Brown’s description suggests a symbiotic relationship, which we are already seeing. But participatory journalism does not show evidence of needing a classically trained “journalist” to be the mediator or facilitator. Plenty of weblogs, forums and online communities appear to function effectively without one.

This raises some important questions: If par-

Figure 1.1 - Top-down vs. Bottom-up news

**Broadcast: Top-down news**

Model also called transmit, push. Characterized by media organization control. All news is filtered through organization before getting to audience.



**Intercast: Bottom-up news**

Also called peer-to-peer, social network. Participants are peers and have ability to change roles. News is often unfiltered by a mediator before getting to its audience.



participatory journalism has risen without the direct help of trained journalists or news industry initiatives, what role will mainstream media play? And are mainstream media willing to relinquish some control and actively collaborate with their audiences? Or will an informed and empowered consumer begin to frame the news agenda from the grassroots? And, will journalism’s values endure?

**Journalism at a crossroads**

In his 1996 book *News Values*, former Chicago

Tribune publisher Jack Fuller summed it up well: “The new interactive medium both threatens the status quo and promises an exciting new way of learning about the world.” This deftly describes both camps of opinion concerning participation by the audience in journalism.<sup>15</sup>

It’s not just the Internet that threatens the status quo of the news business. In their 2001 book *The Elements of Journalism*, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel make a compelling argument that the news business is undergoing “a momentous transition.”

*OhmyNews is the most influential online news site in South Korea, attracting an estimated 2 million readers a day. It is produced by more than 26,000 registered citizen journalists.*

According to the authors, each time there has been a period of significant, social, economic and technological change, a transformation in news occurred. This happened in the 1830s-40s with the advent of the telegraph; the 1880s with a drop in paper prices and a wave of immigration; the 1920s with radio and the rise of gossip and celebrity culture; the 1950s at the onset of the Cold War and television.

The arrival of cable, followed by the Internet and mobile technologies, has brought the latest upheaval in news. And this time, the change in news may be even more dramatic. Kovach and Rosenstiel explain, “For the first time in our history, the news increasingly is produced by companies outside journalism, and this new economic organization is important. We are facing the possibility that independent news will be replaced by self-interested commercialism posing as news.”<sup>16</sup>

Kovach and Rosenstiel argue that new technology, along with globalization and the conglomeration of media, is causing a shift away from journalism that is connected to citizen building and one that supports a healthy democracy.

Clearly, journalism is in the process of redefining itself, adjusting to the disruptive forces surrounding it. So it's no surprise that discussions about forms of participatory journalism, such as weblogs, are frequently consumed by defensive debates about what is journalism and who can legitimately call themselves a journalist.

While debating what makes for good journalism

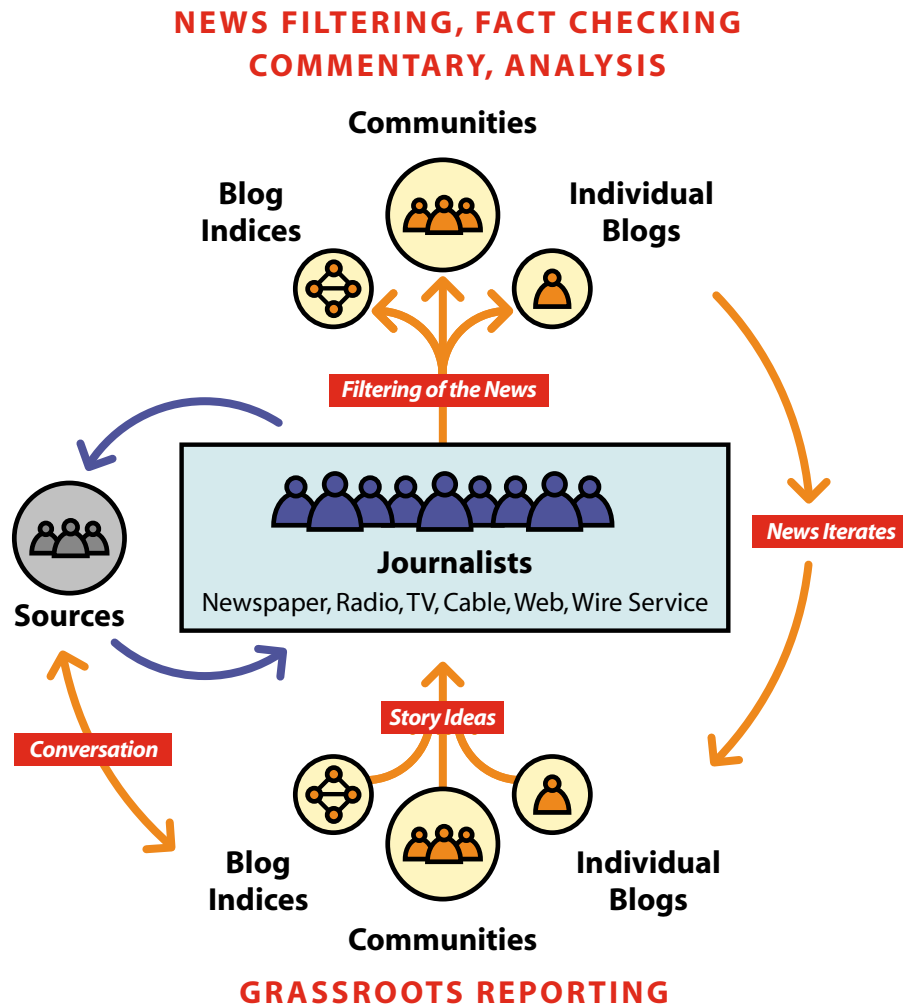
is worthwhile, and is clearly needed, it prevents the discussion from advancing to any analysis about the greater good that can be gained from audience participation in news. Furthermore, the debate often exacerbates the differences primarily in processes, overlooking obvious similarities. If we take a closer look at the basic tasks and values of traditional journalism, the differences become less striking.

From a task perspective, journalism is seen as “the profession of gathering, editing, and publishing news reports and related articles for newspapers, magazines, television, or radio.”<sup>17</sup>

In terms of journalism's key values, there is much debate. After extensive interviews with hundreds of U.S. journalists, Kovach and Rosenstiel say that terms such as fairness, balance and objectivity are too vague to rise to essential elements of this profession. From their research, they distilled this value: “The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing.”<sup>18</sup>

In the case of the aforementioned South Korean news site, we see that traditional journalism's basic tasks and values are central to its ethos. The difference essentially boils down to a redistribution of control – a democratization of media. “With OhmyNews, we wanted to say goodbye to 20th-century journalism where people only saw things through the eyes of the mainstream, conservative media,” said Oh Yeon-ho, editor and founder of South Korea's Ohmynews.com.<sup>19</sup>

Figure 1.2 - The Emerging Media Ecosystem



Source: Based on "Blogsphere: the emerging Media Ecosystem" by John Hiler, Microcontent News

“The main concept is that every citizen can be a reporter,” Yeon-ho says. “A reporter is the one who has the news and who is trying to inform others.”<sup>20</sup>

### The new evolving media ecosystem

The most obvious difference between participatory journalism and traditional journalism is the different structure and organization that produce them.

Traditional media are created by hierarchical organizations that are built for commerce. Their business models are broadcast and advertising focused. They value rigorous editorial workflow, profitability and integrity. Participatory journalism is created by networked communities that value conversation, collaboration and egalitarianism over profitability.

anism over profitability.

Clay Shirky, an adjunct professor at New York University who has consulted on the social and economic effects of Internet technologies, sees the difference this way: “The order of things in broadcast is ‘filter, then publish.’ The order in communities is ‘publish, then filter.’ If you go to a dinner party, you don’t submit your potential comments to the hosts, so that they can tell you which ones are good enough to air before the group, but this is how broadcast works every day. Writers submit their stories in advance, to be edited or rejected before the public ever sees them. Participants in a community, by contrast, say what they have to say, and the good is sorted from the mediocre after the fact.”<sup>21</sup>

Many traditional journalists are dismissive of

participatory journalism, particularly webloggers, characterizing them as self-interested or unskilled amateurs. Conversely, many webloggers look upon mainstream media as an arrogant, exclusive club that puts its own version of self-interest and economic survival above the societal responsibility of a free press.

According to Shirky, what the mainstream media fail to understand is that despite a participant's lack of skill or journalistic training, the Internet itself acts as editing mechanism, with the difference that "editorial judgment is applied at the edges ... after the fact, not in advance."<sup>22</sup>

In *The Elements of Journalism*, Kovach and Rosenstiel take a similar view: "This kind of high-tech interaction is a journalism that resembles conversation again, much like the original journalism occurring in the public houses and coffeehouses four hundred years ago. Seen in this light, journalism's function is not fundamentally changed by the digital age. The techniques may be different, but the underlying principles are the same."<sup>23</sup>

What is emerging is a new media ecosystem (See Figure 1.2), where online communities discuss and extend the stories created by mainstream media. These communities also produce participatory journalism, grassroots reporting, annotative reporting, commentary and fact-checking, which the mainstream media feed upon, developing them as a pool of tips, sources and story ideas.

Scott Rosenberg, managing editor of Salon.com, explains, "Weblogs expand the media

universe. They are a media life-form that is native to the Web, and they add something new to our mix, something valuable, something that couldn't have existed before the Web.

"It should be obvious that weblogs aren't competing with the work of the professional journalism establishment, but rather complementing it. If the pros are criticized as being cautious, impersonal, corporate and herdlike, the bloggers are the opposite in, well, *almost* every respect: They're reckless, confessional, funky — and herdlike."<sup>24</sup>

Dan Gillmor, one of weblogging's most vocal defenders and a technology journalist and weblogger for the *San Jose Mercury News*, describes this ecosystem as "journalism's next wave." In a post to his weblog on March 27, 2002, Gillmor described the principles that define the current "we media" movement:

- My readers know more than I do.
- That is not a threat, but rather an opportunity.
- We can use this together to create something between a seminar and a conversation, educating all of us.
- Interactivity and communications technology — in the form of e-mail, weblogs, discussion boards, web sites and more — make it happen.<sup>25</sup>

In the next chapter, *Cultural context: Behind the explosion of participatory media*, we explore the reasons behind the social forces that are reshaping the public's relationship to media.

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## CHAPTER 2

# Cultural context: Behind the explosion of participatory media

*“Have you any news?”*

— The second message transmitted by Samuel B. Morse, inventor of the telegraph.<sup>1</sup>

Newspapermen of the Victorian era feared the telegraph would spell their doom. “The mere newspapers must submit to destiny and go out of existence,” wrote one newspaper executive.<sup>2</sup> Yet, just the opposite occurred. Despite fears of their obsolescence, newspapers were able to thwart a major technological threat by adopting it as a business advantage.

The telegraph was speedier than mail and enabled newspapers to publish more timely news. Other newspapers joined together to set up wire services such as the Associated Press. And the concern that a telegraph transmission might be cut short gave rise to the familiar writing style called the inverted pyramid, which places important news first followed by less critical details.

Journalism has always had to respond to technological and social changes. The Information Age brought about a tremendous expansion of media — cable television, growing numbers of niche print publications, Internet Web sites, mobile telephony. Media have become nearly ubiquitous, and journalism again finds itself at a crossroads as the media landscape becomes more fragmented and filled with competition from nontraditional sources.

“The way we get news has gone through momentous transition,” Kovach and Rosenstiel write in *The Elements of Journalism*. “It has happened each time there is a period of significant social, economic and technological change. It is occurring now with the advent of cable followed by the Internet. The collision this time may be more dramatic.”<sup>3</sup>

Unlike the telegraph, the Internet is far more pervasive and accessible by just about anyone. If history is any guide, journalism will change, although how dramatic that change will be remains uncertain.

This chapter attempts to shed light on the cul-

tural factors that have provided the fuel for this explosion of participatory media. We’ll also look at how information technologies are changing the traditional roles of consumers.

## Extending social networks

People are inherently social creatures. We develop and maintain complex social networks of friends, family and acquaintances through various means of communication.

Regardless of technology, human “relationships will naturally continue to rely on face-to-face and physical contact, on shared experience and values, on acts of generosity and thoughtfulness, and on trust, understanding and empathy,” according to a whitepaper for Groove, the collaboration software created by Lotus developer Ray Ozzie.

“Nevertheless, (Internet and mobile) technologies do have the potential to have significant, fundamental impact on the types of relationships we maintain, on where we live and work, on when and how we are educated, on how we entertain ourselves and spend our leisure time, on our politics, and on how we conceive of time.”<sup>4</sup>

In the 10 years since its mass adoption, the Web has quickly become a reflection of our elaborate social networks. It has evolved into a powerful medium for communication and collaboration, as evidenced by the hypertext links of more than 10 billion documents authored by millions of people and organizations around the world.<sup>5</sup>

It is the greatest publishing system ever known, and it keeps growing. In May 2003, there were at least 40.4 million Web sites<sup>6</sup> with thousands being added, moved or removed every day. It’s a phenomenally extraordinary achievement, which has emerged without central planning and without government regulation, censor or sanction — an emergent, bottom-up process.

“Self-organization is an irrepressible human drive, and the Internet is a toolkit for self-organizing,” according to Howard Rheingold, author of *Smart Mobs*. “The role of voluntary coop-



eration is the most important and least known story is the history of personal computers and networks.”<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, the architecture of the Internet was the result of a decentralized philosophy, free software and collaboration. In 1962, Paul Baran of the RAND corporation was commissioned by the U.S. Air Force to design a computer network able to survive a nuclear attack to any part of it. His insightful solution required that there be no master or central computer running the network. Instead, computers could be connected to many other computers in a mesh-like pattern.

In a sense, Baran wanted to create a social network of mainframes that routed packets of information through a variable maze of connectors. The benefit was that the network could grow, or handle a loss of computers, without having to be redesigned.

As brilliant as Baran’s idea was, it was rejected. AT&T, the telephone monopoly designated to maintain the network for the U.S. government, saw the “digital packet” approach as too costly to deploy and a threat to its monopoly position because it could allow for competition.<sup>8</sup>

But several years later, the Advanced Research Project Agency stumbled upon the same solution and created a network called ARPANET, the precursor to today’s Internet. The network was built to allow military facilities to connect computers. By 1973, just three years after ARPANET went online, something unexpected happened. E-mail, which began as a novelty, accounted for 75 percent of all network traffic.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the 1980s, the Internet grew steadily but remained mostly unnoticed behind the walls of academic and scientific institutions. In the early ’90s, two events turned the Internet into the greatest publishing system in history by making it more accessible to the masses.

First, Tim Berners-Lee, a researcher at CERN, substituted the impossible-to-remember numerical addressing system of the Internet with the URL (uniform resource locator) for use as electronic addresses. Soon after, students at the University of Illinois, led by Marc Andreessen, created Mosaic, the first browser to display documents on the Web. This graphic, rather than text-based, interface resulted in an explosion of the Internet’s popularity.

In December 1993, a *New York Times* business section article concluded that Mosaic was perhaps “an application program so different and so obviously useful that it can create a new industry

from scratch.”<sup>10</sup>

Years before the advent of the Web and Mosaic, e-mail, bulletin boards and Usenet were the popular means of communication and collaboration on the Internet. Bulletin boards and Usenet, a stockpile of millions of e-mail postings arranged into “newsgroups,” changed radically and became more popular as forums. The browser-based graphic interface, which allowed participants to explore and contribute more readily, changed the practical nature of the Usenet idea into something more open, accessible and interesting to the masses.

The Internet had become a massive repository of publicly accessible, linked documents. This doesn’t sound like a breeding ground for social activity, but according to John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, it is inherently so.

“Documents do not merely carry information, they help make it, structure it and validate it. More intriguing, perhaps, documents also help structure society, enabling social groups to form, develop, and maintain a sense of shared identity,” they write in *The Social Life of Information*. “Shared and circulating documents, it seems, have long provided interesting social glue.”

**Figure 2.1**

**Internet Backbone Traffic**

Chart shows estimated traffic in terabytes on Internet backbones in U.S. during December of that year.

Year	Terabytes/month
1990	1.0
1991	2.0
1992	4.4
1993	8.3
1994	16.3
1995	NA
1996	1,500
1997	2,500 - 4,000
1998	5,000 - 8,000
1999	10,000 - 16,000
2000	20,000 - 35,000
2001	40,000 - 70,000
2002	80,000 - 140,000

Source: K. G. Coffman and A. M. Odlyzko, “Growth of the Internet,” AT&T Labs - Research, July 6, 2001

Today, we see a new phenomenon. Given technological innovations in open source software, everyone has access to robust tools for publishing and collaborating easily on the Web. Weblogging tools are in many ways easier to use than most e-mail applications. It is this ease that accounts for their increasing popularity.<sup>11</sup>

Estimates of the number of active weblogs vary widely from 500,000 to as high as 1 million.<sup>12</sup> According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, more than 8 million U.S. Internet users (7 percent) have created a weblog<sup>13</sup> and 90 million (84 percent) have participated in online groups.<sup>14</sup>

### The Post-Information Age

In a way, the Internet was destined to be a social medium from the start — open, unregulated, extensible and unpredictable. Like the telephone, it removes one of the critical barriers to maintaining social networks: geography. In doing so, the Internet enables a vibrant social universe to emerge powered by the passions of millions.

Moreover, this medium has empowered millions to express their ideas and perspectives in many ways, which, according to futurist Watts Wacker, feeds a great hunger in the Post-Information Age.

In his 2002 book *The Deviant's Advantage*, Wacker suggests that our current society is undergoing relentless, all-encompassing change, which will do nothing but accelerate. This constant change results in an “Abolition of Context” — the inability of business and society to find commonly agreed upon reference points.<sup>15</sup>

“Context is the framework, the structure, the collective common understanding that allows us to live our lives and run our businesses,” Wacker writes in his book. “Take it away and it’s all but impossible to know what’s the right or wrong action to take.”

Such a situation makes it more difficult for companies to create commercially viable, long-lasting goods and services. This environment also creates stress, anxiety and confusion for the individual. With social mores constantly shifting, people seek a “proliferation of perspectives” to make sense of the world.<sup>16</sup>

Credibility, a traditionally reliable context as it has been viewed until now, is dead, Wacker says. “Knowing what other people think news means, in many layers, is more important.”<sup>17</sup>

It appears that the many forms of participatory journalism on the Web are ideally suited to serve

this function. There is evidence that people are actively seeking new perspectives beyond those provided by mainstream media. Researchers have begun to categorize an individual’s media diet as a more dependable method of segmenting audiences, as opposed to demographic and psychographic criteria.<sup>18</sup>

We are now beginning to lead what futurist Wacker calls “media-centric life,” where all of our information is mediated, coming to us second or third hand. Media, he says, are how we define ourselves and our relationships.

This media-centric life requires a large amount of assimilation of information, most of it coming second-hand. Objectivity is one casualty of this massive abundance of viewpoints, Wacker argues.

Even traditionalists are questioning the practicality of objectivity. In *The Elements of Journalism*, Kovach and Rosenstiel write: “The concept of objectivity is so mangled it now is usually used to describe the very problem it was conceived to correct.”

But whether the demise of objectivity will give rise to a social environment governed by interests and relationships is debatable. What is clear is that the Internet provides more opportunity for people to share information among communities, thereby circumventing traditional media’s role as privileged, trusted and informed intermediaries of the news.

In their report “Online Communities: Networks that nurture long-distance relationships and local ties,” the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that not only are people becoming more social online, they are forming vibrant communities and integrating them into their lives.<sup>19</sup>

Some of their findings:

- 90 million Americans (84 percent of Internet users) have participated in online groups; 26 percent have used the Internet to deepen their ties to their local communities.
- Use of the Internet often prompts Americans to join groups. More than half of the aforementioned 90 million say they joined an online group **after** they began participating over the Internet.
- Online communities bring about greater contact with different people. Participants say that online communities have spurred connections to strangers and to people of different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds.
- Online communities foster lively chatter and connection. People exchange e-mails, hash

out issues, find out about group activities, and meet face to face as a result of online communities. About 23 million Americans are VERY active in online communities, meaning that they e-mail their principal online group several times a week.

- Online communities draw civic involvement from the young, a segment of the population that has not typically been drawn to civic activities.

Sociologist Barry Wellman argues that many new social arrangements are being formed through “glocalization” — the capacity of the Internet to expand people’s social worlds to far-away people and simultaneously connect them more deeply to the place they live.<sup>20</sup>

More than just connecting, people are increasingly collaborating. The bottom-up nature of the Internet and several technological innovations — such as digital still and video cameras, mobile devices and wireless computing platforms — have resulted in an explosion of creative activity.

### Customer as innovator

Just as blogs and forums have turned audiences into participants, other industries have thrived by developing tools to turn their customers into creators. As Stefan Thomke and Eric von Hippel argue in “Customers as Innovators: A New Way to Create Value,” the pace of change in many markets is too great and “the cost of understanding and responding to customers’ needs can quickly spiral out of control.”<sup>21</sup>

Some industries have already succeeded in turning their customers into contributors and innovators. Knowing they cannot predict the shifting desires of their customers, these companies have instead created the tools and frameworks to empower their customers to create.

“Essentially, these companies have abandoned their efforts to understand exactly what products their customers want and have instead equipped them with tools to design and develop their own products, ranging from minor modifications to major new innovations,” Thomke and von Hippel wrote.

A number of industries are succeeding in the “Customer as Innovator” approach. Nestlé has built a toolkit that enables its customers to develop their own flavors. GE provides customers with Web-based tools for designing better plastic products. This approach has transformed the semiconductor business, bringing the custom-chip market to more than \$15 billion.<sup>22</sup>

## When Customer Innovation Makes Sense

*Harvard Business Review* identified three major signs that an industry may soon migrate to a customers-as-innovators approach:

**1.** Your market segments are shrinking, and customers are increasingly asking for customized products. As you try to respond to those demands, your costs increase, and it is difficult to pass those costs on to customers.

**2.** You and your customers need many iterations before you find a solution. Some customers complain that you have gotten the product wrong or that you are responding too slowly. You are tempted to restrict the degree to which your products can be customized, and your smaller customers must make do with standard products or find a better solution elsewhere. As a result, customer loyalty starts to erode.

**3.** You or your competitors use high-quality computer-based simulation and rapid-prototyping tools internally to develop new products. You also have computer-adjustable production processes that can manufacture custom products. (These technologies could form the foundation of a tool kit that customers could use to develop their own designs.)

*Source: Harvard Business Review (April 1, 2002).*

Providing the tools and services to enable customers to act as their own auctioneers is at the heart of one of the most successful Internet companies, eBay. In 2002, eBay members bought and sold \$14.87 billion in annualized gross merchandise.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps one the most vivid and dramatic examples of customers transforming a business is the computer game industry.

In the summer of 2000, on the verge of graduating with a computer science degree, 23-year-old Minh Le built a computer game in his parents’ basement called Counter-Strike. In 2002, Counter-Strike was the most popular multiplayer action game in the world, with more than 1.7 million players spending on average about 23.5 hours a month in the game. In addition to its free

Internet distribution, Counter-Strike has sold 1.3 million shrink-wrapped copies at retail, with revenues of more than \$40 million.<sup>24</sup>

What's remarkable is that Le didn't have to build the entire game from scratch. Instead he converted or "modded" the game from an existing popular game called Half-Life. The tools to modify Half-Life into a completely new game were downloaded from the manufacturer's Web site.

"Many of the best game companies now count on modders to show them the way creatively and to ensure their own survival in a savagely competitive market," says Wagner James Au, in his article *Triumph of the Mod*. "By fostering the creativity of their fans, their more agile peers in the game industry have not only survived but prospered."<sup>25</sup>

Even gaming giant Electronic Arts encouraged gamers to modify their classic hit *The Sims*. So far, more than 30,000 different Sims mods are available.

"In a sense, mods also represent the most visible success of the free (open-source) software movement on the larger culture," Au adds. "For the millions who play computer games, the same ethos of volunteerism and shared ownership that characterizes free software has helped utterly transform the gaming experience and the \$8 billion-plus gaming industry."<sup>26</sup>

In many ways, the open-source movement offers a glimpse at the future. In open-source projects, the community builds the tools for itself motivated by hopes of creating better software through mass collaboration. In the best case, open-source movements can organize and develop industry-leading tools (e.g., Linux and Apache Web server), which sometimes threaten multibillion-dollar companies.

According to Dave Winer, weblog guru and founder of Userland Software, Google's acquisition of Pyra and its Blogger weblogging tool earlier this year "may signal a change possibly as deep as the personal computer revolution, where huge glass palaces controlled by technologists were routed around, by software and hardware that did the same thing, for a fraction of the cost. Today, the same software that Vignette sold a few years ago for millions of dollars can be had for hundreds, and it's much easier to install and use."<sup>27</sup>

Access to powerful and inexpensive tools is turning more people into innovators of all sorts. The challenge for news organizations, ultimately,

will be to persuade their customers to become not just innovators but collaborators as well.

### Power of networks

In their book *Information Rules*, Carl Shapiro and Hal R. Varian suggest an altogether new axiom for the news business and its future. "The old industrial economy was driven by economies of scale; the new information economy is driven by the economics of networks."<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, our traditional notions of economics are being disrupted and transformed by the power of distributed collaboration through our computer networks.

More than 2 million people worldwide have been donating their unused computer down time to help the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) analyze 50 billions bytes of signals from outer space. The SETI@home project, which began in mid-1999, put distributed computing on the map.<sup>29</sup>

About the same time that project began, the peer-to-peer file sharing program Napster was launched to enable the sharing of music between users connected to the Internet. At its height, 70 million users were trading 2.7 billion files per month. Since Napster was shut down, Gnutella clients such as Morpheus and Kazaa have stepped in, allowing billions of movies, songs, ebooks, software and other digital files to be exchanged among the masses.<sup>30</sup>

It seems as though the possibilities of distributed collaboration are limitless. "Today, millions of people and their PCs are not just looking for messages from outer space and trading music," says Rheingold in *Smart Mobs*, "but tackling cancer research, finding prime numbers, rendering films, forecasting weather, designing synthetic drugs by running simulations on billions of possible molecules — taking on computing problems so massive that scientists have not heretofore considered them."<sup>31</sup>

The network economy and the proliferation of media are presenting a tremendous challenge for mainstream media organizations, such as newspapers, radio and television. Not only will they have to adapt organizationally, and perhaps philosophically, but their products, over time, will be transformed in unexpected and unforeseen ways.

In the next chapter, *How participatory journalism is taking form*, we look at the exciting new forms that are emerging for this new media construct.

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## CHAPTER 3

# How participatory journalism is taking form

**P**articipation has been a fundamental component of the Internet since its inception. Newsgroups, mailing lists and bulletin boards were the early cousins to the forums, weblogs and collaborative communities flourishing today. Those early forms are still thriving, a testament to our need to stay connected to our social networks.

Participatory journalism flourishes in social media — the interpersonal communication that takes place through e-mail, chat, message boards, forums — and in collaborative media — hybrid forms of news, discussion and community.

This section categorizes the forms in which participatory journalism takes shape. Some of these forms continue to evolve and merge and thus overlap. The list, while generalized, is meant to describe the outlines of that participation and the communities where it resides.

Considering the “publish, then filter” model<sup>1</sup> that most of these forms follow, we define each form’s self-correcting or filtering mechanism. The end goal of filtering is the same in all — to amplify the signal-to-noise ratio, separating the meaningful information from the chatter.

## Discussion groups

Online discussion groups are the oldest and still the most popular forms for participation. Discussion groups run the gamut from bulletin boards and forums to mailing lists and chat rooms.

Participants might engage a discussion group to answer tech support questions, to trade stock-trading tips, to argue about a favorite sports team, to share experiences about a health care issue, or to join a collaborative work project.

Mailing lists, newsgroups, bulletin boards, and forums are methods of asynchronous communication, meaning that all participants do not have to be online at the same time to communicate. Sometimes this leads to more thoughtful contributions, because participants have more time to refine their responses.

Chat rooms, on the other hand, are synchronous,

where all participants must be online at the same time to communicate. This has the benefit of providing immediacy and can be used effectively for business services such as customer support. But for the most part, chat rooms are more like virtual cafes or hangouts, with live, unfiltered discussion.

Forum discussions are probably the most familiar discussion group form to the average Internet user. Forums are typically arranged into threads in which an initial message or post appears at the beginning of a discussion and responses are attached in a branching manner. When forums are viewed in threads, it’s easy to recognize the branching of conversation that occurs, some of which might not be entirely related to the original post. Some forums permit the audience to sort messages by various means — popularity, date, ranking. Many forums are archived, turning them into a searchable knowledge base of community conversation.

Here’s a look at the strengths and weaknesses of various forms of online participation, together with a description of how they work.

**Self-correcting process:** In a discussion group, moderators police the content and actions of participants, sometimes removing and editing parts of the conversations that violate the standards of the community. These moderators are sometimes appointed by the community; in other cases they are appointed by the host or owner of the forums. However, in many discussion communities, the participants police each other, sharing their views of when particular behaviors or actions are inappropriate.

**Strengths:** Most discussion forms have a relatively low barrier to entry (just create an user account), with an especially low level of commitment. For example, a participant can engage a forum only once, or few times, and still have a meaningful experience.

**Weaknesses:** Sometimes forums are too open, easily garnering flip, reactive comments. Active, large forums can get noisy, with so many posts from so many members, it’s hard to deter-

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**Reader Reaction**

View messages by:  
threads | thread tree | by date | last 24 hours

**Two classes of war protesters**

Posted by: LHS92KU96  
Message posted: Tue Feb 18, 2003, 10:48 am

Just my observation, but it seems that there are two classes of war protesters right about now:

1. People who generally oppose any war and prefer peace as a matter of principle. I'm right there with these people, and the principle that peace is (almost) always preferable to war is the reason why I still don't support a war with Iraq. I have a good deal of respect for these people.
2. People who oppose anything and everything GWB does, and since it appears GWB wants a war with Iraq pretty badly, they oppose it. If Al Gore was in office, these people would be 100% in favor of a war with or without the UN's stamp of approval, and they would be the ones calling anyone from group #1 who protested against a potential war "unpatriotic". I have no respect for these people.

Also, there is a fringe of group #2 that really, really likes vandalism and graffiti.

Follow-ups:

- **Two classes of war protesters**  
LHS92KU96, Tue Feb 18, 2003, 10:48 am
- **Re: Two classes of war protesters**  
saint?, Tue Feb 18, 2003, 1:20 pm
- **Re: Two classes of war protesters**

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**Voices of Hysterectomy**

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All Unread

**General Discussion**

- Do I need a hysterectomy?! [1]
- endometriosis/ danocrin [1 new]
- MEDICAL NECESSITY OR NOT??? [1]
- keloiding [1 new]

**Personal Hysterectomy Stories**

- Having Hysterectomy Tomorrow... [1]
- TO TAKE OR NOT TO TAKE....? [5 new]
- Leap/Cone Procedures [1 new]

**Life After**

- Sex and removal of cervix [1 new]
- Post hysterectomy adhesions [4 new]
- TOO YOUNG [9 new]
- Almost 3 years into a Hysterectomy [5 new]

**Hysterectomy Alternatives**

AD

**General Discussion - Do I need a hysterectomy?!**

From: **RAINBOWIRIS2** 12:00 am

To: **ALL** (1 of 1)

630.1

HELP! I am 42 years old, have been having periods for every 2 weeks for a year and a half, and a D & C did not correct this. Also, I've been tested for cancer, and for fibroids and cysts (only one cyst was found, and my doctor is not worried about it. I'm grateful no cancer was found either!) After I got yet ANOTHER period 16 days from my last, I went to my doctor. He said, "Let's talk about a hysterectomy." My reply was "What are my options?!" He told me about the balloon therapy. I brought up hormonal therapy. I'm a heavy smoker (I know, not smart!), so I cannot take the pill. However, I could take Prostergin (Prostergera) or Depo-Provera. I am in shock, because I am NOT ready to give up on having a child forever. I'm just wondering if anyone else had this happen to them, and also, if hormone therapy helped someone with a similar situation. Thank you for taking the time to read this and God Bless!

RainbowIris

Figure 3.1: Discussion forums (top) Lawrence Journal, (bottom) About.com

mine what information is meaningful or useful. In addition, some moderated forums require each post to be pre-approved before it appears online, slowing down and smothering the conversation.

Many online media outlets have abandoned discussion forums in the past few years, citing legal problems as well as lack of sufficient staff to moderate and maintain forums. Ultimately, some media outlets think forums provide little value to the audience and to the bottom line (ROI).<sup>2</sup> One barrier to effective advertising on these pages is the lack of content control by either the advertiser or publisher.

*See Figure 3.1 for examples.*

### User-generated content

Many news sites provide a vehicle – through Web-based forms or e-mail – designed to collect content from the audience and redistribute it. This vehicle can collect full-length articles, advice/tips, journals, reviews, calendar events, useful links, photos and more. The content is usually text-based, but increasingly we are seeing the contribution of audio, video and photographs. After submission, the content appears online with or without editorial review, depending on the nature of content and the host policy.

Ranking is another popular and easy way for the audience to participate. Examples include rating a story, a reporter and other users. Ranking systems typically provide the best benefit when a sufficient number of users have participated, for example, “4,202 readers give this movie 4 out of 5 stars.”

Internet users also provide content through feedback systems, such as polls or mini-forums attached to story pages. Polls sometimes also support comment submissions.

**Self-correcting process:** Usually, audience submissions go to a traditional editor at the host site, undergo an editing or approval process, and then are posted to the Web. Ranking and feedback mechanisms, however, are typically posted live immediately. Communities often police the submissions, and strong agreement or disagreement with a submission may prompt members to submit their own comments. This commonly occurs with reviews of products, movies and restaurants.

**Strengths:** Like forums, audience submissions have a relatively low barrier to entry, with a low level of commitment. A participant can submit (usually on topics that meet a special interest) only once, or few times, and still have a meaningful experience. Those who post repeat-

edly may build up over time a reputation among their peers as an expert on the subject.

**Weaknesses:** The quality of user-generated content can be uneven, with participants who are not trained writers or fact-checkers. As a result, some content can require extensive editing. Generally, this type of content relies on the good will of the audience to not exploit the system. It’s easy, in some cases, to skew polls and other feedback systems, by voting multiple times. Also, a low volume of participation can limit the value of feedback systems.

*See Figure 3.2 for examples.*

### Weblogs

Among the newest forms of participatory journalism to gain popularity is the weblog. A weblog is a web page made up of usually short, frequently updated text blocks or entries that are arranged in reverse chronological order (most recent to oldest). The content and purpose of weblogs vary greatly, ranging from personal diary to journalistic community news to collaborative discussion groups in a corporate setting.

Weblogs can provide links and commentary about content on other Web sites. They can be a form of “latest news” page. Or they can consist of project diaries, photos, poetry, mini-essays, project updates, even fiction. The quick, short posts on weblogs have been likened to “instant messages to the Web.” On other weblogs, the content can be longer, such as excerpts from a research paper in progress, with the author seeking comment from peers.

Weblogs fall into the one-to-many (individual blogs) or many-to-many (group blogs) model of media, with some allowing no or little discussion by users and others generating robust reader responses. Either way, weblogs inevitably become part of what is now called the “blogosphere.” This is the name given to the intercast of weblogs – the linking to and discussion of what others have written or linked to, in essence a distributed discussion.

The blogosphere is facilitated by several technologies. First, it is supported by TrackBack<sup>3</sup> – a mechanism that automatically finds other comments about a blog post on a weblog, and provides excerpts and links to the comments alongside the post. It’s like having an editorial page of commentary on the Web, automatically generated to appear alongside a story.

Second, the blogosphere is fueled by meta-sites such as Daypop, MIT’s Blogdex, Technorati and



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New York, NY 10009-6689  
Phone: (212) 777-5920  
Cross Streets: Between Avenue A and Avenue B

Average Meal Price \$\$\$\$ (\$41 and up)  
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More than 7 million Citysearch users are looking for businesses like yours. Feature an OFFER and your Business Listing in our leading local directory. Sign Up Online!

**User Rating and 2 Most Recent Reviews (14 Reviews)**

Food	5.6	Add your own rating
Ambience	8.4	
Service	6.4	
Value	5.5	

**3** Author: [Posted: 06/17/2002]  
**Dont fall for the hype!**  
"The hope that you get from the cool setting quickly goes away after the first bite of food. The bread and olives were good but ..."  
[Read full review](#)

**8** Author: [Posted: 06/17/2002]  
**what's not to like?**  
"Friendly, attentive staff; great decor; a tempting, eclectic menu of interesting and well-prepared dishes; excellent wines; intriguing music--It all adds up to a great dining ..."  
[Read full review](#)

[Read more ...](#)

**Restaurant Information**

<b>Atmosphere</b> People-Watching Sexy Trendy	<b>Dress Code</b> Casual to dressy
<b>Directions</b> L at 1st Ave	<b>Hours</b> Tue-Thu 6pm-2am Fri-Sat 6pm-3am Sun 6pm-2am
<b>Special Features</b> Full Bar	<b>Payment</b> American Express Diners Club MasterCard Visa

photo by Oscar Perez

**User-Provided Information**

Prompt seating: <b>yes</b>	Delivery: <b>no</b>	Make reservations: <b>yes</b>
Romantic: <b>yes</b>	Good for kids: <b>no</b>	Good for groups: <b>yes</b>
Recommended: <b>mixed</b>		

**Figure 3.2**  
**User-generated content**  
(Top) Citysearch.com, the leading provider of online city guides in the U.S., enables the audience to write reviews and contribute information about venues and restaurants.  
(Bottom) BabyCenter.com is a community site for exchanging stories, tips and advice, as well as discussing common problems facing parents.

**BabyCenter**  
Cradle and all.

for a limited time! Shop our Store help | member center | shopping cart

Home | Topics A-Z | Store & Gift Registry | Premium Services | Community | My BabyCenter

Main areas: Search Articles Store go Gift Registry

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BABYCENTER BULLETIN BOARDS

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**See Also**  
Are you on fertility drugs?  
Share your questions and concerns with other women on our bulletin boards

**One woman rides the ups and downs of IVF**  
"I cried for a week after I miscarried the twins"

**MICHELLE**

My entire life I knew that I wanted children. I come from a large family and everyone has kids. The women in my family are so fertile that my mother used to tell me to double up on birth control. I married in my late twenties and because my husband is older, we decided to have kids right away.

After trying for about nine or ten months, we went to the doctor. My husband has three adult children from a previous marriage, but they tested him anyway. He was fine. Most of my tests also were fine, so my doctor did exploratory surgery to see if he could find anything wrong. And he did. Both my ovaries were full of cysts. He removed the cysts and then gave me Clomid to help me ovulate. I still didn't get pregnant, and I kept failing the postcoital test. The morning after intercourse my husband's sperm would not be moving inside me. For some reason his sperm could not survive in my body.

*Climbing the high-tech treatment ladder*

others. These sites track what items weblogs are linking to and talking about – news stories, weblog posts, new products (movies, books, software), whatever subject is catching their attention. Meta-sites provides a popularity ranking of the most linked-to items, and then indexes all links to those items.

The blogosphere is also supported by a third technology, XML or RSS syndication. This allows weblogs to syndicate their content to anyone using a “news reader,” a downloadable program that creates a peer-to-peer distribution model. With content so easily exchanged, it’s easy to know what others in your peer group are talking about. (XML Syndication is discussed in detail later in this chapter).

Weblogs are a powerful draw in that they enable the individual participant to play multiple roles simultaneously – publisher, commentator, moderator, writer, documentarian.

Weblogs have also proven to be effective collaborative communication tools. They help small groups (and in a few cases, large) communicate in a way that is simpler and easier to follow than e-mail lists or discussion forums.

For example, a project team can collaboratively produce a weblog, where many individuals can post information (related Web site links, files, quotes, meeting notes or commentary) that might be useful or interesting to the group or to inform others outside the group. A collaborative weblog can help keep everyone in the loop, promoting cohesiveness in the group.

**Self-correcting process:** Weblogs rely on audience feedback, through weblog commenting forms, e-mail or remarks made on other weblogs, as a method of correction. Typically, bloggers are reliable about correcting their mistakes, and a great many frequently link to dissenting viewpoints on the Web.

**Strengths:** Weblogs are easy to set up, operate and maintain. The technology is relatively inexpensive, sometimes even free. This allows just about anyone to simultaneously become a publisher, creator and distributor of content.

**Weaknesses:** This type of publishing requires a higher level of commitment and time from the creator than other forms. Also, it is difficult for weblogs to attract readers, other than through word of mouth and weblog aggregation and search engines. Weblogs have also been judged as being too self-referential, with critics likening them more to the “Daily Me” than the “Daily We.”

*See Figures 3.3 and 3.4 for examples.*

## Collaborative publishing

The technology behind many online communities is open source and free. In addition, Web publishing tools and content management systems are becoming easier to install, deploy and manage. As a result, thousands of Web-based collaborative publishing communities have appeared in the past five years.

As open-source tools for forums, weblogs and content management systems (CMS) have evolved, they have begun to blur into each other. This has led to the development of groupware, Web- or desktop-based applications designed for the collaborative creation and distribution of news and information, file-sharing and communication. Weblogs are considered to be groupware, because they can be collaboratively created. But in this section, we are addressing systems that are somewhat more complex.

A collaborative publishing environment is designed to enable a group of participants (large or small) to play multiple roles: content creators, moderators, editors, advertisers and readers. While the environment may be owned by an individual creator or host organization, the goal of these systems is distributed ownership and deep involvement from its community of users.

Forums, mailing lists and weblogs can be effective collaborative publishing environments. But what distinguishes this group from other forms is the self-correcting process and the rules that govern participation (*see Chapter 4 for more on rules*).

Forums use moderators and community feedback. Weblogs usually have a feedback feature or, more often, other weblogs link back and discuss posts. However, in complex collaborative publishing environments, the self-correcting processes are more akin to peer review, traditional editing oversight and meta-moderators, individuals who police moderators to make sure the conversation doesn’t get skewed or diluted.

The most well-known of these environments is Slashdot.org, which resembles a cross between a large-scale forum and a collaborative weblog. Slashdot is driven by a combination of editorial oversight by its owners, submissions by users, and moderation and meta-moderation by the community of users. The site attracts more than 10 million unique readers each month, with roughly a half million audience members (5 percent) participating by submitting articles, moderating, ranking and posting comments. The open-source technology behind Slashdot now runs thousands



# INSTAPUNDIT.COM

"The New York Times of the bloggers." -- Prada

"The Grand Central Station of Bloggerville" -- American Journalism Review

"Glenn also has a rather dry sense of humour, which I'm guessing not enough people pick up on." -- Andrea See

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Email: pundit -at- instapundit.com

**February 25, 2003**

HOMELAND SECURITY IS **STILL A JOKE:**

LOS ALAMOS, New Mexico -- There are no armed guards to knock out. No sensors to deactivate. No surveillance cameras to cripple. To sneak into Los Alamos National Laboratory, the world's most important nuclear research facility, all you do is step over a few strands of rusted, calf-high barbed wire.

I should know. On Saturday morning, I slipped into and out of a top-secret area of the lab while guards sat, unaware, less than a hundred yards away.

Not quite as James Bondian as it might sound, but bad enough. Noah Shachtman, who wrote the story, has more on his blog, [DefenseTech](#).

posted at 02:15 PM by **Glenn Reynolds** ☺

**BROOKLYN COLLEGE TENURE BATTLE UPDATE:**

February 25, 2003 -- The CUNY trustees yesterday granted tenure to a Brooklyn College history professor who ripped the school's post-9/11 forum for promoting hatred against America - overruling the college's appointments panel, which sparked outrage by passing him over.


In a rare reversal on a personnel matter, City University Chancellor Matthew Goldstein and the policy board concluded that Assistant Professor Robert "KC" Johnson is a nationally renowned scholar who should not have been denied promotion and tenure.

Interesting. Erin O'Connor has [more](#), naturally.

posted at 11:21 AM by **Glenn Reynolds** ☺

**Figure 3.3 Weblogs**  
 (Top) InstaPundit is one of the most well-known and popular weblogs, written by Glenn Reynolds, a law professor at the University of Tennessee.  
 (Bottom) Florida Today uses a weblog format to chronicle the launch and landing of space shuttle missions. This example is the weblog for Columbia, which tragically exploded during re-entry over the Southwestern US in February 2003.

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AD

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## STS-107 Columbia landing journal

**4:00 p.m. EST, Feb. 1, 2003**

Shuttle program manager Ron Dittmore, in an emotional briefing with his top technical deputies, says point blank that NASA does not know what happened yet.

He says the agency needs to reconstruct as much of the vehicle as possible. He thanks the public for its aid in finding debris, which is spread over a large area.

The shuttle managers are saying they did not believe at the time that the damaged wing tile was a serious enough issue to pose a threat during re-entry. He says, "We don't believe at this point that the impact of that debris on our tile was our problem. Now we have the events of this morning, and we are going to go back and see if there is a connection. Is that the smoking gun?"


He says, "That's just something we need to go look at."

But he has pointed out repeatedly that is just one of many things that need to be looked at.

**2:05 p.m. EST, Feb. 1, 2003**


"The Columbia is lost," President Bush is telling the nation.

**1:32 p.m. EST, Feb. 1, 2003**



**COLUMBIA LOST**  
 CONTINUING COVERAGE  
 Special section: Updates on Columbia tragedy

This was our journal chronicling the landing of space shuttle Columbia as it ended a 16-day [science mission](#). Landing was scheduled for Saturday morning, Feb. 1, at Kennedy Space Center. [See more coverage on our mission page](#) or read more news on our [space page](#).



Journal updated by John Kelly, Chris Kridler and Kelly Young



AD

Send links and tips to [tips@gawker.com](mailto:tips@gawker.com), or AIM us at [gawkbox](http://gawkbox).

**THU 17**

**To-Do List #**

1. Hear [Douglas Copeland](#) read from *Hey Nostradamus!* at Barnes & Noble.
2. Catch "The Boss" [Bruce Springsteen](#) at Giants Stadium or [Blur](#) at Hammerstein Ballroom.
3. Attend the "New Yorkers on the edge: you talkin' to me?" urban storytelling Summerstages event at Rumsey Playfield in Central Park.

**Queer eye for the straight guy: the Bunsen version #**

Blogger Bunsen has created his own version of Bravo's "Queer eye for the straight guy" series (wherein five gay guys dress, style, and generally makeover helpless and slovenly straight guys.) The Bunsen version: "Black eye for the straight guy," starring Harvey Fierstein, Nathan Lane, Barry Diller, Rip Taylor, and the ghost of Rock Hudson. "Fierstein will head straight for your closet, tearing your ratty flannel shirts with his teeth. Be wary as Diller punches you in the breadbasket and as you stoop to catch your breath, works a healthy dollop of orange-marmalade-scented pomade into your hair moments before carving the telltale mark of Zorro across your scalp with Wuhl electric clippers. Just as you think you've gotten it all figured out, capricious Gemini, Rip Taylor is inside your kitchen cabinets, loudly shattering your finest Ikea earthenware and shaving your chest with the suprisingly sharp fragments."

[A black eye for the straight guy special](#) [Bunsen.tv]

**Blind item #**

Which publisher at which major men's magazine just quit?  
UPDATE: [The official statement is released.](#)

**Libeskind, Childs, Silverstein cont'd #**

Per [yesterday's assurances](#) that all parties in the WTC development team are getting along now, the LMDC proffers pics of everyone smiling happily, as promised.



Fun with captions:  
Childs [left]: "And we shall call him 'mini-me.' Heheheh."  
Libeskind [center]: "I feel...pretty."  
Silverstein [right]: "Yeah, isn't it a riot? I thought he was taller, too. 'Mini-me'? Ha! Good one!"

**quick links**

<a href="#">New York Times</a>	<a href="#">Flavorpill</a>
<a href="#">Wall Street Journal</a>	<a href="#">Gothamist</a>
<a href="#">New York Post</a>	<a href="#">The Morning News</a>
<a href="#">PageSix</a>	<a href="#">601am.com</a>
<a href="#">Rush &amp; Molloy</a>	<a href="#">Lockhart Steele</a>
<a href="#">Daypop</a>	<a href="#">Anil Dash</a>
<a href="#">Citysearch</a>	<a href="#">Romensko</a>
<a href="#">1010wins</a>	<a href="#">MUG</a>
<a href="#">Google News</a>	<a href="#">Data Lounge</a>
<a href="#">Associated Press</a>	<a href="#">Wired New York</a>
<a href="#">Drudge Report</a>	<a href="#">Fucked Company</a>
<a href="#">Weather</a>	<a href="#">Fark</a>

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[Shopaholic Ties the Knot](#)  
[The Nanny Diaries](#)  
[The New York Yankees - 100 Years](#)  
[The Devil Wears Prada](#)

**real estate developments**

[102 Fulton St - Fulton Chambers Building](#)  
[Williamsburg - Smith-Gray Building](#)  
[65 West 13th St - The Greenwich](#)  
[79 Laight St - The Sugar Warehouse](#)

**Figure 3.4 Weblogs**  
 (Top) Gawker, a gossip weblog for New York City, made Entertainment Weekly's 2003 "It List," with the editors noting, "The cheeky roundup of gossip, hipster to-do items, and withering commentary on pop-culture news has become a must-read for Manhattan's media elite." (Bottom) Leo's Mob is a moblog — a mobile weblog created with a cell phone digital camera.



Leo's Mob

855 | nearby

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7/17/2003 4:57:15 PM



Comments

John 7/17/2003 4:59:23 PM  
 You two are absolutely cute.

Ray Phoenix 7/17/2003 4:59:32 PM  
 Big feed doesn't look too happy!

Dracoola 7/17/2003 5:01:41 PM  
 Jessica looks anything but forced to have her pic taken.

Taw 7/17/2003 5:09:01 PM  
 Two of the most beautiful girls in the world! Try to smile Jessica :)

Margalita 7/17/2003 5:15:27 PM  
 Ah! Jessica smile please! Lovely as always Sarah :D

James & Julia 7/20/2003 6:43:23 PM

of similar communities on the Web.<sup>4</sup>

Extending the Slashdot model in a different direction, Kuro5hin.org passed on editorial oversight to its members. Every story is written by a member and then submitted for peer review. Next, the story is edited, discussed and ranked before it even appears on the site. Finally, the audience reacts, comments and extends the story.

The open-source technology that runs Kuro5hin, called Scoop, is a “collaborative media application” according to its creator, Rusty Foster. “It empowers your visitors to be the producers of the site, to contribute news and discussion, and to make sure the signal remains high.”

One measure of the success of these two collaboration systems is that Google News includes Slashdot and Kuro5hin as two of the 4,500 sources for its news search index.

A somewhat less-structured approach to collaborative publishing is the Wiki model. Wiki technology, depending on how its deployed, is used for writing, discussion, storage, e-mail and collaboration. In this discussion, we will narrow our focus to collaborative examples, such as Wikipedia. Wikipedia is an international, open content, collaboratively developed encyclopedia. In just over two years, it has amassed more than 120,000 articles in English as well as more than 75,000 articles in other languages.

At first glance, a Wiki appears to be somewhat chaotic, allowing any member the ability to create public domain articles and edit just about any piece of text within the environment. The central component is that every change is tracked, and can be reviewed, challenged or restored — an

omnipotent version history. As evidence to the ever-blurring lines of these forms, there are now experiments in Wiki-style weblogs.<sup>5</sup>

Another interesting example of a collaborative publishing is Zaplet technology, where discussion forums, polling and group decision-making tools are exchanged inside dynamic e-mails.

Among the most advanced and ambitious groupware desktop applications is Groove, created by Ray Ozzie, who also created one of the best-known collaboration tools, Lotus Notes. Groove is a peer-to-peer program that allows large or small groups to collaboratively write, surf, exchange files, chat, create forums and invite outsiders to participate. It even supports voice-over-IP communications.

**Self-correcting process:** Collaborative systems usually have a detailed workflow for built-in correction, such as Slashdot’s system, where the audience ranks other audience members and their comments, moderators police discussions, and moderators are monitored by meta-moderators. In the case of Kuro5hin, the audience acts as editor before and after publishing.

**Strengths:** Participants can engage multiple roles, or earn the privilege of new roles. A greater level of involvement and ownership from the audience usually yields greater reward (better discussion and content) than in other forms.

**Weaknesses:** These systems are more difficult to launch and maintain than others, due to technical complexity. Depending on the number of participants in the environment, the speed at which membership grows, and how active the membership is in creating content, collaborative

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for "Parachuting". At the top, it says "199,233,181,254" and has links for "Log in" and "Help". Below that is a search box and a "Search" button. The article title "Parachuting" is followed by the text "From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." and a note "(redirected from Skydiving)". There are links for "Printable version", "Pages that link here", "Main Page", "Recent Changes", "Edit this page", "History", "Random Page", and "Special Pages". The main text of the article begins: "Parachuting, or skydiving, is a recreational activity and competitive sport. A jump involves individuals jumping out of aircraft, usually travelling at approximately 3000 metres altitude, and free-falling for a period of time before activating a parachute to slow the landing down to safe speeds. Once the parachute is opened, the jumper can control their direction and speed with cords attached to the parachute, and so they can aim for the landing site and come to a relatively gentle stop in a safe landing environment. Most modern sport parachutes are self-inflating "ram-air" wings that provide control of speed and direction similar to the related paragliders. (Purists in either sport would note that paragliders have much greater lift and range, but that parachutes are designed to absorb the stresses of deployment at [terminal velocity]?)". Below this is a paragraph about the adrenaline rush and another about the FAA requirements. On the right side, there is a sidebar with the "WIKIPEDIA The Free Encyclopedia" logo and a list of navigation links: "Main Page", "Recent Changes", "Watch page", "links", "Edit this page", "History", "Upload files", "Statistics", "New pages", "Orphans", "Most wanted", "Most popular", "Random Page", "Stub articles", "Long articles", "List users", "Bug reports", "June 18, 2002", and "Talk".

**Figure 3.5**  
**Collaborative publishing**  
Wikipedia is an international, open content, collaboratively developed encyclopedia. In just over two years, it has amassed more than 120,000 articles in English as well as more than 75,000 articles in other languages.

**Figure 3.6**  
**Collaborative publishing**  
(Top) Slashdot.org, which resembles a cross between a large-scale forum and a collaborative weblog, is driven by a combination of editorial oversight by its owners, submissions by users, and moderation and meta-moderation by the community of users. The site attracts more than 10 million unique readers each month.  
(Bottom) Every story on Kuro5hin.org is written by a member and then submitted for peer review. Stories are then edited, discussed and ranked before it even appears on the site. Once published, a mass audience reacts, comments and extends the story.

**Figure 3.7 Collaborative publishing:** Internet Movie Database (*imdb.com*) originally started as newsgroup. In the early '90s, the user-created database was moved to the Web, and has become one of the top movie sites. In 1998, it was purchased by Amazon.com, but the content is still primarily created by the audience.

systems become increasingly unwieldy and complex to manage.

See Figure 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 for examples.

### Peer-to-Peer

Peer-to-peer (P2P) describes applications in which people can use the Internet to communicate or share and distribute digital files with each other directly or through a mediating Web server.

*P2P communication:* Instant Messaging (IM) and Short Message Service (SMS) are the most pervasive forms of peer-to-peer communication. These forms constitute types of social media, where personal, informal conversation occurs in a “one-to-one” or “one-to-few” model.

While the content of IM and SMS is difficult to categorize or analyze, its appeal and usefulness as a communications medium is unquestionable. Surveys from the Pew Internet and American Life Project reveal that more than 50 million Americans (about 46 percent of all Internet users) have send instant messages, and about 7 million (11 percent) of all these users send instant

messages daily. AOL, one of the most popular of instant messaging providers, transmits almost 1.4 billion instant messages each day.

SMS, short text messages that are sent between cell phones, is pervasive in Europe and Asia but hasn't yet gained traction in the United States due to the lack of support for a key industry technology (GSM).

In the past decade, as American culture has embraced mobile technologies, instant messaging has become a powerful means of distributing news and information to computers, cell phones, pagers and PDAs. Now, everything from news headlines and stories, sports scores, stock quotes, airline flight schedules and eBay bids are regularly sent directly to mobile devices, through instant messages or SMS. In addition, parents keep in closer contact with their teen children through IM.

Reuters explored the business prospects for instant messaging of news, sports and financial information with an ActiveBuddy tool. Audience members who added this intelligent news agent

as a IM buddy could ask for news on demand based on keywords.

In Hong Kong, the Chinese government sent a blanket of 6 million SMS messages to spread the word and avert panic about the outbreak of the SARS respiratory illness.<sup>6</sup>

As cell phones and mobile devices have integrated digital camera technology, instant messaging is now expanding outside of text communications to include still photography and video. This is already being used in a peer-to-peer fashion among friends or colleagues, but it is also being used as a vehicle to submit photography and video directly to a Web site or weblog. During worldwide protests against the war in Iraq, the BBCNews.com asked its readers to submit photos from their digital cameras and cell phones.<sup>7</sup>

Microsoft's new ThreeDegrees application is an interesting experiment in peer-to-peer communication. Participants form groups with this software to chat, share pictures and music to the group, without permanently sharing the files. Music and images are streamed to the group members on the fly (See Figure 3.8).

**P2P Distribution:** Peer-to-peer forms excel when it comes to the distribution and dissemination of digital files, which may carry valuable news and information. Instant messaging users can exchange digital files on the fly in the middle of a conversation. But the heart of P2P file sharing was born with Napster, the controversial desktop software program designed to enable participants to share any digital music file on their hard drives.

At its zenith, 70 million users were trading 2.7 billion files per month. Since Napster was shut down, other file-sharing programs (called Gnutella clients) such as Morpheus and Kazaa have stepped in, allowing billions of movies, songs, ebooks, software and other digital files to be exchanged among the masses.

From a participatory journalism perspective, P2P has enormous potential to distribute the content created by digital amateurs. One example is the recent emergence of P2P photo-sharing software programs. Such programs let you define a list of friends and mark photos that you want to share with your them. The program watches for your friends to log on and then automatically makes the images available for downloading or real-time viewing.

**Self-correcting process:** Peer-to-peer file sharing doesn't necessarily need correction, but



**Figure 3.8 Peer-to-Peer:** With Microsoft's ThreeDegrees, participants form groups to chat, share pictures and music, without permanently sharing the files. Music and images are streamed to the group.

ranking and filtering mechanisms can increase the signal-to-noise ratio. Peer-to-peer communication such as instant messaging doesn't need correction either, any more than a conversation with a friend would. However, chat rooms sometimes benefit from moderation.

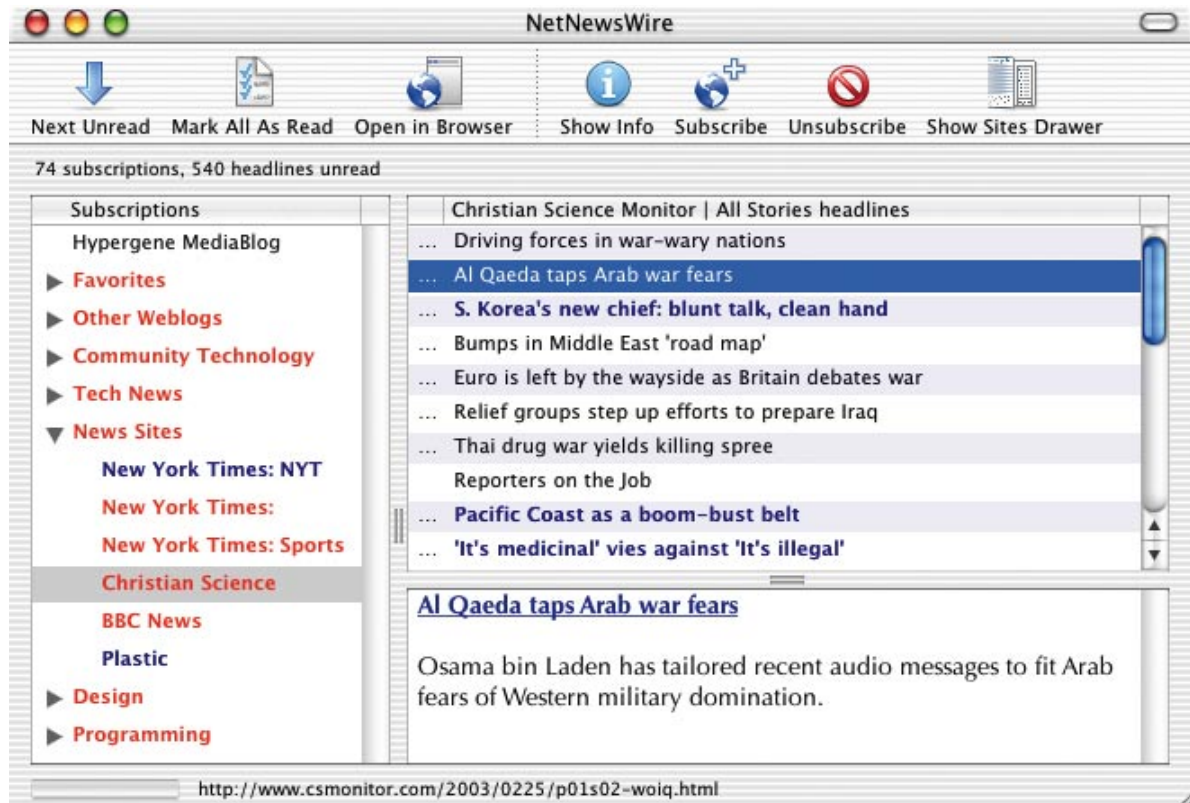
**Strengths:** Synchronous communication is a powerful vehicle for immediate news and information. SMS has the advantage of being both synchronous and asynchronous, because if a participant isn't online, the message is stored for later retrieval.

**Weaknesses:** Instant messaging requires participants to be online in order to communicate. The lack of interoperability between software programs, conflicting messaging standards and closed devices are sources of continual frustration, creating islands of users who are unable to communicate with others. For example, an AOL instant messaging user cannot communicate with an MSN user.

### XML Syndication

The content on many of these forms, especially blogs and collaborative systems, can be syndicated through the use of an XML specification called RSS, Rich Site Summary. An RSS file typically contains a list of headlines, summaries and links recently published by a given site. Using news reader applications such as NewzCrawler, AmphetaDesk or NetNewsWire, Web readers can browse these RSS files, sorting through large amounts of news content at a rapid rate. When a reader finds an item of interest, she clicks on the headline and it takes her to the story on the source's site. (See Figure 3.9 for an example).





**Figure 3.9 XML syndication:** The Christian Science Monitor’s headlines are distributed using the RSS XML format and can be quickly scanned in a news reader application, such as NetNewsWire (above).

RSS syndication seems to be making an impact in several ways. Content creators, from mainstream media to the average blogger, can easily syndicate their content to RSS reader applications, creating a peer-to-peer distribution model. In many cases, the user doesn’t have to do a thing. “It’s all part of the democratization effect of the Web,” says entrepreneur Dave Winer, who incorporated an early version of RSS in Userland blogging software in 1999. “It puts bloggers on the same field as the big news corporations, and that’s great.”<sup>8</sup>

News readers can be trained to go out and refresh content based on a time schedule. This allows readers to be up to date without having to search for recent news on their own.

“Most people, once they start using RSS to check the news, just don’t go back (to surfing Web pages),” says Tim Bray, co-editor of the World Wide Web Consortium’s XML specification. “The amount of time and irritation saved is totally, completely addictive.”<sup>9</sup>

According to columnist J.D. Lasica, this virtue can motivate users into an immediate online dialogue, whether through e-mails, discussion boards or blog entries. “Interactivity is much more vibrant when the news is fresh.”<sup>10</sup>

“News readers help to build community,” adds Matthew Gifford, a Web developer in Bloomingdale, Ill. “You can see the ebb and flow of ideas around the network much better now.”<sup>11</sup>

The XML structure of RSS feeds also allows other sites to easily integrate a headline and summary feed into other products, redistributing content in a viral fashion.

### Open vs. closed

The scale of these forms, the technology behind them and type of participation that occurs varies greatly. However, the nature of participation can be affected by one additional key factor that should be considered: Is the environment public or private? We have identified four categories of openness that these forms usually fall within:

1. *Open Communal:* While there typically is a single host, facilitator or architect of the community, almost all activity within it – membership, editing, filtering, moderation, content contribution, etc. – is managed and governed by the community it serves.
2. *Open Exclusive:* A group of privileged members, usually the owners of the site, is allowed to post primary content to the site, while the

audience creates secondary content through commentary. This is typical of weblogs. Sometimes exclusivity can be assigned to audience members. For example, MetaFilter limits the number of new members that can join each day.

3. *Closed*: Only a group of privileged members can read, post, edit and comment on content. The system, which can take the form of a weblog or forum, exists in a private Web environment, such as a company intranet. Instant messaging and e-mail are private, and thus closed.
4. *Partially Closed*: In this case, some portion of the information created by a closed community is exposed to a public Web space.

## Function of participation

This section attempts to categorize participatory journalism by the function the audience serves.

### Commentary

The most pervasive, and perhaps fundamental, level of participation is commentary. During the past three decades, forums, newsgroups, chat rooms and instant messaging have enabled online discussion on just about any subject of interest imaginable. Summing up the ubiquity and popularity of this activity, a Pew Research report noted that in the days following the Sept. 11 attacks, nearly one-third of all American Internet users “read or posted material in chat rooms, bulletin boards or online forums.”

In the past five years, weblogs have increased the signal of this activity, with some advocating the blog form as the next generation of newspaper Op/Ed page.

“Though bloggers do actual reporting from time to time, most of what they bring to the table is opinion and analysis — punditry,” says Glenn Reynolds, a law professor at the University of Tennessee and author of the popular weblog InstaPundit.<sup>12</sup>

### Filtering and editing

With the flood of information available, as well as competing demands of media attention, the door has opened for alternative forms of editing — filtering, sorting, ranking and linking. This process is akin to “editing” in the sense of editorial judgment and selection. The online participants “guide and direct” their community, large or small, to valued news and information.<sup>13</sup>

Filtering and ranking can be based on explicit singular or collective participation. For example,

Gizmodo, “the Gadgets Weblog,” is a well-edited, “best-of” list of links to news and information about cutting-edge consumer electronics. Gizmodo is produced by one person. The search engine Daypop, also run by one person, has a collection of the top 40 most linked-to news and information Web pages within the blogging community (See Figure 3.10).

Many news sites, such as MSNBC.com and CNN.com, employ a similar “Most Read Top 10,” where all site visitors’ choices are accumulated into a popularity ranking. Other interesting examples of filtering systems include Google’s Page Rank algorithms, Yahoo’s Buzz — based on popular searches — and *The New York Times*’ “most e-mailed stories.”

Filtering, however, doesn’t have to come from explicit activities, such as linking or favorite lists. It can also have implicit origins, such as Amazon’s well-known “People who bought this item also bought ...” feature. This is an example of collaborative filtering, in which Amazon uses information about previous sales and browsing to suggest potentially relevant products to returning customers.

### Fact-checking

In discussion forums and weblogs, the act of verification is a frequent activity. The initial post in either form begins with a link to a story, followed by a statement questioning the validity of certain facts. What ensues is a community effort to uncover the truth. Sometimes journalists enter the fray in an effort to uncover the truth in traditional media.

One example of this occurred when the Slashdot community and an Associated Press reporter uncovered a fraudulent ad campaign by Microsoft.<sup>14</sup>

“This is tomorrow’s journalism,” says blogger and journalist Dan Gillmor, “a partnership of sorts between professionals and the legions of gifted amateurs out there who can help us — all of us — figure things out. It’s a positive development, and we’re still figuring out how it works.”<sup>15</sup>

### Grassroots reporting

Taking the form of eyewitness or first-hand accounts, Internet users are participating in the fact-gathering and reporting process, sometimes even conveying breaking news. Weblogs and forums brought compelling first-hand accounts and photography to the events of September 11.

The terrorist attacks were the watershed event for grassroots reporting in weblogs, says John Hiler, co-founder of WebCrimson, a soft-



**Figure 3.10**  
**Filtering**  
Daypop's Top 40 is a list of popular links that are being discussed by webloggers around the world. Weblog indices such as Daypop are an excellent way to monitor the distributed discussion in the blogosphere.

ware consulting firm based in Manhattan, and Xanga.com, one of the largest weblog community sites. "Eyewitness reporting comes in large part from people's desire to share their stories and publish the truth. These are key features in blog-based grassroots reporting, and a big reason that weblogs have exploded in popularity since September 11th."

"There are so many post 9-11 weblogs that they've gotten their own name: warblogs," Hiler says. Warblogs continue to dissect and analyze the news from the war on terrorism.

The scope of blog journalism has expanded to other areas of interest. "[A]lternative internet sources are gaining a reputation for breaking important news stories more quickly than traditional media sources," says Chris Sherman, associate editor of SearchEngineWatch.com. "For example, *The New York Times* reported that the first hint of problems that doomed the space shuttle Columbia appeared on an online discussion eleven minutes before the Associated Press issued its first wire-service alert."<sup>16</sup>

Fact-gathering and grassroots reporting also come from professional or amateur subject matter experts who publish a weblog or participate in a

collaborative community, such as Slashdot. These participants tend to produce a wealth of original content as well as opinion, links and original databases of resources on their expertise. This is particularly successful on a subject or theme that is not covered well by mainstream media.

An excellent example of such niche amateurs is the Web site Digital Photography Review. This news and reviews site is written and produced by UK photography consultant Phil Askey and his wife Joanna. The nearly 4-year-old site features a weblog on digital photography news, plus in-depth equipment reviews and original coverage of trade shows. It also has a active discussion forum. From its modest beginnings in late 1998, it now attracts almost 5 million unique visitors and 50 million page views each month.<sup>17</sup>

### Annotative reporting

Another way to characterize the fact-checking, grassroots reporting and commentary in weblogs and related forms is to view the activity as an extension of traditional reportage. Adding to, or supplementing, the information in a given story is the goal of many participants who believe that a particular point of view, angle or piece

of information is missing from coverage in the mainstream media.

Reporters have also used participatory forms on the web to annotate themselves, calling it “transparent journalism,” by publishing the complete text of their interviews on their weblogs. For example, Online Journalism Review’s senior editor JD Lasica sometimes uses his weblog to print the complete text of interviews he conducts for an OJR article. Lasica explains why he did this earlier this year on a story about RSS syndication, “I’m posting the comments of my interview subjects here, since I had so little room to include them in my column. I suspect most journalists don’t do this because (a) it’s a hell of a lot of work, and (b) it could call into question the decision-making process on which quotes the writer selected for his or her story.”<sup>18</sup>

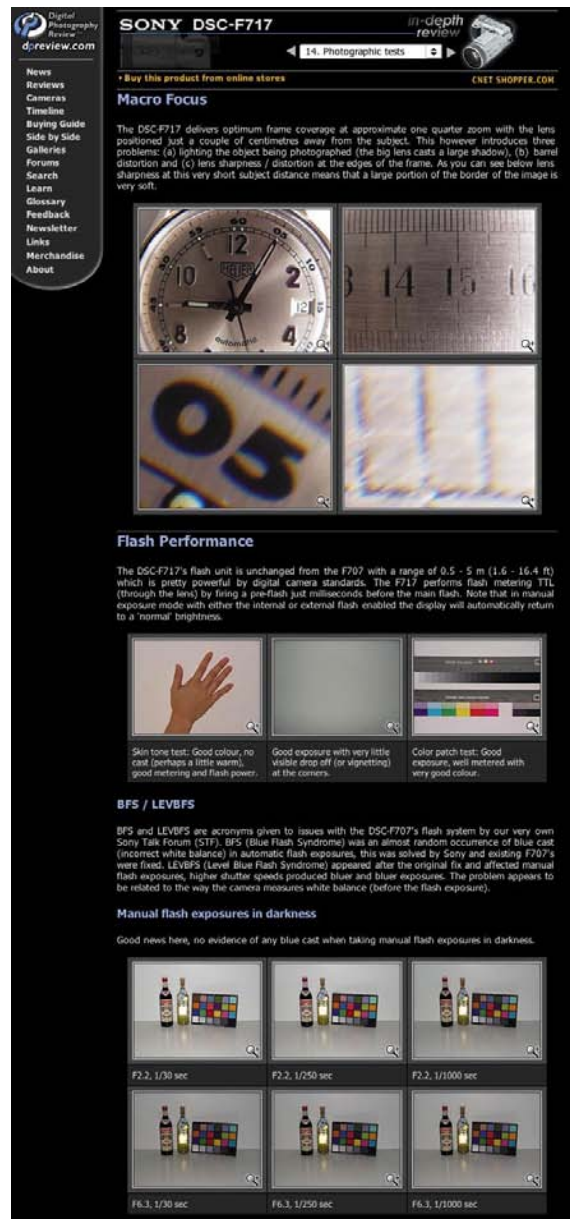
When taking the role of a source, Lasica also posts transcripts of when he’s been interviewed by media outlets about subjects like the state of online news media.<sup>19</sup> This could have tremendous impact if sources such as politicians, celebrities, athletes and others begin to post transcripts of interviews by the media.

### Open-source reporting and peer review

Some media are allowing their readers to evaluate and react to content online before its official publication in the traditional product. Journalism researcher Mark Deuze suggests that this type of journalism, similar to a peer review process, is best suited to “specialized niche markets” whose audience has comparably specialized interests and needs.<sup>20</sup> Considering the fluidity and connectivity of the Internet, it is within reason to suggest that a community of interested peers could quickly be assembled on any given subject.

The most frequently documented case of open-source journalism, is the story of Slashdot and *Jane’s Intelligence Review*. Dan Gillmor recounts what happened:

“In 1999, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, the journal widely followed in national security circles, wondered whether it was on the right track with an article about computer security and cyberterrorism. The editors went straight to some experts — the denizens of Slashdot, a tech-oriented Web site — and published a draft. In hundreds of postings on the site’s message system, the technically adept members of that community promptly tore apart the draft and gave, often in colorful language, a variety of perspectives and suggestions. Jane’s went back to the drawing board,



**Figure 3.11 Grassroots reporting**  
*Digital Photography Review provides amazingly detailed reviews of digital cameras (above), forums and weblog of digital photography news.*

and rewrote the article from scratch. The community had helped create something, and Jane’s gratefully noted the contribution in the article it ultimately published.”<sup>21</sup>

### Audio/Video broadcasting

While not nearly as widespread due to cost barriers and technological know-how, the Web has empowered the audience to the play the role of audio or video broadcaster.

Internet radio and television stations use

streaming servers or straight file downloads to deliver content. These bandwidth-intensive sites can be expensive to operate and require donations or some type of revenue stream to survive. Yet thousands of these sites continue to thrive, like many audience-driven sites, by providing alternative/niche content.

As broadband adoption increases, creation tools get cheaper and more simple, and the entertainment center of the home (TV) gets connected to the Web, we should see a significant proliferation of audio and video content created and distributed by the audience.

### **Buying, selling and advertising**

The egalitarian ethos driving participatory journalism is not restricted merely to the dissemination of news and information but also encompasses commerce and advertising.

“The web has created an unprecedented opportunity for consumers to openly discuss the products that fill their lives,” says Derek Powazek in his book *Design for Community*. “From e-mail to web sites to Usenet, there are millions of conversations on anything and everything you can buy, rent, or do.”<sup>22</sup>

Commerce communities began to develop in the mid-'90s with sites such as Amazon, which include reviews by users on its product pages. Sites like Edmunds.com provide discussion and advice about purchasing cars. The participation in commerce communities includes commentary, grassroots reporting and fact-checking.

At the same time, in the mid-'90s, consumer to consumer (C2C) environments began to establish the notion of the audience owning all aspects of the business chain – buying and selling to each other. Examples range from the monolithic auction site eBay, with more than 12 million items for sale, to the intimate, down-to-earth classifieds of craigslist.org.<sup>23</sup>

Easy-to-use systems such as PayPal, Amazon zShops and Yahoo Stores enable any Internet user to put up a storefront in a few hours. Affiliate programs, like those set up by Amazon, allow anyone to share in the profits when an item sells.

Donation engines, like Amazon's Honor System, enable small-scale publishers like webloggers to collect an income ranging from the modest to respectable. During a one-week pledge drive in December 2002, weblogger and *New Republic* senior editor Andrew Sullivan generated \$79,020 in donations from 3,339 of his weblog readers.<sup>24</sup>

In the past few years, following the lead of Google and collaborative weblogs such as MetaFilter and Kuro5hin, we have begun to see the proliferation of text-based advertising. Depending on how the system is designed and priced, audience members can compete with large companies for the same ad space.

Kuro5hin's community text ads offers a key twist – any community member can publicly comment on an advertisement.

“The idea behind ad comments is twofold,” explains Foster, Kuro5hin's founder. “For the advertiser, the benefit is that potential customers can meet you on ‘neutral ground,’ ask questions and get more information in a place they're already comfortable. And for the users, the benefit is that they can see what others have said about the product, whether it's good or bad, and how the advertiser has dealt with other people.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Knowledge management**

Some people are taking weblogs and using them as a tool for personal and corporate knowledge management, in what's become known as “klogging.”

Weblogs have proven to be a great enabler of knowledge collecting and sharing. A strong emphasis on hypertext linking, simple content publishing and syndication helps creators amass a searchable and distributable knowledge base related to personal interests, academic research or the workplace.

Weblogging also encourages interaction and refinement of ideas, enabling a group of peers to add to the knowledge through feedback or comment. Group weblogging has become an effective tool for knowledge management in the workplace.

The authors of *We Blog: Publishing Online with Weblogs* explain one scenario of how weblogs build and capture knowledge: “By integrating the weblog publishing process into how inter-office communication happens, it becomes possible for weblogs to function simultaneously as informal knowledge management systems. An e-mail exchange between two technical support reps outlining a fix to a common problem can be copied to the department weblog. Now that fix, that knowledge, is stored in a centralized location, and is available to everyone else in the group.”<sup>26</sup>

In the next chapter, *The rules of participation*, we examine what motivates the audience to take on their participatory roles and what kinds of rules yield the most fruitful participation.

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## CHAPTER 4

## The rules of participation

The abundance and proliferation of virtual communities and collaboration environments provide the opportunity for anyone to play just about any role in the journalistic process.

As we discussed in the last chapter, the audience has taken on the roles of publisher, broadcaster, editor, content creator (writer, photographer, videographer, cartoonist), commentator, documentarian, knowledge manager (librarian), journaler and advertiser (buyer and seller).

For media organizations and businesses to understand how to engage their empowered audience, we must consider what motivates the audience to take on their new roles and what kinds of rules yield the most fruitful participation. Finally, we look at reputation systems and the balance of trust that's struck between buyers and sellers or content creators and their online peers.

### Why we participate

Through these emerging electronic communities, the Web has enabled its users to create, increase or renew their social capital. These communities are not merely trading grounds for information but a powerful extension of our social networks. And as in any social system, looking at our motivations helps us understand and trust the system as well as find our place in it.

The Hierarchy of Needs was the brainchild of Abraham Maslow, one of the founding fathers of humanistic psychology. He believed that people are motivated by the urge to satisfy needs ranging from basic survival to self-fulfillment, and that they don't fill the higher-level needs until the lower-level ones are satisfied.

In her book *Community Building on the Web*, online community expert Amy Jo Kim mapped Maslow's offline needs to online community equivalents (See Figure 4.1). Viewed in this context, we can assume that people are motivated to participate in order to achieve a sense of belonging to a group; to build self-esteem through contributions and to garner recognition for contributing; and to develop new skills and opportunities for ego building and self-actualization.<sup>1</sup>

Through our interviews and research on par-

ticipatory journalism, we have compiled a list of reasons why audience members are becoming participants. While reading this list, consider that an individual may be motivated by multiple reasons.

### ***To gain status or build reputation in a given community.***

Social recognition is one of the biggest motivators, intoxicating participants with instant gratification and approval. This ego-driven motivation to enhance social capital is best captured by the advice Web sites and review engines rampant in the late 1990s, which enabled anyone to showcase his or her expertise and recommendations on just about any subject imaginable.

"People with expertise contributed answers, tidbits, essays, pages of software code, lore of astonishing variety," Howard Rheingold writes in *Smart Mobs*. "A few contributors earned the kind of currency banks accept. Most contributed for the social recognition that came with being a top-ranked reviewer. The 'reputation managers' that enabled users and other recommenders to rate each other made possible opinion markets that traded almost entirely on ego gratification."<sup>2</sup>

For some, the ego-driven surface of this motivation is more practical underneath — people want to establish themselves as an authority on a subject. For example, one the primary reasons people write a blog is that they aspire to become "legitimate" writers in mainstream media. The weblog becomes a place to hone their craft and showcase their skills.<sup>3</sup>

In general, this is viewed as a benefit to the individual. Small business proprietors, consultants and budding writers can quickly gain an audience and build a positive reputation that they can parlay into real-world business opportunities. But organizations can benefit as well because individual reputation can be transferred to some extent. For example, if a reporter begins to gain an involved audience through a weblog, that good will and trust could be transferred to the media organization that he or she works for.

These new forms also allow people who haven't had a voice — because of educational, economic,

Figure 4.1

## Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs in Online Communities

Humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow believed that people are motivated by the urge to satisfy needs ranging from basic survival to self-fulfillment, and that they don’t fill the higher-level needs until the lower-level ones are satisfied. Amy Jo Kim’s book, *Community Building on the Web*, uses Maslow’s hierarchy to clarify the goals and needs of online community participants.

Need	Offline (Maslow)	Online Communities
<b>Physiological</b>	Food, clothing, shelter, health	System access; the ability to own and maintain one’s identity while participating in a Web community
<b>Security &amp; Safety</b>	Protection from crimes and war; the sense of living in a fair and just society.	Protection from hacking and personal attacks; the sense of having a “level playing field”; ability to maintain varying levels of privacy
<b>Social</b>	The ability to give and receive love; the feeling of belonging to a group.	Belonging to the community as a whole, and to subgroups within the community.
<b>Self-Esteem</b>	Self-respect; the ability to earn the respect of others and contribute to society.	The ability to contribute to the community, and be recognized for those contributions.
<b>Self-Actualization</b>	The ability to develop skills and fulfill one’s potential.	The ability to take on a community role that develop skills and opens up new opportunities.

Advancement in Hierarchy

Source: Amy Jo Kim’s *Community Building on the Web* (Peachpit, 2000)

social or cultural barriers — to enter the dialogue by building a personal reputation. Online communities have also empowered those with physical or emotional impediments to blossom in a virtual space.<sup>4</sup>

### **To create connections with others who have similar interests, online and off.**

An oft-read claim is that the majority of the billions of Web pages on the Internet today are junk. The trouble with this criticism is that the wheat — the relevant 2 percent — is different for every person. What many dismiss as “junk” is made by junkies — people who are fanatical or passionate about a subject.

People want to feed their obsessions and share them with like-minded individuals. This is what fuels, in large part, many social connections on the Internet. Whether it’s a fan page for ’50s and ’60s jazz pianist and vocalist Buddy Greco, or a database of airfoils used in the wing design of aircraft, people are using online communities to share passions, beliefs, hobbies and lifestyles.

Stuart Golgoff, from the University of Arizona’s

Office of Distributed Learning, says that “while chat rooms, newsgroups, forums and message boards continue to play a role in computer-mediated communication, the Web has assumed a prominent place in forging relationships among people with common interests.”<sup>5</sup>

According to a study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, about 45 million participants in online communities say the Internet has “helped them connect with groups or people who share their interests.” Participation in an online community, the study says, has helped them get to know people they otherwise would not have met.<sup>6</sup>

The same Pew study revealed that these virtual relationships are transferring to offline interaction. “In addition to helping users participate in communities of interest that often have no geographical boundaries, the Internet is a tool for those who are involved with local groups, particularly church groups (28 million). Internet users have employed the Internet to contact or get information about local groups.”

Sociologist Barry Wellman argues that a good deal of new social capital is being formed through



“glocalization” – the capacity of the Internet to expand users’ social worlds to faraway people and simultaneously to connect them more deeply to the place where they live. According to the Pew study, “glocalization” is widespread. “The Internet helps many people find others who share their interests no matter how distant they are, and it also helps them increase their contact with groups and people they already know and it helps them feel more connected to them.”

### ***Sense-making and understanding.***

Faced with an overwhelming flow of information from a massive number of media sources, people are increasingly going to online communities to learn how to make sense of things. Moreover, the conglomeration and corporatization of media and the sophisticated means by which sources (such as politicians and business executives) “spin” media leaves the mass audience often grasping to make sense of the news and wondering what information to trust.

Witness the increasing number of experts on TV news trying to explain market fluctuations, political maneuvers and medical advancements. But that doesn’t completely satisfy the audience, write Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel in their book *The Elements of Journalism*, because “a journalism that focuses on the expert elite – the special interests – may be in part responsible for public disillusionment. Such a press does not reflect the world as most people live and experience it.”

Weblogs, forums, usenets and other online social forms have become real-time wellsprings of sense-making from their peers on just about any subject. They also function as archives of perspective.

According to a study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, “The pull of online communities in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks shows how Americans have integrated online communities into their lives. In the days following the attacks, 33% of American Internet users read or posted material in chat rooms, bulletin boards, or other online forums. Although many early posts reflected outrage at the events, online discussions soon migrated to grieving, discussion and debate on how to respond, and information queries about the suspects and those who sponsored them.”<sup>7</sup>

### ***To inform and be informed.***

Participants in discussion forums, weblogs and collaborative publishing communities also play

the role of “thin media” publishers, inexpensively providing news, information and advice not normally found in mainstream media.

Everyone on the Internet is a potential expert on some subject – from Pez dispensers to digital photography techniques to wormholes – and these participatory forms are great places to find and share not only obscure or rare information, but commentary that might be too controversial for mainstream media.

“Thin media publishers are far nimbler and will feed happily on new niches that are far too obscure for traditional media to notice and too thin for traditional media to profitably mine,” says Henry Copeland, founder of the Web consultancy Pressflex and author of the weblog Blogads. “And, because they are small and nimble, thin media can help discover and invent the Next Big Thing much easier than their big peers who are busy looking for huge revenues from huge services.”<sup>8</sup>

The social network created by Internet virally spreads information extremely quickly among their participants. This may be because participatory forms attract “mavens” and “connectors.” These types of individuals, whom Malcolm Gladwell identified in his book *The Tipping Point*, are crucial to the spread of information, online and off.<sup>9</sup>

Mavens are information brokers, sharing and trading what they know. They are aggressive collectors of information but are socially motivated to share it as well. Connectors are people who know a lot of people in diverse settings. They have their feet in many different worlds and are socially motivated to bring them together.

Participatory forms offer an excellent outlet for mavens to satisfy their need to share and acquire information, and provides connectors the ability to help information seekers find mavens. (It also provides the opportunity to position themselves as an authority on a subject.)<sup>10</sup>

In a foreword to Seth Godin’s book on marketing, *Unleashing the Ideavirus*, Gladwell explains the potential power of what’s happening in participatory forms: “(The) most successful ideas are those that spread and grow because of the customer’s relationship to other customers – not the marketer’s to the customer.” Later in the book, Godin adds: “The future belongs to marketers who establish a foundation and process where interested people can market to each other. Ignite consumer networks and then get out of the way and let them talk.”<sup>11</sup>

**To entertain and be entertained.**

Just about anything will suffice as entertainment, as long as it can serve as a distraction from the day-to-day grind. To get people to pay for this diversion, it usually must be compelling or “fun.” And there are seemingly no limits to what we will pay for fun.

But, as anyone in the entertainment business will testify, fun can be one of the most difficult experiences to satisfy. What seems to resonate with an audience of thousands one month falls into relative obscurity the next month. Factors such as novelty, trend and cultural status weigh heavily in the success of entertainment. The result is a large target that is hard to hit.<sup>12</sup>

According to the authors of *The Chuetrain Manifesto*, the Web is not a natural vehicle for prepackaged entertainment. “Unlike the lockstep conformity imposed by television, advertising and corporate propaganda, the Net has given new legitimacy — and freedom — to play. Many of those drawn into this world find themselves exploring a freedom never before imagined: to indulge their curiosity, to debate, to disagree, to laugh at themselves, to compare visions, to learn, to create new art, new knowledge.”<sup>13</sup>

Online participation is simply fun — whether a political riff by a deeply committed weblogger, a casual forum discussion, or a one-off album review posted on Amazon. As futurist Paul Saffo notes, “In the end, much of what passes for communications actually has a high entertainment component. The most powerful hybrid of communications and entertainment is ‘particitainment’ — entertaining communications that connects us with some larger purpose or enterprise.”<sup>14</sup>

**To create.**

Those who participate online usually create content to inform and entertain others. But creating also builds self-esteem and, in Maslow’s view, it’s an act of self-actualization. We derive fulfillment from the act of creation.

“Five percent of the populace (probably even less) can create. The others watch, listen, read, consume,” says Marc Canter, one of the founders of Macromedia and now chairman and founder of Broadband Mechanics. “I think one of the destinies of digital technology is to enable the other 95 percent to express their creativity somehow. That’s the gestalt view.”

“Digital cameras, storytelling, assembling stuff from existing content, annotating, reviews, conversations, linking topics together — are all forms

of creativity,” Canter says. “(Weblogging is) at the core of creativity — expressing your feelings, opinions and showing everyone else what you think is important.”<sup>15</sup>

Traditional media tend to understate the value of participation journalism, holding that comments, reviews and content created by “amateurs” provide little value to their mass audience. As such, they are missing the inherent psychological value of the creative process to the individual.

For the most part, our list contains motivations that are positive or fairly benign. An egalitarian/for-the-common-good ethic tends to permeate most of these forms. Yet, anyone that has participated in online communities knows that not all participants play fairly. People will abuse these forms by performing pranks, manipulating the rules, spreading false information and rumors, engaging in flaming — indeed, just about any mischief imaginable — and the results can be serious.

According to a CNET article in 1996, “Several stocks have seen meteoric rises, or dramatic falls, in their valuation because of information posted to Internet newsgroups and online services. The Securities and Exchange Commission and other federal regulatory agencies are concerned that unscrupulous insiders or stock promoters could disseminate false or misleading information to manipulate securities prices.”<sup>16</sup>

Regulatory agencies have policed Internet postings aimed at manipulating stock prices, but they need to tread carefully lest they infringe on free speech rights. Conflict is a key component of any social environment, from a party to a chat room, so we have learned to develop rules designed to guide the experience in a positive direction.

“Social interaction creates tension between the individual and the group,” explains Clay Shirky, a consultant and teacher who writes frequently on the social and economic effects of Internet technologies. “This is true of all social interaction, not just online. Any system that supports groups addresses this tension by enacting a simple constitution — a set of rules governing the relationship between individuals and the groups. These constitutions usually work by encouraging or requiring certain kinds of interaction, and discouraging or forbidding others.”<sup>17</sup>

**Rules governing participation**

In broadcast models, the rules of participation are strict and limited. The media organization has supreme control as the informed intermedi-

ary of the news and it only allows the audience to participate through limited means, e.g., submitting letters to the editor or phoning a talk show. Mainstream media are comfortable with this level of participation because it's relatively easy to authenticate the credibility of these participants (though occasional pranks do occur).

Because not all participatory journalism is collaborative, We Media can follow the same model as broadcast models. For example, reviews are submitted by the audience to a product recommendation site, authenticated by editors, and broadcast out to a mass audience. Likewise, many webloggers have little interaction or open discussion with their audience. It's simply push media.

But collaborative forms of participatory journalism — forums, newsgroups, chat rooms, group weblogs and publishing systems — are more complex because they must balance the tension between the group and the individual. Even more challenging are the dynamically forming groups that come together briefly to achieve goals through Internet-connected mobile devices (dubbed “smart mobs” by Rheingold).

In the past few decades, the Internet has become highly successful in giving the consumer a voice, but author Stephen Johnson says “... systems like Slashdot force us to accept a more radical proposition. To understand how these new media experiences work, you have to analyze the message, the medium and the rules. What's interesting here is not just the medium, but rather the rules that govern what gets selected and what doesn't.”<sup>18</sup>

When we talk about rules, we really are describing control — the governance of how participants assume roles, how they are allowed to interact with others, and the ownership of the social system.

The rules of participation come from a few places. First, they come from technology — rules that are built into the social software that runs the community or participatory form. These rules are then configured by the host (whoever creates the environment). A basic rule of most systems, for example, is that you have to become a registered member to participate. A host would define whether registration is necessary and the criteria that a registrant must meet.

Second, rules come from the community of members. This can come from moderators — appointed community members who police the ebb and flow of communication based on the estab-

lished rules of the environment. For example, in chat rooms or discussion forums, it's common to have a moderator that disciplines or kicks out users who are behaving improperly.

Even those who are not appointed as moderators will police the activity of the system. Much as in any social situation, individuals draw boundaries about what's appropriate and what's not. As the community grows and evolves, members push back against the rules of the host to the point where the system becomes co-owned and operated. In this regard, many of these environments are highly democratic in the way they operate.

Various technologies have evolved over the past 40 years to enable us to establish rules, monitor behavior and to tune out the unwanted voices. As online community expert Rheingold says, “Hiding the crap is the easy part. The real achievement is finding quality.”<sup>19</sup>

To increase the signal-to-noise ratio of online communities, emerging technologies called “reputation systems” are helping participants define which information is credible, reliable and trustworthy.

### **Reputation systems and trust metrics**

Traditional models of trust between buyers and sellers fell short of requirements for an online marketplace, where anonymous transactions crossed territorial and legal boundaries as well as traditional value chains. Alternative quantifications of trust were developed for e-commerce, called “reputation systems” or “trust metrics,” to ensure better evaluations of risk.

On eBay, for example, auction buyers evaluate sellers, rating their transaction experience and adding comments. The cumulative ranking of past buyers creates a track record of trust that new buyers often reference. This also works in the other direction, where sellers can rate buyers, creating a full-circle reputation system.

“A reputation system collects, distributes, and aggregates feedback about participants' past behavior,” according to a paper by a group of University of Michigan researchers. “Though few of the producers or consumers of the ratings know each other, these systems help people decide whom to trust, encourage trustworthy behavior, and deter participation by those who are unskilled or dishonest.”<sup>20</sup>

When it comes to the exchange of news and information, the challenge of reputation systems is equally complex to that of e-commerce. In

traditional broadcast models, trust is built top down. News and information is gathered and disseminated by trained professionals that use rigorous methods of verification to ensure that the information is reliable and trustworthy. The media institution develops a certain level of credibility based on the success of this process.

From the consumer's perspective, it's easy to place trust in an established institution such as *The Wall Street Journal* or even MTV, but how does the audience learn to trust a stranger (or group of strangers), to evaluate the information they are providing, and to collaborate with them?

In participatory forms, trust is built from the bottom up. An anonymous individual enters the environment with no reputation and must gain the trust of others through their behavior and through the information they provide. Through the ranking and rating of content and of content creators, several successful online communities have used reputation systems to help maintain quality discussions and content.

One of the most well-known success stories of reputation systems is Slashdot.org,<sup>21</sup> an online technology discussion community. Slashdot has three mechanisms for creating and distributing trust. First, all posts to the site are policed by moderators, who are members in good standing. Second, moderators are monitored by meta-moderators to ensure that moderators do not wield too much control. The last ingredient is karma, a way for members to gain recognition for contributions and appropriate behavior. "These three political concepts," says Shirky, "lightweight as they are, allow Slashdot to grow without becoming unusable."<sup>22</sup>

Reputation systems help track the activity of a community and use criteria to determine appropriate roles for members, based on their level of acceptance within the community. Reputation systems also help members identify self-interested parties that are trying to disrupt the community's goal of the greater good.

According to the creators of Kaitiaki.org, a community site in New Zealand, reputation systems "have the potential to solve the problems of controlling access while preventing gate-keeping or 'capture' of the web site by outsiders. They serve as a filter so that the most valued members of the community are given prominence, while less valued members have a chance to prove themselves before they are given the 'limelight' [enhanced reputation and special privileges]. In this way, the site can avoid spam (unsolicited advertising),

abusive discussions and other bad behavior that plagues some discussion group systems."<sup>23</sup>

Other online communities have reputations systems that try to capture the somewhat transitive nature of trust. The products recommendation site Epinions uses a "web of trust" to mimic the way people share word-of-mouth advice. Their reputation system is based on the premise, "If a friend consistently gives you good advice, you're likely to believe that person's suggestions in the future. You know which preferences you and your friend share. If you both like the same types of films, you're more likely to trust your friend's recommendations on what to see."<sup>24</sup>

Such collaborative filtering systems, pioneered by Firefly (since purchased by Microsoft) in the mid-1990s, are now becoming commonplace, bringing the idea of reputation systems to a wide range of content sites, ranging from parental advice to purchases of home theater systems.

### Distributed credibility

There are other ways to assess credibility of content. One of the most effective is through hyperlinks. Acting as a decentralized, distributed reputation system, links act as votes, citations and reference to relevant pages on the Web.

Google's PageRank search algorithm uses hyperlinks-as-votes as a method of relevance in the social network of the web. As they explain on their Web site, "PageRank relies on the uniquely democratic nature of the web by using its vast link structure as an indicator of an individual page's value. In essence, Google interprets a link from page A to page B as a vote, by page A, for page B. But, Google looks at more than the sheer volume of votes, or links a page receives; it also analyzes the page that casts the vote. Votes cast by pages that are themselves 'important' weigh more heavily and help to make other pages 'important.'"<sup>25</sup>

Weblogs use a similar system of hyperlinks as votes with something called "blogrolls." A blogroll is a list of links to a weblog author's favorite Web sites, usually sites that are related to the weblog's subject. So if a reader decides they like a certain weblog, they might check out its blogroll as well.

"Rampant cross-linkage isn't a new phenomenon. It's the basic mechanism by which academia has operated for centuries," says Joshua Allen on his weblog *Better Living Through Software*. "Researchers judge the value of published research based upon the number of other works that cite it. Citations in scientific research form

‘clusters’ of cross-linkage that would suggest citation reciprocity. Groups of people tend to cite one another. Besides reciprocity, there are certainly other reasons that researchers can end up getting sucked into citation clusters. A milder form of reciprocity is mutual admiration. If Dr. Wang cites Dr. Miller five times, Dr. Miller will start to think that Dr. Wang has good judgment.”<sup>26</sup>

### Credible by nature

There are several other qualities of these new online participatory experiences that can breed trust and credibility:

**Egalitarian:** Collaborative publishing systems like Wiki use open editing rules and version history to promote trust. Because any reader of a Wiki can add their own views or information to a Wiki article, they begin to trust the environment and the collective goal of the common good.

“We assume that the world is mostly full of reasonable people,” say the creators of Wikipedia, a multi-lingual open-content encyclopedia, “and that collectively they can arrive eventually at a reasonable conclusion, despite the worst efforts of a very few wreckers.”<sup>27</sup>

**Intimacy:** Authenticity comes from the personal nature of discussions in a participatory form. One powerful draw of weblogs and forums is their ability to capture and share first-hand accounts, such as 9/11 terrorists attacks. The University of Arizona’s Golgoff explains, “When people share intimate details of their lives with a virtual stranger, it affirms that an implicit context of trust has been established.”<sup>28</sup>

**Passion:** According to *Time* magazine columnist James Poniewozik, the problem with mainstream media today is a passion deficit. “Many big-media journalists are now cautious, well-paid conformists distant from their audiences and more responsive to urban élites, powerful people and megacorporations—especially the ones they work for.”<sup>29</sup> The result, he says, is bland news anchors, magazines that more closely resemble catalogs, timid pack journalism, and celebrity/cult-of-personality coverage overload.

On the flip side of the new media ecosystem, online participatory journalism is fueled by people who fanatically follow and passionately discuss their favorite subjects. Their weblogs and online communities, while perhaps not as professionally produced, are chock full of style, voice and attitude. Passion makes the experience not only compelling and memorable but also credible.

“Maybe the biggest, if vaguest, lesson to learn

(from weblogs),” explains L.A. Examiner.com publisher Matt Welch, “is that people value personalities, especially those who will admit being wrong, show humility and class with readers. ... Newspapers have gotten away from the personality business, and this is where the weblogs are just hammering them.”<sup>30</sup>

**Speed of communication:** According to Harvard University professor Karen Stephenson, an influential social network theorist, one easy way to improve the level of trust is simply to increase the speed with which people respond to our communication.

When people return our e-mails or respond to questions in forums quickly, it sends a signal that we can rely on them because our connection, however distant, is important enough to claim some of their attention. Compare the experience of leaving a voice-mail message with tech support that gets a response days later to a real-time chat session or user-to-user discussion forums. The faster a satisfactory answer comes, the more likely we are to trust a person or organization. “Human beings always keep an internal accounting system of who owes what to whom,” says Steve Haeckel, director of strategic studies at IBM’s Advanced Business Institute. “Response time is one indicator of the degree of trustworthiness of the individual.”<sup>31</sup>

**Free market of media:** There are three basic rules of behavior that are tied directly to the intrinsic nature of the Internet, according to Doc Searls and David Weinberger: “No one owns it. Everyone can use it. Anyone can improve it.”<sup>32</sup>

Likewise, there is practically no barrier to participatory journalism. Just about anyone can start a discussion forum or weblog for relatively little or no money, or participate for free in most public participatory environments. “This is a medium that by definition encourages readers to establish competing media,” says publisher Welch. “That’s awesome and wonderful.”<sup>33</sup>

When the audience owns the medium, and owns the power to equitably compete in the same space, the medium and its forms carry a level of trust not found in any other media to date.

### Challenges of trust

Reputations systems are by no means perfect. One problem with online reputation is the lack of portability of virtual identities (and reputations) between systems. For example, if you build a positive seller or buyer reputation on eBay or Slashdot, it cannot be transferred to other vir-

tual environments. (eBay has sued some who have tried to do so.) It's great for the host of the community, such as eBay—some speculate that this aggregation of social capital is the key to their success—but for the individual and for social networks, it's a serious problem. It creates islands of reputation, which are time-consuming to earn.

The issue of identity ownership may be why weblogs cause such a powerful fuss. The participant owns and controls their identity, without the requirement to be known by a different eight-character name (e.g., bluskyz7) in each system.

“Because a person has control over his own piece of the community landscape (with a weblog), he feels a powerful ownership of his space that's lacking in traditional community sites,” says Derek Powazek, author of *Design for Community*. “(Weblogging) tools are exciting because they point to the future of online community—a future where everyone has a home of his own, a space where he has control, a private space in an ever-more complicated virtual community sphere.”<sup>34</sup>

From the reader's perspective, this also adds a level of credibility to webloggers because bloggers typically use their real-world identity in their virtual space.

Another challenge facing reputation systems is capturing feedback. Some people may not bother to provide feedback at all, seeing little or no value in the process. Negative feedback is difficult to elicit, because people fear the retaliation it could bring. The honesty of feedback is questionable,

because, just as in the real world, we sometimes give compliments in order to receive them.<sup>35</sup>

“Further complicating all of this,” says Shirky, “are the feedback loops created when a group changes its behavior in response to changes in (social) software.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite their theoretical and practical difficulties, reputations systems appear to perform reasonably well, says a team of University of Michigan researchers. “Systems that rely on the participation of large numbers of individuals accumulate trust simply by operating effectively over time.”<sup>37</sup>

The success of We Media thus far has been built on the evolution of reputations systems, trust metrics and the politics of social software. As the technology improves, facilitating better social connections, the future role of the mainstream media in this new media ecosystem comes into question.

Can the audience, informed and independent, provide news with meaning, context and credibility beyond the capabilities of a professional press? Are traditional media companies capable of growing and nurturing a community? Will reporters and editors lurk in communities for tips and grassroots reporting or will they become active co-equal participants in online communities, fully engaged in the conversation?

In the next chapter, *Implications of We Media*, we explore the potential impact of participation journalism on mainstream media and its relationship with advertisers, sources and the audience.

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (Perseus Publishing, 2002), 119.

<sup>3</sup> Author interview with John Hiler, co-founder of Xanga.com, one of the largest weblog community sites and co-founder of WebCrimson, a software consulting firm based in Manhattan (2002).

<sup>4</sup> One example: Mark Siegel, who has spinal muscular atrophy, has an excellent weblog: <http://www.the19thfloor.net/>

<sup>5</sup> Stuart Golgoff, “Virtual Connections: Community Bonding on the Net.” Published on FirstMonday.org (March 2001). [http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue6\\_3/glogoff/index.html](http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_3/glogoff/index.html)

<sup>6</sup> Pew Internet & American Life Project. *Online Communities: Networks that nurture long-distance relationships and local ties*. Oct. 31, 2001. <http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=47>

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<sup>10</sup> John Hiler goes into great detail about how Mavens and Connectors provide value in the weblogging community in his article, “The Tipping Blog: How Weblogs Can Turn an Idea into an Epidemic.” He also connects the ideas of Gladwell and Godin. Published on his weblog, *Microcontent News* (March 12, 2002). <http://www.microcontentnews.com/articles/tippingblog.htm>

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- <sup>22</sup> Shirky.
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## CHAPTER 5

# Implications for media and journalism

The Internet has grown in a way distinctly different from any medium before it. As a result, it's difficult to predict how the Net will change mainstream media and to what magnitude. To say that media will undergo a "paradigm shift" might be an understatement.

Consider that today one billion computers are connected to the Internet, most dialing in through telephone lines. By the end of 2010, Intel predicts that more than 1.5 billion computers will be connected via high-speed broadband and another 2.5 billion phones will have more processing power than today's PCs.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, only one-tenth of the world's population, or 600 million people, can access the Internet today. What will happen when many of the rest join in seeking others with whom to collaborate and share information?

That's a revolution already underway, but it's one that's easy to miss. It's quiet. Revolutions on the Net happen at the edges, not at the center.

Economist J. Bradford Long explains: "As the action spreads from producers (the few) to users (the many), it becomes much, much harder to get an overview of the revolutionary things occurring. We have anecdotes of brilliant new uses and applications, but do they add up to an enduring boom or just a few isolated pops that make good copy?"<sup>2</sup>

And that is the problem facing media companies, the entertainment industry and even governments. How do you put together the pieces of a puzzle without knowing what the final picture looks like?

First, you find the edges.

While we may not be able predict how the media landscape will shift, there are places we can begin looking for change and their likely impacts:

## Democratization of media

A.J. Liebling once said, "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one."<sup>3</sup> Now, millions do.

Those who believe the democratization of media will have little effect on big media often point to the "zine" business. In the late '80s and

early '90s, desktop publishing allowed many small, independent publications to spring up. To some degree, the magazine business became more democratized with the addition of more viewpoints. But those publications generally expanded the reach of magazines without toppling the more established titles. In the same way, some see little evidence that micromedia will displace established media today.

An important distinction to remember is that the economics of production and distribution in the magazine business, while less costly than before, were still substantial — keeping the number of new competitors to a handful. Moreover, competing with magazines that had larger circulation usually required considerable marketing budgets and years to build a large subscriber base.

On the Web, the barriers to entry are next to nothing. The costs associated with distributing content online are so low that anyone can join and experiment with the democratization of media.

And that experiment is quickly moving into the mainstream. Recently America Online announced it would get into the weblog game, putting simple and powerful publishing tools into the hands of more than 30 million members. Millions will own a press, making everyone a potential media outlet. With the ability to publish words and pictures even via their cell phone, citizens have the potential to observe and report more immediately than traditional media outlets do.

## Challenges to the media's hegemony

A democratized media challenges the notion of the institutional press as the exclusive, privileged, trusted, informed intermediary of the news.

According to a recent *Sports Illustrated* story, "there is little doubt that fan web sites are breaking — and making — news and dramatically reshaping the relationship between college coaches and the public.

"Mainstream news media, *SI* included, monitor web site message boards to take the public's pulse and, in some cases, look for news tips."<sup>4</sup>

Are respected news operations such as *SI* likely to be eliminated as one of the primary interme-



diaries of sports news any time soon? That's unlikely, but Web communities and even search engines are becoming valued outlets of news, which guide and direct their readers to information of interest. The role these sites play — as filters, simplifiers and clarifiers of news — is adding a new intermediary layer. They might not be the ultimate authority, but the new intermediaries — forums, weblogs, search engines, hoax-debunking sites — are helping audiences sort through the abundance of information available today.<sup>5</sup>

Many newspapers and TV stations have had years to establish the trust of their audiences. Yet participatory news sites, with their transparent and more intimate nature, are attracting legions of fans who contribute and collaborate with one another. In addition, recent surveys suggest people are beginning to place more trust in online sources and are seeking increasingly diverse news sources and perspectives.<sup>6</sup>

### **Credibility becomes redefined**

What are the implications of a distributed, collective pool of knowledge on credibility? Arguably, the stakes go up. Online communities require transparency of sources and reporting methods. Experts emerge through the recognition of their online peers rather than by anointment by the mass media.

For example, Glenn Fleishman, a freelance journalist in Seattle, has become one of the world's leading experts on wireless technology. He uses his weblog to both report on the latest developments in wi-fi and to interact with readers who might point him to a new wrinkle in the fast-moving field.<sup>7</sup>

In a digital medium, reputations form through a synthesis of consistency, accuracy and frequent comparison by the reader.

Says author Howard Rheingold: "I think people who are dedicated to establishing a reputation for getting the story right and getting it first don't necessarily have to work for *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times*."<sup>8</sup>

Individuals, institutions, the government and even reporters use the Web to maintain a record of their encounters with other media. The Department of Defense routinely posts transcripts of interviews with the Secretary of Defense and other high-ranking officials.

The motivation for self-publishing interviews appear to be twofold: To ensure that their words aren't misconstrued or misreported by the news media and to publish a complete public record of

what the person being interviewed is saying.

Even well-intentioned journalists may misinterpret an interviewee's meaning. Annotating provides the interviewee the opportunity to give his or her comments the kind of nuance, heft, context and thoughtfulness that might be left on the cutting-room floor in a news outlet's notoriously shrunken news hole.

One of the better examples of user-generated content actively challenging the media's credibility is product reviews. While mainstream readers might not actively seek news reports or political opinions from amateurs, many are willing to consult reviews contributed by strangers before they make a purchase.

Commerce sites like Amazon or product review sites such as Epinions.com or Edmunds.com put a great deal of emphasis on user-generated reviews and discussions. Many manufacturing companies like Subaru have taken notice and actively monitor discussion boards to understand what online communities think about their products.<sup>9</sup>

### **The rise of new experts and watchdogs**

News organizations have spent much time and effort trying to position their journalists as more than impartial observers. They have in many ways tried to present them as experts in a field or interpreters of events. This approach in a print or broadcast model makes perfect sense.

Online, the world of opinion and expert commentary is not restricted to the privileged. But forward-looking media companies don't view that development as a threat. News organizations still have the resources to become known as the definitive authority on various subjects. They will have to make way, however, for readers who want pick up the tools of journalism to contribute to a more informed citizenry and a more robust democracy.

For example, the news media and consumer non-profits no longer have a monopoly on serving as a watchdog on government and private industry. Individuals and citizen groups are stepping in to fill the void they believe has been created by lapses in coverage by big media.

One of the more ambitious attempts is the Government Information Awareness (GIA) project by the MIT Media Lab, created in response to the government's Total Information Awareness project, which aims to collect personal information on citizens and foreigners and analyze it to preempt terrorist activities.

In a sense, GIA hopes to be Big Brother's Big Brother: "To allow citizens to submit intelligence about government-related issues, while maintaining their anonymity. To allow members of the government a chance to participate in the process."<sup>10</sup>

Opensecrets.org, a site by the Center for Responsive Politics, tracks campaign contributions and corporate connections of government officials, from the president's administration to every member of Congress.

Citizens are also taking up a media watchdog role when it comes to chronicling perceived evidence of the news media's political bias, censorship or reporting inaccuracies.

Controversies surrounding the invasion of Iraq have fueled the launch of many sites. Mainstream media has been criticized for under-reporting both coalition force and Iraqi civilian casualties.<sup>11</sup> In response, two sites — Iraq Coalition Casualty Count and Iraq Body Count — have attempted to establish independent databases that tabulate deaths by reviewing military and news reports.<sup>12</sup> Each provides greater detail and accuracy than currently found in mainstream news reports. The sites also provide a transparency of sources and methodology rarely found in other media.

The Memory Hole, run by Russ Kick, is an example of a watchdog site that attempts to preserve and share information that has been removed from other sites on the Web or is difficult to find.<sup>13</sup>

FAIR.org scrutinizes media practices that "marginalize the public interest."<sup>14</sup> Established in 1986, the organization highlights neglected news stories, opposes efforts at censorship and defends First Amendment precepts.

In a similar vein, the Tyndall Report monitors the three major U.S. television networks' nightly newscasts and the time devoted to each story.<sup>15</sup>

In England, where the BBC is funded by public tax monies, groups like bbcwatch.com have sprung up to make sure the broadcast organization stays true to its charter, which pledges journalism that is impartial and comprehensive.

In the wake of corporate scandals and greater influence-peddling in Washington, grassroots organizations are also turning a watchful eye toward corporate responsibility. CommercialAlert.org, a 4-year-old consumer organization in Portland, Ore., tries "to keep the commercial culture within its proper sphere, and to prevent it from exploiting children and subverting the higher values of family, community, environmental integrity and democracy."

## Media organization & culture

Three incidents in the spring of 2003 point to the disruptive effects that the Internet has begun to sow in newsrooms — a disruption that threatens the status quo of news organization culture and policy.

- In April 2003, *The Hartford Courant* required a travel editor and former columnist, Denis Horgan, to stop posting commentary to his weblog.<sup>16</sup>
- A month earlier, CNN reporter Kevin Sites was told to discontinue posting to his blog, which featured first-hand accounts of the war in Iraq. According to a CNN spokesperson, "CNN.com prefers to take a more structured approach to presenting the news. ... We do not blog."<sup>17</sup>
- Similarly, *Time* magazine editors instructed reporter Joshua Kucera to stop posting reports from Kurdistan to his weblog.

The resistance in media organizations to these newer forms of expression is not surprising. But such incidents, which are likely to multiply, raise questions about the nature of the relationship between journalists and their employers.

Is a journalist, by virtue of his or her newsroom employment and access to newsmakers, not permitted to express a personal opinion outside of the office? Do media companies own an employee's free time? Do such prohibitions apply only to working journalists or to newsroom executives as well?

A chief concern on the part of news organizations is one of liability. Allowing reporters to write when off the clock might expose a company to a lawsuit. In addition, news outlets may perceive a reporter's weblog as competition, since it potentially draws eyeballs away from a media company's advertisers.

Yet, as media companies gear more of their operations to an online audience that expects a more interactive dynamic, things will have to change. The collaborative and fast-paced nature of online news will require new policies, technologies, organizational structures and workflows.

The assembly-line nature of broadcast and print media is not well-suited to developing content for smaller, more targeted audiences. Content will likely be published in a more continuous manner by teams or communities acting as an extension of the enterprise. Eventually, licensing and copyright policies will need to be reexamined to come into harmony with a collaborative audience model.

Moreover, measuring and managing the suc-

cess of such collaborative ventures might be a challenge and force some rethinking about how such projects are gauged within the larger organization.

Some news sites are experimenting on a small scale by co-opting successful participatory media models. MSNBC.com's Weblog Central section hosts a variety of analysts and columnists such as Instapundit.com's Glenn Reynolds and Eric Alterman of *The Nation*.

Some of the more ambitious efforts have come from the United Kingdom.

Whereas many larger news sites keep links to other sites to a minimum, Britain's *The Guardian*<sup>18</sup> maintains many weblogs that guide readers to the best of the Web, including other news sites.

The BBC has announced plans to make its entire archives available for non-commercial use. Called the BBC Creative Archive, it will offer more than 80 years of radio and broadcast programs free to anyone.

The BBC's director general, Greg Dyke, said the decision was made based on their sense of where the Internet was heading: "I believe that we are about to move into a second phase of the digital revolution, a phase which will be more about public than private value; about free, not pay services; about inclusivity, not exclusion.

"In particular, it will be about how public money can be combined with new digital technologies to transform everyone's lives."<sup>19</sup>

When some media outlets start making participatory media work effectively, media companies that dig in their heels and resist such changes may be seen as not only old-fashioned but out of touch.

### Journalism and the media workforce

Assuming that issues related to newsroom culture can be overcome, there are more hurdles facing the media.

Along with a rethinking of journalism's role in the online medium, new skills and attitudes will be required. Staffs will need to be motivated to collaborate with colleagues, strangers, sources and readers. After years of working their way up the professional ladder, some reporters will undoubtedly need to discover a newfound respect for their readers. Arrogance and aloofness are deadly qualities in a collaborative environment.

To be successful, reporters will need to be more than skilled writers. They will have to hone their skills in growing communities around specific

topics of interest.

"That's one of the great challenges to us as news gatherers and journalists," said Joan Connell, executive producer for opinion and community at MSNBC.com. "How do we discover information and share it in creative ways with people? Give them the information they need to make the choices in their lives as citizens."<sup>20</sup>

MSNBC.com believes that the editing process brings a higher degree of journalistic integrity to the news equation, and that's one factor that sets news organizations apart from personal weblogs.

"One of the values that we place on our own weblogs is that we edit our bloggers. Out there in the blogosphere, often it goes from the mind of the blogger to the mind of the reader, and there's no backup. ...I would submit that that editing function really is the factor that makes it journalism."<sup>21</sup>

Universities will also need to shape their journalism curricula to help students prepare for working in this new media ecosystem and the fast-changing tools needed.

A larger unknown for investigative reporters will be the impact of the Internet on sources. Now that we live on the cusp of a world in which everyone has the potential to be a reporter and a source, will that affect the behavior of sources when they are approached by mainstream journalists?

### Advertising and marketing

Clay Shirky believes that mass media are dead. In his essay "RIP the Consumer 1900-1999," he suggests that mass media depend on two important characteristics of the audience: size and silence.<sup>22</sup>

According to recent Nielsen ratings reports, the TV audience continues to become more fragmented, with new channels continuing to proliferate. (Nightly network news viewership dropped in half from 1993 to 2002.<sup>23</sup>) Today, an unqualified ratings champion is a fraction of what it was several years ago. Audiences, while still fairly large, are diminishing in size.

To Shirky, silence means that the audience remains passive. The Internet has helped to fracture mass media by empowering the audience to take a more active role when interacting with media.

"The Internet heralds the disappearance of the consumer altogether," Shirky writes, "because the Internet destroys the noisy advertiser/silent consumer relationship that the mass media relies

upon. The rise of the Internet undermines the existence of the consumer because it undermines the role of mass media. In the age of the Internet, no one is a passive consumer anymore because everyone is a media outlet.”<sup>24</sup>

There are a number of challenges facing media companies in the long run, if Shirky’s argument is valid.

First, traditional media may need to rethink how to measure economic success. One option is to explore avenues for targeted, personalized advertising aimed at individuals or small identifiable groups. Another is to consider the possibility of moving away from an advertising-supported business model and toward subscriptions and other pay-for-content models. Real-time data about readership and viewership might lead to new pricing rules where fixed pricing is replaced by real-time market adjustments.

In addition, media companies will likely have to devise new ways to present audiences to advertisers. Typically, standard demographics are the measure of an audience. It may be that more creative and descriptive measures of audiences, based around psychographic characteristics, will be devised.

Such changes cannot happen without expecting a change in the relationship between businesses and their customers. While many news sites have experimented with personalization as a means to identify more targeted advertising opportunities,<sup>25</sup> they have only fleetingly experimented with new ways to allow consumers to interact with advertisers.

### **Citizens as stakeholders in the journalistic process**

Increasingly, audiences are becoming stakeholders in the news process. Rather than passively accepting news coverage decided upon by a handful of editors, they fire off e-mails, post criticism of perceived editorial shortcomings on weblogs and in forums, and support or fund an independent editorial enterprise.

In June 2000 the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund launched Women’s eNews, a

news service run by a small staff of professional journalists who work with a national network of free-lance writers. Devoted to coverage of women’s issues, the site became a fully independent operation in early 2002. In July 2003 it won four journalism awards from the National Federation of Press Women and continues to probe issues often overlooked by the mainstream media.<sup>26</sup>

Occasionally, readers will dig into their own pockets to finance a journalism effort they find worthwhile. Freelance journalist Christopher Allbritton received \$14,334 from 320 people who funded his trip to Iraq to report his first-hand observations of the war zone. He filed daily dispatches on his Web site, Back-to-Iraq.com, about the fall of Tikrit and reported on the region’s ethnic tensions.<sup>27</sup>

A freelance journalist from Maine, David Appel, asked readers of his weblog to pony up to let him pursue an investigative story. After receiving more than \$200, Appel investigated a sugar lobbying group’s attempt to get Congress to kill funding for the World Health Organization, whose policies had offended corporate sugar interests.<sup>28</sup>

While war reporting and investigative reporting remain the province of trained journalists, more often citizens are taking up the tools of journalism to write about favorite topics. Columnist J.D. Lasica calls these do-it-yourself entries “random acts of journalism,” as when Jessica Rios, a 22-year-old woman in Los Angeles, attended a Coldplay concert and wrote a review of their performance on her weblog.<sup>29</sup>

The author Howard Rheingold is representative of a new kind of reader who spends more time with favorite weblogs and collaborative media than with traditional media. “The things I’m interested in, from pop culture to wireless policy to copyright, you have to go to the fanatics,” he said.<sup>30</sup> And those fanatics are more easily found in niche online media.

In the next chapter we explore the potential practical benefits of integrating participatory journalism into mainstream news operations.

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## CHAPTER 6

## Potential benefits of We Media

Participatory journalism is not going to disappear any time soon. Communication, collaboration and sharing personal passions have been at the heart of the Internet since its inception more than 30 years ago.

David Weinberger, author of *Small Pieces Loosely Joined*, says that this is because the Web is not just a giant marketplace or an information resource. Rather, “it’s a social commons on which the interests of a mass of individuals are splayed in universally accessible detail and trumpeted in an effectively infinite array of personal voices.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Scott Rosenberg, managing editor of Salon.com, what Weinberger reminds us is that “every Web site, every Internet posting matters to the person who created it — and maybe to that person’s circle of site visitors, whether they number 10 million or just 10.”

“Individually, these contributions may be crude, untrustworthy, unnoteworthy. Collectively, they represent the largest and most widely accessible pool of information and entertainment in human history. And it’s still growing.”<sup>2</sup>

If media companies are going to collaborate with their audiences online, they must begin to consider a news and information Web site as a platform that supports social interaction around the stories they create. These interactions are as important as the narrative, perhaps more so, because they are created and owned by the audience. In a networked world, media whose primary value lies in its ability to connect people will win.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter explores the potential benefits to media companies and businesses that adopt participatory journalism in meaningful ways. Possible examples include enabling editors and reporters to publish a weblog about the subjects they cover; hosting, moderating and participating in discussion forums or groups about news; encouraging audience contribution of editorial content for distribution on a Web site or in a traditional media product; enabling your readers to purchase online advertising through affordable text ads. The possibilities are limitless, as long as it includes an effort to engage the audience in an authentic conversation and collaboration.

An involved, empowered audience could well bring a number of potential benefits to media companies. From our research, we have compiled the following list of benefits:

### Increased trust in media

According to a USA Today/CNN/Gallup Poll in June 2003, only 36 percent of those polled believe the news media generally “get the facts straight.”<sup>4</sup> News media have their work cut out in restoring their reputations and their readers’ sense of trust.

Participatory journalism provides media companies with the potential to develop a more loyal and trustworthy relationship with their audiences. This can happen, for example, with a reporter who writes a weblog, asking the audience to fuel her efforts by providing tips, feedback and first-hand accounts that confirm a story’s premise or that take it in a different direction. We Media can also provide the audience a deeper level of understanding about the reporting process by illustrating, for example, how a reporter must balance competing interests. This communication can lead to a lasting trust.

*Time* magazine media critic James Poniewozik explains how this is possible, when he describes the perception gap between the audience and the media about trust. “Journalists think trust equals accuracy. But it’s about much more: passion, genuineness, integrity.”<sup>5</sup> Honest conversation and passionate collaboration could instill respect and trust into the relationship between both parties.

Involving an audience, either small or large, in the creation of content also gives them a sense of ownership — an affinity with the media brand that they believe they are not getting today — as well as a more intimate relationship with the storytellers.

### Shared responsibility in informing democracy

An audience that participates in the journalistic process is more demanding than passive consumers of news. But they may also feel empowered to make a difference. As a result, they feel as though they have a shared stake in the end result.

According to Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, authors of the book *The Elements of Journalism*, citizens must take an active, collaborative role in the journalistic process if we are to realize an effective journalism that appropriately informs a democracy.

“Journalists must invite their audience into the process by which they produce the news,” Kovach and Rosenstiel write in their book. “They should take pains to make themselves and their work as transparent as they insist on making the people and institutions of power they cover. This sort of approach is, in effect, the beginning of a new kind of connection between the journalist and the citizen. It is one in which individuals in the audience are given a chance to judge the principles by which the journalists do their work.”

“The first step in that direction has to be developing a means of letting those who make up that market finally see how the sausage is made — how we do our work and what informs our decisions.”<sup>6</sup>

Many journalists who are already weblogging are doing just that — exposing the raw material of their stories-in-progress, posting complete text of interviews after the story is published, and inviting comments, fact checking and feedback that contribute to follow-up stories.

### Memorable experiences created

Online interactive experiences are more memorable than relatively static experiences such as newspapers, according to Web usability expert Jakob Nielsen. “Moving around is what the Web is all about,” Nielsen explains. “When analyzing the ‘look-and-feel’ of a web site, the feel completely dominates the user experience. After all, doing is more memorable and makes a stronger emotional impact than seeing.”<sup>7</sup>

Collaborating and having a conversation with audience members is sure to provide an even more meaningful and memorable experience than passive consumption of news.

Likewise, enabling your audience to talk about and extend news stories also increases retention and understanding. When we read a story that grabs us, we want to tell others, who will also likely tell others. Good stories are inherently infectious. Sharing and discussing them is a natural extension of the experience.

“As users have greater effect upon the experience, they become more absorbed (immersed) in the experience,” according to the authors of a research study, “Interactive Features of Online

Newspapers.”

“What users do with content is more important than how content may affect users. Users are actively chasing discovery, rather than passively being informed.”<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, the authors argue, “journalists today must choose. As gatekeepers they can transfer lots of information, or they can make users a smarter, more active and questioning audience for news events and issues.”

### The next generation of news consumers

Increasing interactivity and enabling audience participation have an additional benefit — attracting a younger audience, the next generation of news consumers.

“Kids today expect to interact with their media,” according to Steve Outing, a senior editor at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, and an interactive media columnist for *Editor & Publisher Online*. “From playing interactive online games, to using instant messenger (IM) services to communicate with friends, to interacting with their television (by having control over when programs are watched, and skipping commercials with devices like TiVo and ReplayTV), today’s kids expect their media to offer a two-way street of communication.”<sup>9</sup>

“A safe assumption is that when today’s children and teenagers reach adulthood, they’ll not be tolerant of media that’s one-way, that’s not interactive. They expect to be able to manipulate media content, and to share it with others. The one-way conversation of a printed newspaper won’t do — thus print’s prospects for the young digital generation are not promising. Newspaper Web sites and other newspaper digital media formats likewise cannot afford to perpetuate the one-way model. They’ve got to become more interactive.”

### Better stories — and better journalism

An interesting question, yet to be addressed by research in this field, is: Does participatory journalism — the process of collaboration and conversation between media and the audience — ultimately help create better stories and better storytellers?

“I’ve found that my readers definitely know more than I do, and, to my benefit, they share their knowledge,” says *San Jose Mercury News* technology columnist Dan Gillmor, who has been writing a weblog since 1999.<sup>10</sup>

Based on Gillmor’s experience and that of oth-

ers in the field, reporters who write weblogs and collaborate with their audiences in various ways ultimately write more compelling and accurate stories. One reason is that listening to and collaborating with your audience helps to develop a broader base of sources who are experts in wide-ranging subject matter.

Journalism researcher Mark Deuze explains: “The Internet as it wires millions of individuals as potential information experts into a global communications infrastructure provides an ideal platform for improving journalism by incorporating the expertise of people ‘outside of the Rolodex.’”<sup>11</sup>

Sheila Lennon, a features and interactive producer with Projo.com, the Web site of *The Providence Journal*, says collaborating with the audience “can make for better reporting, especially when sources contact me out of the blue because they feel the know me from the weblog and choose to trust me with their news.”

Voice and personality are also key hallmarks of participatory media. Several observers have argued that the informal style found in many participatory forms free the writer from the “official voice” of the media company, and that makes for better storytelling. The official voice of journalism is usually formal, often drained of color and attitude, and written as an objective and balanced account. In contrast, weblogs and discussion groups thrive on their vivid writing, controversial points of view and personality-rich nature — traits that many readers find compelling.

Columnist J.D. Lasica goes so far as to argue that newspaper webloggers should not be subject to the newsroom’s routine editing filter. On his weblog he called for a form of Editing Lite: “Perhaps the chief appeal and attraction of weblogs are their free-form, unfiltered nature. You get to hear people in their natural dialect, writing from their gut with a voice and tone that too often can be filtered into a homogenous blandness after passing through the typical newsroom’s editing machine. A lightly edited, hands-off weblog would show journalists as human beings with opinions, emotions and personal lives.”<sup>12</sup>

Audience participation serves another salutary function. The mainstream media tend to dispose of stories in a fast-paced news cycle. Even important news events often fall off the media’s radar screen after 48 hours. The blogosphere and discussion forums keep stories alive by recirculating them and regurgitating them with new angles

or insights. Weblogs have been credited with keeping in the public spotlight Sen. Trent Lott’s statement expressing fondness for the Dixiecrat era of one-time segregationist Strom Thurmond, a controversy that led to Lott stepping down as Senate majority leader.<sup>13</sup>

### **A scalable virtual staff**

An involved audience can play the role of a scalable virtual staff — a massive pool of grassroots writers, commentators, photographers and videographers. Collaborating with them enables media to be and go where they normally cannot, due to geography or cost.

For example, in the weeks leading up to the Iraq war, BBC News asked its worldwide audience to send in digital images from anti-war protests held around the globe, then published a slide show of the best images on its Web site.<sup>14</sup>

The events calendar on SciFi.com is a good example of building a virtual staff as well as editorial content getting better through user participation. Craig E. Engler, a general manager at SciFi.com, says that one-quarter of all events on the calendar are submitted by their fans. “They usually send us things that we might otherwise miss on our own, so it balances our work nicely,” Engler said.<sup>15</sup>

Using the audience as an extension of your staff will help develop a broader base of editorial voices and perspectives from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds.

### **Fostering community**

Traditionally, media companies have viewed the concept of online community no differently than a section of a newspaper (à la Letters to the Editor) or a segment of a newscast. It is something that has been segregated from the news — a closed-off annex where readers can talk and discuss, as long as the media companies don’t have to be too involved. Such an architected virtual space is not a true online community. Real communities have leaders, moderators and involved participants who care about their space.

Participatory journalism helps develop real community around reporters, stories, and the media company’s brand experience. With a weblog, for example, a reporter has a place to extend reporting, interact with readers, exercise personal conscience, and share some level of personality that might be absent from his “unbiased” reports. These are elements that attract real community.



Projo.com's Lennon shared with us an excellent story describing how this occurred with a breaking news story in February 2003. The rock band Jack Russell's Great White used a pyrotechnic display that triggered a fire and killed 97 people in a Rhode Island nightclub called The Station. It became a national story overnight.<sup>16</sup>

"When The Station nightclub fire happened, I created a special weblog for that on *The Providence Journal* Web site, and it resulted in a real exchange of information. I was updating constantly with information found in the forums at sites such as roadie.net, KNAC.com, in newsgroups and in smaller local papers and far-flung hometown papers of victims.

"My e-mail address became a contact point. Friends and relatives of victims e-mailed me the URLs of pages set up for those in the hospital; the photo on the weblog of the club before the fire originally came by e-mail from the mother of the man who had painted the mural, and the National Fire Protection Association e-mailed me looking for the original. Clubs e-mailed information on hastily arranged benefits for the weekend after the fire — and, in the course of calling to check details and confirm those benefits, I learned that the first of many clubs had been temporarily closed after a sudden wave of fire inspections and broke that news.

"I was in the office of the deputy managing editor as she read my story about it on the web site to the bureau manager in the closed club's town. It was the first he'd heard of it, and he was being dispatched to follow it up for the paper.

"The readers became the sources as a community pooled its knowledge. The nature of this event, which involved so many people, so many questions and reporting spread all over the web, would have led to the invention of a weblog on the spot even if I hadn't already been weblogging on the site. It was the only way to handle that much incoming information in a way that invited readers to add what they knew — or found — to our common body of knowledge.

"I answered every e-mail, and expressed my sympathy to every friend and relative before

diving into the substance of their information. It reinforced that caring humans were reporting this story, and 'Thank God for The Journal' was commonly heard in those dark days."

Using participatory journalism, Lennon engaged the readers in the reporting process, creating a community around a breaking news story as well as building a community around the reporter's brand and the newspaper's brand.

## Network identity

In the past 10 years there have been numerous scientific discoveries about how networks form and behave. This has led us to understand that networks are driven by hubs and nodes.

"There is a hierarchy of hubs that keep these networks together, a heavily connected node closely followed by several less connected ones, trailed by dozens of even smaller nodes," writes Albert-László Barabási in his book *Linked: The New Science of Networks*. "No central node sits in the middle of the spider web, controlling and monitoring every link and node."

"Real networks are self-organized. They offer a vivid example of how the independent actions of millions of nodes and links lead to a spectacular emergent behavior."<sup>17</sup>

News media have traditionally viewed themselves as central nodes in the information network, with the power to control the ebb and flow of news. On the Web, that is no longer possible. News sites that sit behind registration firewalls, or whose content is quickly moved into paid archives, display the characteristics of a cul-de-sac rather than a connected node on a network.

Adopting various forms of participatory journalism will increase the importance of your company's hub in the network economy. By increasing the number of connections — though weblogs, forums, XML syndication and collaborative publishing engines — the strength of a media company's node is enhanced.

In the next chapter, we look at various ways in which media companies can retool themselves to become a powerful force in an era of participatory journalism.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Scott Rosenberg paraphrasing of Weinberger's concepts in "The media titans still don't get it," Salon.com, Aug. 13, 2002. [http://www.salon.com/tech/feature/2002/08/13/media\\_titans/](http://www.salon.com/tech/feature/2002/08/13/media_titans/)  
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- <sup>2</sup> Rosenberg.
- <sup>3</sup> Ellen Kampinsky, Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis, "Amazoning the News," Hypergene.net, February 2001. <http://www.hypergene.net/ideas/amazon.html>
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- <sup>7</sup> Jakob Nielsen, "Differences Between Print Design and Web Design." Published on the author's Web site, Useit.com, Jan. 24, 1999. <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/990124.html>
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- <sup>10</sup> Dan Gillmor, "Here Comes We Media," *Columbia Journalism Review*, January/February 2003. <http://www.cjr.org/year/03/1/gillmor.asp>
- <sup>11</sup> Mark Deuze, "Online Journalism: Modelling the First Generation of News Media on the World Wide Web," FirstMonday.org, Volume 6, Number 10 (October 2001). [http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue6\\_10/deuze/index.html](http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_10/deuze/index.html)
- <sup>12</sup> J.D. Lasica, "Should newspaper bloggers be subjected to the editing filter?," New Media Musings weblog, Feb. 5, 2003. [http://www.jdlasica.com/blog/archives/2003\\_02\\_05.html#000014](http://www.jdlasica.com/blog/archives/2003_02_05.html#000014)
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- <sup>14</sup> "Your pictures of the anti-war demonstrations," BBC.com, Feb. 18, 2003. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking\\_point/2763101.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/2763101.stm)  
Steve Outing also has documented several other excellent examples of audience photo submissions in his *Stop The Presses* column, "Photo Phones Portend Visual Revolution," on *Editor & Publisher Online*, March 12, 2003. [http://www.editorandpublisher.com/editorandpublisher/features\\_columns/article\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1835539](http://www.editorandpublisher.com/editorandpublisher/features_columns/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1835539)
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- <sup>16</sup> Sheila Lennon's story comes from an e-mail interview, conducted by the authors July 2003. You can see the reporting process unfold, if you read the weblog Sheila created on Projo.com, starting from the bottom up. <http://www.projo.com/cgi-bin/include.pl/blogs/stationfire/week1.htm>
- <sup>17</sup> Albert-László Barabási, *Linked: The New Science of Networks* (Perseus Publishing, May 2002), Pg. 221.

CHAPTER 7

## How media might respond

**M**edia organizations will need to rethink some of their basic ideas about journalism, organization and the role of audience if they hope to remain indispensable resources to their readers and viewers.

This section explores effective ways of integrating participatory journalism into existing media operations.

### Connections = Value

Our research suggests a simple proposition for media in the network economy: Connections equals Value. There are three types of connections that media should consider:

**1. Continuous connections:** Magazines and newspapers need Internet counterparts that are providing continuous updates to their audience. This doesn't mean a web site filled with shovelware content. It needs to be a 24x7x365, living, breathing, responsive extension of your brand. Increase the frequency of connections with daily e-mail newsletters, weblogs, RSS feeds and forums.

**2. Network connections, online and off:** Use your content (print and online) as a platform to guide and direct readers to additional news, information and experiences on the Web and in other media. Ultimately, this will make your content more valuable because it's connected to similar information. As well, your customers' media diet is becoming more varied and vast. Don't leave your product in a cul-de-sac.

**3. Intercast connections:** A successful news Web site is a platform that supports social interaction around the story. Print media must begin to engage and grow online community in order to build affinity and loyalty to their brand experience. Community members have a stake in your brand when they engage the journalistic process — by providing valuable commentary, displaying their mastery of a subject, offering grassroots reporting and acting as filters for their fellow readers.

News organizations have policies, practices and traditions that discourage connections. Despite this, the audience is still managing to become part of the news equation by creating links and commentary that center on news events. The

emergent behavior of participatory journalism suggests that audiences want to create intimate connections with news organizations, reporters and the stories they produce. The challenge in newsrooms will be to persuade writers, editors and advertisers to stop thinking in terms of a broadcast model (one-to-many) and to start "thinking network" (one-to-one).

At the strategic level, a corporation must decide: Is the value of your audience going to be its size or the quality of its participation? Most likely, both factors will come into play. That leads directly to the next set of questions: What is it worth to acquire participants? What are you willing to do to keep them for the long term?

### Make your newsroom responsive to change

According to Albert-László Barabási, author of *Linked: The New Science of Networks*, media organizations are tree networks. "The CEO sits at the root and the bifurcating branches represent the increasingly specialized and nonoverlapping tasks of lower-level manager and workers," Barabási writes. "Responsibility decays as you move down the branches, ending with drone executors of orders conceived at the roots."<sup>1</sup>

This is the standard model of corporations, one that has been ingrained in their DNA for more than 100 years.

"These days, however, the value is in ideas and information," Barabási writes. "As companies face an information explosion and an unprecedented need for flexibility in a rapidly changing marketplace, the corporate model is in the midst of a complete makeover.

"The most visible element of this remaking is a shift from a tree to a web or network organization, flat and with lots of cross-links between the nodes."

The internal remaking of media companies, transforming them from tree organizations into web networks, is only one consequence of a network economy, Barabási says. "Another is the realization that companies never work alone. They collaborate with other institutions, adapting business practices proved successful in

other organizations.” In the case of participatory journalism, this means that media companies will increasingly collaborate with their audience, either directly in a one-on-one fashion, or indirectly using audience-created communities such as Slashdot.org as leads for story generation.

But none of this will happen unless the media organization and its business culture are transformed.<sup>2</sup> Such a radical change will not occur overnight. This is uncharted territory for most and large-scale change in corporations is fraught with pitfalls.

With media companies still generating respectable returns on investment, the smart money will be on those organizations that can integrate successful experiments supported by better staff training, equipment and practices that encourage reporters and editors to interact with their audience.

### **Give your staff some level of autonomy**

Media companies must consider that the role of reporters and editors are in flux. Your audience wants a closer relationship with the storytellers. Reporters and editors must find the proper balance between encouraging audience participation and producing something ready for publication or broadcast — and finding that balance may prove difficult.

Reporters and editors will need to be empowered to grow communities of interest online. As the value of their communities grows so will it enhance the value of the media organization.

However, we are increasingly seeing media companies force their employees to make the choice between their jobs and their weblogs, rather than trying to determine how blogging can serve the interests of both parties. Such controlling behavior on the part of media companies sends a negative message to their audiences. Readers begin to wonder, “If journalists cannot be heard, then what is the media company hiding?” Weblogs are an excellent way for staff members and readers to bridge the communication gap.

A key component of what makes a good journalist, according to Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, is an obligation to personal conscience. “Every journalist — from the newsroom to the boardroom — must have a personal sense of ethics and responsibility — a moral compass,” they say in their book *The Elements of Journalism*. “What’s more, they have a responsibility to voice their personal conscience out loud and allow others

around them to do so as well.

“The top-down structure of oligarchies usually makes it more difficult for individuals to be heard on abstract matters, such as ethics or questions of conscience. As long as we have one newspaper and only three or four TV stations doing news in most cities, we cannot rely solely on the marketplace to protect journalism ethics.”

But providing journalists with some measure of autonomy goes beyond questions of ethics and conscience. Such a move can lead to more compelling stories, fostering a closer relationship between audience and storyteller, outside of the classic construct of a newspaper or TV station. Ultimately, the audience develops an allegiance to those who are authentic and open in their pursuit of journalism.

News organizations and audiences will have to become more comfortable with a duality they have wrestled with for years — journalist as objective observer and as an informed conscience.

### **Embrace the audience as valued partner**

Critical to any participatory model is the understanding that the audience needs to play a meaningful role in the news process. Ohmynews.com relies upon thousands of citizen journalists to produce the majority of the site’s daily content.

While that model might appear extreme to many traditional news organizations, it illustrates that there are thousands of people eager to contribute to the news equation. Publications such as the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, *Dallas Morning News* and BBC News have taken a step in that direction by soliciting reader photographs, news accounts and other user-generated content.<sup>3</sup>

News organizations also need to consider how to empower the audience as a valued intermediary of the news. When deciding on what news to read, the audience often trusts other audience members for recommendations before they trust an editor. Thus, the popularity of “most-read and most-emailed stories” pages on news sites. Likewise, this is one of the reasons why weblogs are useful. Weblogs act as a filter on the news, helping its audience cut through the fat of the news and get to what’s important to them.

News organizations face a challenge in deciding the extent to which they want to leverage audience participation and incorporate it into their news products.

### **Embrace customers as innovators**

According to a *Harvard Business Review* article

on turning your customers into innovators, organizations need to provide some type of free toolkit to effectively collaborate with their customers.<sup>4</sup> Here's what a customer collaboration toolkit for news media might contain:

- **Open-source style guide:** One of the hidden parts of journalism is style. If media are going to enable its audience to produce news and information, then it behooves media to educate its audience on the best ways to produce it. Why not make your style guide open source? Being accurate, reliable and consistent has value, and something like an open-source style guide is critical to infecting social networks with the power to adopt journalism's best practices. The BBC offers its style guide online along with journalism courses.<sup>5</sup> Many universities also post their style guides online.
- **Provide a journalism learning program:** For those audience members who really want to become full-fledged journalists, a learning program is the next step. Such a program would encompass writing, editing, audio, video and still photography. Participants should do more than take notes; they should report on an event and then engage in a group discussion that examines best practices. Such a course also must include an ethics guide. Certification, or graduation, could be a requirement for a participant to become a "trusted" contributor. Media might consider adopting a program similar to MIT's OpenCourseWare, which includes lecture notes, video lectures, simulations and lab courses.<sup>6</sup>
- **Encourage low-cost content management solutions:** Large newspaper sites use expensive and complicated content management systems, but that doesn't mean their audience should, too. Encourage audience members to create their own content. This, in turn, will make a more fertile ground for your content. If you cannot provide the publishing tools for them, guide them to open-source tools or other reasonable platforms. Consider offering Web services, as Amazon, eBay and Google do, to provide audiences with a way to

create new products that enhance your news and information. Some blogging tools, such as MovableType, have features that provide notifications when someone has commented on a story. Integrating such functionality in news sites can greatly increase the interest and goodwill of communities.

### **Don't own the story. Share the story.**

"We have to convince journalists that the consumer owns the story," says Dan Bradley, vice president of broadcast news at Media General and former news director of WFLA-TV.<sup>7</sup>

The last and perhaps most important step for a media company to take is to relinquish control. News media are geared to own a story. They shape it, package it and sell it. But that mindset might make organization blind to the larger opportunity.

"The story itself is not the final product, it's just the starting point, because ultimately the goal of every story is to start discussion, to start a lot of other people saying what they think about it," says Rusty Foster, founder of Kuro5hin.org.

"A story (on Kuro5hin.org) isn't considered complete when it's posted (online). That's just the beginning of the story, and then people post comments and discuss the story. And eventually, after a while, you have sort of a complete view of an issue because many people are talking about it."<sup>8</sup>

Today, news media organizations are actually story instigators. They track down important stories and relay them to the world. Once they are released, stories transform and can take a life of their own beyond the control of the news organization. The Internet community (and other media) appropriates the stories, retells them, comments on them, adds additional information or overlooked angles, and reworks them as part of a broad-based web of ideas and information. That's not only a good thing, it's essential. If it's not happening, it means your reporting has little value to your audience.

If journalism is indeed about informing the community and lifting up our fellow citizens, we need to evolve. We need to tell better stories and, while doing so, we need to engage the world.

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> See “Managing the Connected Organization,” by Valdis E. Krebs for advice on how to create effective connections within your organization.

<http://www.orgnet.com/MCO.html>

<sup>3</sup> J.D. Lasica, “Participatory Journalism Puts the Reader in the Driver’s Seat,” *Online Journalism Review*, Aug. 7, 2003.

<http://www.ojr.org/ojr/workplace/1060218311.php>

<sup>4</sup> Stefan Thomke, Eric Von Hippel, “Customers as Innovators: A New Way to Create Value,” *Harvard Business Review*, April 1, 2002.

[http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu/bo1/en/common/item\\_detail.jhtml?id=R0204F](http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu/bo1/en/common/item_detail.jhtml?id=R0204F)

<sup>5</sup> BBC News Styleguide

<http://www.bbcetraining.co.uk/onlineCourse.asp?tID=5487&cat=3>

<sup>6</sup> MIT OpenCourseWare

<http://ocw.mit.edu/index.html>

Also see David Diamond’s article, “MIT Everywhere,” which recounts the impact of MIT’s online learning program (*Wired*, September 2003).

<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.09/mit.html>

<sup>7</sup> Cory Bergman, “The Convergence Culture,” *LostRemote.com* Web site, Feb. 18, 2002.

<http://www.lostremote.com/story/convergenceclash.html>

<sup>8</sup> From a panel discussion, “Journalism’s New Life Forms: Community Publishing, Weblogging, Self-Broadcasting & More” at the Online News Association Annual Conference, Berkeley, Calif., Oct. 27, 2001.

<http://www.jdlasica.com/articles/ONA-panel.html>

APPENDIX

## Resources for We Media

### Weblogs & related sites

#### Hypergene MediaBlog

Weblog about participatory journalism by the authors of this paper, Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis  
<http://www.hypergene.net/blog/weblog.php>

#### New Media Musings

Weblog of J.D. Lasica, senior editor for OJR  
<http://www.newmediamusings.com/blog/>

#### Weblogs and the News

An introduction to blogging and journalism  
<http://jdlasica.com/articles/roundup.html>

#### Dan Gillmor's eJournal

Weblog of San Jose Mercury News technology columnist  
<http://weblog.siliconvalley.com/column/dangillmor/>

#### Cyberjournalist.net

Weblog by MSNBC.com technology editor Jonathan Dube, sponsored by the American Press Institute.  
<http://www.cyberjournalist.net/>

#### Amateur Hour: the "Me" in Media

Jonathan Peterson's weblog about the democratization of media  
<http://www.corante.com/amateur/>

#### Many-to-Many

Collaborative weblog on social software  
<http://www.corante.com/many/>

#### Clay Shirky

Essays about media, community, open source and more  
<http://www.shirky.com/>

#### Seb's Open Research

Weblog on the evolution of knowledge sharing  
<http://radio.weblogs.com/0110772/>

#### Meg Hourihan

Weblog by the co-founder of Pyra, the company behind Blogger, and co-author of *We Blog*  
<http://www.megnut.com/>

#### Jason Kottke

Weblog about Web technology, media and network science  
<http://www.kottke.org/>

#### Evan Williams

Weblog by CEO of Pyra, the company behind Blogger  
<http://www.evhead.com/>

#### David Weinberger

Weblog by author of *Small Pieces Loosely Joined*; co-author of *The Cluetrain Manifesto*  
<http://www.hyperorg.com/blogger/index.html>

#### Doc Searls

Weblog by co-author of *The Cluetrain Manifesto*; senior editor of *Linux Journal*  
<http://doc.weblogs.com/>

#### Dave Winer

Weblog by the creator of UserLand Software  
<http://www.scripting.com/>

#### Nick Denton

Weblog by the founder of Gawker and Gizmodo and former chief executive of Moreover Technologies  
<http://www.nickdenton.org/>

#### Joichi Ito

Weblog by the CEO of Neoteny, a VC firm  
<http://joi.ito.com/>

#### MediaSavvy

Barry Parr's analysis of media news and research  
<http://www.mediasavvy.com/>

#### E-Media Tidbits

Collaborative weblog by the Poynter Institute for Media Studies about online media and journalism  
<http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=31>

#### Online Community Report

Free e-mail newsletter about online group collaboration  
<http://www.onlinecommunityreport.com/>

#### Design for Community

Essays from Derek Powazek, author of book by same name  
<http://designforcommunity.com/>

#### I Want Media

Media news, interviews and resources by Patrick Phillips.  
<http://www.iwantmedia.com/>

#### Romenesko

Poynter Institute weblog on media industry news, commentary and internal memos  
<http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=45>

#### Adrian Holovaty

Weblog that focuses on design, usability of news Web sites.  
<http://www.holovaty.com/>

#### Steven Berlin Johnson

Weblog by the author of *Emergence*  
<http://stevenberlinjohnson.dreamhost.com/>

#### Mitch Ratcliffe

Journalist whose blog covers business, technology and investing  
<http://www.ratcliffe.com/bizblog/>

#### Jeff Jarvis

Weblog by the president of Advance.net  
<http://www.buzzmachine.com/>

#### Matt Haughey

Weblog by the co-author of *We Blog* and creator of the community weblog MetaFilter  
<http://a.wholelottanothing.org/>

#### Marc Canter

Weblog by the founder of MacroMind  
<http://blogs.it/0100198/>

#### Blogosphere

Weblog by Nicholas Jon on weblogging, new media  
<http://www.blogosphere.us/>

#### Slashdot

News for nerds, stuff that matters  
<http://slashdot.org/>

#### Kuro5hin

Technology and culture, from the trenches  
<http://www.kuro5hin.org/>

#### MetaFilter

Community weblog, with topics that run the gamut  
<http://www.metafilter.com/>

#### J-Log

Journalism news and views from K. Paul Mallasch  
<http://www.mallasch.com/journalism/>

### Creative Commons

Released a set of copyright licenses free for use  
<http://creativecommons.org/>

### First Monday

Peer-reviewed journal on the Internet  
<http://www.firstmonday.org/>

### Pew Internet & American Life

Research and reports on the impact of the Internet  
<http://www.pewinternet.org/>

### Journalism.org

Research, resources and ideas to improve journalism  
<http://www.journalism.org/>

### Online Journalism Review

Articles on new media by a staff at USC Annenberg  
[http://www.ojr.org/ojr/page\\_one/index.php](http://www.ojr.org/ojr/page_one/index.php)

### Online News Association

5-year-old organization devoted to enhancing online news  
<http://journalists.org>

### Instant Messaging Planet

News and research on instant messaging  
<http://www.instantmessagingplanet.com/>

## WEBLOG INDICES, RESOURCES AND SEARCH

**Blogdex:** <http://blogdex.media.mit.edu/>

**Daypop Top 40:** <http://www.daypop.com/top/>

**Popdex:** <http://www.popdex.com/>

**Technorati:** <http://www.technorati.com/>

**Waypath:** <http://www.waypath.com/>

**Photoblogs:** <http://www.photoblogs.org/>

**Blogwise:** <http://www.blogwise.com/>

**BlogStreet:** <http://www.blogstreet.com/>

**Organica:** <http://organica.us/>

## Books

### NETWORK THEORY

#### Linked: The New Science of Networks

by Albert-László Barabási  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0738206679/>  
Author site: <http://www.nd.edu/~alb/>

#### Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age

by Duncan J. Watts  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0393041425/>

#### Small Worlds

by Duncan J. Watts  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0691005419/>

#### Nexus: Small Worlds and the Groundbreaking Science of Networks

by Mark Buchanan  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0393041530/>

#### Sync: The Emerging Science of Spontaneous Order

by Steven Strogatz  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0786868449/>

#### Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software

by Steven Johnson  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/068486875X/>

#### The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference

by Malcolm Gladwell  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0316346624/>

#### The Emergence of Everything: How the World Became Complex

by Harold J. Morowitz  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/019513513X/>

## ONLINE COMMUNITY

### Design for Community:

**The Art of Connecting Real People in Virtual Places**  
by Derek M. Powazek  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0735710759/>  
Web site: <http://designforcommunity.com/>

### Community Building on the Web: Secret Strategies for Successful Online Communities

by Amy Jo Kim  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0735710759/>

### The Virtual Community:

**Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier**  
by Howard Rheingold  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0060976411/>

### Online Communities: Designing Usability and Supporting Sociability

by Jennifer Preece  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/047180599/>

## WEBLOGS

### The Weblog Handbook:

**Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining Your Blog**  
by Rebecca Blood  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/073820756X/>  
Author weblog: <http://www.rebeccablood.net/>

### We've Got Blog: How Weblogs Are Changing Our Culture

by Editors of Perseus Publishing, Rebecca Blood  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0738207411/>

### We Blog: Publishing Online with Weblogs

by Paul Bausch, Meg Hourihan, Matt Haughey  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0764549626/>  
Weblog: <http://www.blogroots.com/>

### Essential Blogging

by Shelley Powers (Editor), et al (Paperback)  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0596003889/>  
Author weblog: <http://weblog.burningbird.net/>

### Blogging: Genius Strategies for Instant Web Content

by Biz Stone  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0735712999/>

### Running Weblogs With Slash

by Chromatic, et al  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0596001002/>

### Blog On: Building Online Communities With Weblogs

by Todd Stauffer  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0072227125/>

## JOURNALISM

### The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect

by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosensteel  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0609806912/>

### Warp Speed:

**America in the Age of the Mixed Media Culture**  
by Bill Kovach, Tom Rosensteel  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0870784374/>

### News Values: Ideas for an Information Age

by Jack Fuller  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0226268802/>

### The News About the News: American Journalism in Peril

by Leonard Downie Jr., Robert G. Kaiser  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0375714154/>

### The Press Effect: Politicians, Journalists, and the Stories That Shape the Political World

by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Paul Waldman  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0195152778/>



## OTHER

### **Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution**

by Howard Rheingold  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0738206083/>  
Weblog: <http://www.smartmobs.com/>

### **Small Pieces Loosely Joined: A Unified Theory of the Web**

by David Weinberger  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0738205435/>  
Author weblog: <http://www.hyperorg.com/blogger/>

### **TRUST: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order**

by Francis Fukuyama  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0684825252/>

### **Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community**

by Robert D. Putnam  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0743203046/>

### **The Future of Ideas: The Fate of the Commons in a Connected World**

by Lawrence Lessig  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0375505784/>

### **The Cluetrain Manifesto: The End of Business as Usual**

by Christopher Locke, et al  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0738204315/>

### **The Visionary's Handbook: Nine Paradoxes That will Shape the Future of Your Business**

by Watts Wacker, Jim Taylor  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0066619874/>

### **The Deviant's Advantage:**

**How Fringe Ideas Create Mass Markets**  
by Ryan Mathews, Watts Wacker  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0609609580/>

## Tools

### WEBLOG SOFTWARE

**Blogger:** <http://www.blogger.com/>  
**Movable Type:** <http://www.movabletype.org/>  
**TypePad:** <http://typepad.com/>  
**Radio UserLand:** <http://radio.userland.com/>  
**pMachine:** <http://www.pmachine.com/>  
**LiveJournal:** <http://www.livejournal.com/>  
**Greymatter:** <http://www.noahgrey.com/greysoft/>  
**b2:** <http://www.cafelog.com/>  
**Geeklog:** <http://www.geeklog.net/>  
**iBlog (Mac):** <http://www.lifli.com/Products/iBlog/main.htm>  
**Tripod Blog Builder:** <http://blog.tripod.lycos.com/>  
**Trellix:** <http://www.trellix.com/products/blogging.asp>  
**Xanga:** <http://www.xanga.com/>  
**WebCrimson:** <http://www.webcrimson.com/>  
**Weblog Compendium:** <http://www.lights.com/weblogs/>

### FORUM SOFTWARE

**phpBB:** <http://www.phpbb.com/>  
**Discus and DiscusPro:** <http://www.discusware.com/>  
**vBulletin:** <http://www.vbulletin.com/>  
**WebBoard:** <http://www.akiva.com/products/webboard/>  
**WebCrossing:** <http://www.webcrossing.com/>  
**Ultimate Bulletin Board (UBB) & OpenTopic**  
<http://www.infopop.com/products/>  
**Snitz Forums:** <http://forum.snitz.com/>  
**Phorum:** <http://phorum.org>

### DISCUSSION GROUPS SOFTWARE

**Yahoo!Groups:** <http://groups.yahoo.com/>  
**Topica:** <http://www.topica.com/>

### GNUTELLA FILE SHARING (P2P) SOFTWARE

<http://www.gnutelliums.com/>  
**Kazaa:** <http://www.kazaa.com/>  
**Morpheus:** <http://www.morpheus.com/>  
**LimeWire:** <http://www.limewire.com/>  
**BearShare:** <http://www.bearshare.com/>  
**Grokster:** <http://www.grokster.com/>

### RSS XML NEWS READERS

**NewzCrawler (PC):** <http://www.newzcrawler.com/>  
**AmphetaDesk (cross-platform)**  
<http://www.disobey.com/amphetadesk/>  
**News Monster (cross-platform)**  
<http://www.newsmonster.org/download.html>  
**Radio UserLand (PC or Mac)**  
<http://radio.userland.com/>  
**NetNewsWire (Mac)**  
<http://ranchero.com/software/netnewswire/>  
**FeedReader (PC):** <http://www.feedreader.com/>  
**Headline Viewer (PC):** <http://www.headlineviewer.com/>  
**Aggie News (PC):** <http://bitworking.org/Aggie.html>  
**More news reader software**  
<http://www.ourpla.net/cgi-bin/pikie.cgi?RssReaders>

### XML FEED AGGREGATORS

**Syndic8:** <http://www.syndic8.com/>  
**News Is Free:** <http://www.newsisfree.com/>

### COLLABORATIVE PUBLISHING TOOLS

**Slashcode:** <http://slashcode.com/>  
**Scoop:** <http://scoop.kuro5hin.org/>  
**PHP-Nuke:** <http://phpnuke.org/>  
**Postnuke:** <http://www.postnuke.com/>  
**Wiki Engines:** <http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WikiEngines>  
**OpenCMS**  
<http://www.opencms.org/opencms/en/>  
**Open Source Content Management Systems**  
<http://www.la-grange.net/cms>  
**Groove Networks:** <http://www.groove.net/>  
**Zaplet Collaboration Software:** <http://www.zaplet.com/>  
**ActiveBuddy:** Interactive Instant Messaging Software  
<http://www.activebuddy.com/>  
**Jabber.org:** Open source instant messaging platform  
<http://www.jabber.org/>



### **Insights, ideas and actions**

The Media Center is a non-profit research and educational organization committed to building a better-informed society in a connected world. The Media Center conducts research, educational programs and symposia and facilitates strategic conversations and planning on issues shaping the future of news, information and media.

The Media Center helps leaders, organizations and educators around the world understand and create multimedia futures. Its programs and engagements provide innovation, knowledge and strategic insights for personal, professional and business growth.

A division of The American Press Institute, The Media Center was established in 1997 to help the news industry devise strategies and tactics for digital media. In September 2003 it merged with New Directions for News, an independent think tank. The merger created a global, multi-disciplinary network of researchers and leading thinkers focused on the future of media and the behaviors of consumers in a media-centric world.

For more on The Media Center's programs, research and services, go to [www.mediacenter.org](http://www.mediacenter.org).

### **Headquarters**

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