

***Some Community Newspapers In America Are “Getting It”—  
From Information As Lecture  
to Information As Conversation:  
Insights From Journalist Bloggers About What They Do, How  
They Do It and Why***

A paper for Newspapers and Community-Building Symposium XII  
of the National Newspaper Association’s 120<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention  
Oklahoma City, Okla., October 2006

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***Abstract***

Personal Weblogs--“blogs” or “online journal(s) comprised of links and postings in reverse chronological order”(Gillmor, 2006)—are increasingly becoming more prevalent. As of this writing (late 2006), for example, there are now tens of millions blogs on the Internet (no one seems to know how many exactly but many sources agree the number is growing exponentially each week) (Gillmor, 2006) (Romenesko, 2006) (Drudge, 2006) (Rosen, 2006). And possibly thousands of these bloggers work for America’s newspapers.

Free from the space and geographical constraints of journalism, bloggers are changing the community conversation. Connecting with others, they link the press to valuable sources of information for readers. Bloggers are helping redefine the media landscape. Recently, for example, they have been on the front lines of disseminating information that changed the presidency (Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton in the late 90s); played a key role in covering the 2000 and 2004 Democratic and Republican national conventions; unearthed a story that tarnished the career of a network TV anchor (Dan Rather of CBS News in 2004); exposed governmental inadequacy in late 2005 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina; and in October 2006 helped spark the resignation in disgrace of an incumbent congressman who made salacious passes electronically (and otherwise) with young pages in his employ (Schatz, 2006).

Whether you accept or reject blogging as legitimate journalism, few would disagree that bloggers are altering the relationship between community newspapers and their readers. Bloggers, according to Friend, Challenger and McAdams—authors of the 2005 edition of *Contemporary Editing*--are “encouraging traditional newsrooms to expand the news conversation, to connect with readers and viewers in broader ways and on deeper levels than at any time in history.”

But what of the bloggers at community newspapers who are also traditional reporters, photographers or editors? What effects, if any, are their newspaper-linked blogs having on readers? On circulation? On themselves as journalists? On the stories, photos or other assignments they undertake? The blogosphere, a relatively new phenomenon for U.S. newspapers, is growing, but what is it actually doing for or to these journalists, their papers and their audiences? How are the bloggers themselves—and those who supervise them at newspapers--being transformed as journalists?

My paper explores these questions through interviews with journalists who have links on their newspapers’ Web sites. The bloggers work at newspapers in the Carolinas; no claim is made that what is learned from these journalists can be extrapolated (although one could suggest that there’s no reason why they would be unrepresentative of other journalist bloggers.) Generalizability of findings was not the goal of this research. The goal was to gain a depth of understanding from a few newspaper bloggers about what they do, why they do it and how. Thus this paper should be viewed as a start to exploring

the art and science of journalist blogging. Others may probe more deeply, widely and scientifically this phenomenon.

### ***Method/Approach***

In-depth interviews were conducted with 11 journalist bloggers; I attempted to sift through, explore and learn as much as I could about how and why these journalists regularly blog for their newspapers. What obstacles do they encounter? What do they like about blogging? Dislike? How is what they're doing as bloggers changing them (as well as their newspapers)? What advice do they have for other journalists? How do they respond to the newspaper traditionalist naysayers who oppose blogging? How is what they're doing helping them (and their newspapers) connect (or disconnect) with readers? What rewards, professionally or otherwise--derive from their blogging?

In addition, I connected what has already been written about blogging with my own research. (See source list at the end of this paper.) The published scholarship helped me interpret what I learned from my sample of bloggers. Finally, I spoke to some key players in the know about journalist blogging, not necessarily bloggers themselves but nonetheless doing professional work in journalism that makes it essential for them to be informed and up to date about what one scholar has described as "the unraveling newspaper business model" (Gillmor, 2006).

Journalist bloggers interviewed for this research work at relatively small daily and weekly "community" newspapers—ranging in paid circulation from 7,000 to 100,000. Bigger more famous newspapers—such as the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times and the Wall Street Journal—frequently attract the attention of journalism scholars. However, such possibly over studied metropolitan print media comprise but a tiny minority of America's newspapers. For example, while the United States has about 1,570 daily newspapers, a large percentage of these have less than 100,000 paid circulation and concern themselves with focusing almost entirely on their target audience local communities. Likewise, roughly 8,000 nondaily newspapers are published in the United States, with a circulation approaching 50 million (Vivian, 2005). Most of these nondailies are publications of record for their local communities—preoccupied with covering local government and politics, police blotters, schools, health care, churches, businesses, weddings, homecomings, births and deaths, and high school, little league and peewee league sports. And, while paid metro daily newspaper circulation in the United States is not keeping pace with population growth (and is in fact shrinking), many of the country's smaller "community" oriented papers seem to be on the upswing, with dozens reporting sizable circulation and ad revenue gains even in the current economic downturn.

Thus, the decision was made in this study to look closely at journalist bloggers at community newspapers, inasmuch as: 1) these media seem more and more to be taking on an increasingly important news, information and advertising role in the United States; and 2) community newspapers frequently get second or little shrift (or no shrift at all) in journalism scholarship.

### ***Beaufort (S.C.) Gazette***

One rap against bloggers is that they are "not news-gatherers but opinion-mongers" (Ivins, 2006). However, 27-year-old Ian Leslie, city editor of the 13,000-daily circulation Beaufort (S.C.) Gazette, has been blogging for the Gazette about 18 months, and he says he makes it a point to control his opinions. Reason: His primary mission at

the Gazette is editing the news, and he doesn't want even the appearance of a conflict of interest—based on what a reader might intuit from his blog.

Leslie blogs about once every two weeks about outdoors and environmental issues. And, again, he's always conscious of the Society of Professional Journalists' ethical guideline that journalists should "Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived." "I try not to be too opinionated in a blog," said Leslie, noting his blog's traffic ranges from a few dozen people to a few hundred, depending on to what extent he has written about a topic that stirs public interest. "I just try to put ideas out there (in the blog)," Leslie said. He requests an editor review of what he's written if he (Leslie) suspects he may be too opinionated. "While I'm not out there reporting the news, I'm still editing it," Leslie said. "And for me, personally, I don't think I let my personality come out in my blog. . . . If I'm very opinionated in my blog—for example about a decision on the environment or development—and a day later I'm editing a story about that, I can be accused of swaying the story one way or the other, and I don't want that. News is my primary job here."

In addition, in a small community like Beaufort, S.C.—population about 20,000—folks know who their local journalists are, and they expect no less than objectivity and fairness in covering the news, Leslie said.

Leslie blogs voluntary—with no pressure from his supervisors at The Gazette. And he says that while blogging is not that difficult, it's sometimes challenging to blog about a topic that will impact a lot of people. He recalls, for example, writing his first blog about his being a triathlete and trying to stay healthy. Nobody seemed to care about that. But when Leslie blogged about seeing trash on a local bridge, people responded—attracting about 700 hits.

At the Gazette, reader responses or posts to blogs are only lightly edited, Leslie said. "We have a code of conduct. We don't touch 'em unless there's some violations of that code of conduct—unless there's profanity or some kind of slur. They're lightly moderated." Even grammar and spelling in a reader post are not edited by the Gazette. "How they (reader posts) go is how they go," Leslie said, noting it can occasionally be funny how readers will correct each other in their response posts to blogs.

So what kind of material goes into a journalist blog at the Gazette? Leslie said it can be the kind of stuff that strikes some readers as interesting but that may not merit space in the newspaper "because I don't think a reporter can get everything into a story."

Examples of potential blog material: The mayor is at a speaking engagement and demonstrates an inability to control the crowd. Or maybe there's a half hour or so of bickering—between two city council members--at a public meeting, and the two argumentative officials are wasting taxpayers' dollars by not staying on point.

The Gazette has a blog link on its Web site, Leslie says, because it's one more way to attract readers. Plus, he said, it's the way the newspaper industry is headed. "You have people who only go online and won't buy the paper," he said. "They only read us online, and I think you get people talking (through blogs and other online mechanisms.) I

think it's beneficial . . ."

Leslie advises journalists who may be thinking about blogging for their newspapers to keep in mind that "some kind of public benefit" must derive from blogging. "And strive for the facts," he stressed. "Keep that foremost. You hear a lot of horror stories of bloggers going off and writing things that aren't true. . . When I think blog, I think original fresh reporting. I think that's how it was established in the industry."

### ***To edit or not to edit a blog?***

A blog that is screened or a heavily edited blog defeats the purpose of a true blog, according to newspaper sports reporter and award-winning blogger Mike Sando of the News-Tribune in Tacoma, Wash. "A blog with filters is not much of a blog, in my view," Sando recently asserted in an interview with Robert Niles of Online Journalism Review. "Immediacy is very important," he added. "The News Tribune trusts my ethics and my judgment. The paper also realizes, shrewdly, that online standards differ from print standards. This doesn't mean that anything goes in a blog. Basic journalism values still apply and management has a responsibility to enforce them wherever its name appears. It's just that reporters have more freedom on a blog" (Niles, 2006).\_

But how much freedom-for journalist bloggers and for readers who post to those blogs-might come back to haunt a newspaper?\_

Blog scholar and journalism professor Timothy Boudrea has noted that while the spontaneous, unfiltered, unedited nature of many blogs presents newspapers with expanded opportunities to connect with readers, this same nature can engender an occasional risk or, at the very least, can create legal and ethical concerns among editors and publishers. That said, Boudreas also has noted that "(W)hile laws concerning defamation as it relates to blogging are still taking shape, editors and publishers who exercise reasonable care generally have little to fear on the legal front. By and large the same rules that apply to print apply online whether staff-generated blogs or to blogs written by community members not employed by the newspaper" (Bourdrea, 2006)

Boudrea has also called attention to the "broad protections under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act to Internet service providers who merely act as conduits for third-party postings, as blogs do." Per Section 230, no newspaper that has a Web site featuring interactivity (between newspaper and readers) can be held liable for defamation or other sorts of damaging or embarrassing material posted by readers. Courts, in effect, recognize that newspapers or other mass media would be hard pressed to police and/or delete online reader-written libelous or offensive material. One caveat: if an editor materially changes a blog posting or edits it in a way that substantially alters its meaning, the more liable the editor becomes.

Similarly, according to N.C. General Counsel Amanda Martin, newspaper journalist bloggers and those who supervise them (presumably their editors or publishers) had best be aware that, in some ways, it will behoove the newspaper NOT to correct, edit or suppress information posted to a blog.\_

Martin argues that Congress wanted immunity for operators or sponsors of Internet based sites and discussion groups--which she suggests encompasses blog links

on a newspaper's Web site. “No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider,” she wrote recently. \_

Translation (according to Martin): “If you host an online site that serves as a forum for others to communicate, you cannot be held liable for the content of those communications... (If all your newspaper is doing is providing the town square--the shelves on which people can put their ideas for public consumption--your paper will not be held legally accountable if one of those ideas is faulty. \_

“... (If you get in and tinker with what is posted (on a blog or Web site)--either by editing the content or by selecting what gets posted and what does not--then you may have converted your site to a high-tech letters to the editor page for which you are legally responsible,” Martin added (Martin, 2006). \_

Concerning reporters or others on a newspaper's staff who have a blog link on the newspaper's Web site, those persons might be at more risk legally, because “blogging by journalists gives the world a view of that reporter that we otherwise might not have. \_ “Depending upon what your reporter writes about and how personal he gets, this extra window into his soul carries the added risk of increasing liability in other areas. He might reveal biases or prejudices that color his work as a reporter. Or worse yet, something he writes might come back to haunt you in a libel trial” (Martin, 2006). \_

### ***The (Rock Hill, S.C.) Herald***

Journalists, according to First Amendment attorney Martin, ought to be wary of blogging, lest they reveal too much about themselves online that can later be used as ammunition against the newspaper in a libel case. \_ Has the potential danger of too much self-revelation then paralyzed a lot of journalist bloggers? \_

Not, apparently, at the 33,000-circulation daily Herald in Rock Hill, S.C., which has six staffers with blog links on The Herald's Web site ([www.heraldonline.com](http://www.heraldonline.com)). \_ One of those bloggers is 38-year-old Justin McGuire, online editor for The Herald. \_ Blogging since January 2006 about three to four times a week, McGuire said none of those blogging Herald newsroom staff members are getting any kind of extensive editing. \_ “Right now, if I see a typo or grammar error, I'll go in (online) and change it,” said McGuire, who previously was city editor at The Herald. “People at The Herald who blog tend to be senior people and people we can rely on and trust. Whatever editing happens tends to be after the fact and small stuff. We're not doing observational reporting with blogs--just doing little stuff.” \_

The Herald does not have a formal policy on the editing of blogs. McGuire: “Lawyers have told us we're better off not editing any of it. . . (But) if I came upon something very bad (in a blog) I would go to the big boss and say 'What should we do? This is what is going on. What are we going to do?'” \_ “But right now, our philosophy is pretty much hands off.” \_

So, with journalist written blogs and those who respond to them, everything is fairly freewheeling and unfiltered at The Herald. \_ And that can sting a journalist blogger, McGuire noted. There have probably been some questionable things that readers have posted to the blogs, and some of the posts hurt: “Some of these people (blog posters) have no qualms of just going in and insulting you. You just have to be kind of

above it. They have anonymity. My name and picture is out there (on the blog link.)”\_

McGuire also said that he and others at The Herald who blog understand that you have to be careful about crossing the line from information to opinion. “Certainly, we've talked to the reporters,” he said. “You're there as a neutral observer and you play it straight and just give information. You're not supposed to give opinions about something you're covering as a reporter. \_ But for someone like Terry Plumb (editor of The Herald) it's different. He writes editorials and has a column, so he can express his opinion.”\_

While McGuire, a print journalist for 16 years, acknowledges that his personality might come through in his blog, he's not so sure someone could intuit his biases. “We're still trying to figure it (blogging) out,” he said. “The more I do it, probably the more my personality will come out. I've been a newspaper person for a long time . . . I'm supposed to play it straight. It's kind of hard to break from that pattern.”\_

The most popular Herald blog might well be sports reporter Darin Gantt's “Panthers Blog”--devoted to covering the nearby Carolina Panthers NFL team. \_ Gantt's blog has allowed him to “empty his notebook,” McGuire said. “He gets a lot of tidbits stuff about the Panthers that he can't get in the paper-small behind the scenes stuff.”\_

Those who post to the blogs factor in to what The Herald decides to cover, and that's a positive benefit for the newspaper, McGuire noted. “At this point, we get just a sense of what people are interested in as opposed to specific story ideas,” he said, referring to reader blog posts.

### ***Chester, S.C., journalist “gadfly” blogger***

Journalist bloggers at community newspapers run the gamut. \_ Some seem deadly serious in their blogs about maintaining the same sense of ethics, detached objectivity and fairness that they strive to attain in their printed newspaper work. \_ They view their blogs as an extension of what they do as journalists for the newspaper. \_

Others, however, blog on not what they cover or write about for the paper. \_ Consider, for example, 40-year-old Stephen Guilfoyle, editor of the 8,000-circulation twice-a-week News & Reporter in Chester, S.C. \_ Guilfoyle might be the embodiment of a blogger with an attitude who doesn't feel confined or constrained to blog only about things or people on his various local beats. \_

He described himself on his blog link-which until a few months ago appeared not on the Web site of the News & Reporter but instead on the Web site of the nearby (Rock Hill, S.C.) Herald-as “an expatriate Yankee stuck in the South but loving it, to be honest.”\_

“I'm more of a citizen blogger,” he said in a recent interview, a few weeks before, at the bequest of The Herald, Guilfoyle's employer asked him to discontinue his blog on The Herald's Web site (which Guilfoyle agreed to do.) “I do journalistic stuff if I want to, but I'm very opinionated. I'm a know it all. All must know that I know it all.”\_

He says he blogged for about a year on the Web site of the nearby Herald because his own paper, the News & Reporter, did not yet have the capacity to accommodate blogging. \_ Plus, Guilfoyle--like so many other journalists who work on small community newspapers--is hard-pressed just to get his regular (non-online) newspaper work completed each day. \_

A few days before being interviewed for this paper, for example, Guilfoyle had spent about 60 hours the previous week covering a huge fire (and the aftermath of that blaze) that had rocked the town of Great Falls--which is in the coverage area of the News & Reporter.

As a blogger on the Web site for The Herald, he focused on journalistic issues--praising The Herald for what it did right and other times acting as a critical gadfly who spotlighted lapses or weaknesses in reporter/editor judgment.

Because he's married to Patricia Larson, publisher of the Fort Mill (S.C.) Times (owned by McClatchy, the same company that owns The Herald), Guilfoyle knew all along that he was treading on thin ice.

He recalled that a couple of Herald employees wanted him to stop blogging because they didn't take his criticism very well; nevertheless he seemed to have the support of The Herald's publisher, who, Guilfoyle believes, values free speech.

"I stirred 'em up," Guilfoyle says of The Herald's staff. "I also praised some stuff, but mostly it was critical of Herald reporters when they screwed up."

In retrospect, Guilfoyle thinks that he was asked to terminate "SteveG2" (the name of his blog on The Herald's Web site) because he stepped on too many toes and maybe hurt some reporters' and editors' feelings. "They (Herald staffers) couldn't handle the criticism...Some thought I wanted to knock 'em because I worked at the Chester newspaper. But one of my heroes was (the late irreverent, rambunctious longtime award-winning daily newspaper columnist) Mike Royko. He always got on the newspaper industry," telling newspapers what they did right and scolding them when they fell short of transmitting quality journalism, Guilfoyle noted. "Royko had a reputation for being critical of the newspaper industry. He would call newspapers into question when he felt they were doing something wrong."

Guilfoyle reads a lot of blogs. The best ones, he says, are provocative, newsy and interesting. But some of the others help give bloggers a bad rap. "I'm seeing that it (blogging) is transforming journalism, but I don't think it's doing it in a good way."

He cited the example of The Herald posting a rumor via a blog--about a CVS store coming to Fort Mill. Turns out the rumor was true (the store did indeed come to Fort Mill) but still, it was a rumor and should never have been posted by the reporter, according to Guilfoyle.

"It was a rumor and they (a Herald blogger) threw it up there," Guilfoyle, with 21 years working professionally in journalism, noted. "Would you put this in the paper? The person who did didn't think the rules of journalism were the same for a journalist blogger. He said the rules...are not the same if you do a blog. But I don't think the rules should change a bit. Publication is publication. You publish what you know."

"... The Herald guy threw it up there (on the blog), admitted it was "unconfirmed" and went his merry way. I don't think the fact that it turned out to be right matters much. His headline called it a rumor. The content of the blog said it was unconfirmed and that they'd be checking in with CVS corporate later on. Everything in it screamed RUMOR RUMOR RUMOR. The source of the rumor was someone where the reporter was eating lunch nearby."

"Hideous," Guilfoyle said.

(Brief edited/condensed transcript of the Jan. 27, 2006, blog exchanges between Guilfoyle and a veteran Herald newsroom staffer):

Guilfoyle: "Why is it OK to print a rumor on a blog? Would you put this in the newspaper like this? I sure hope not. So why is it OK here?"

Herald staffer: "That's a completely legitimate question. In short, no, we wouldn't print a rumor in the newspaper. A blog, however, allows for slightly different rules. Blogs are a great way for us to let the public know the process of getting a story into the paper. Many times, the stories you read in the paper started out as a rumor..."

Guilfoyle: "Why does blogging allow for slightly different rules? The Herald is still publishing this. It's using bits and bytes of information on the Internet as the medium, rather than paper. But it's still being published by The Herald...The rush to be right is the kind of mistake that factored into the ignominious end of Dan Rather's career as anchor...I think The Herald is making a BIG mistake if it's using the blog to get around the rules of journalism." \_

### ***The (Greensboro, N.C.) News-Record***

If blogging, launched in the mid 1990s and rising to prominence in mass communication in the United States in 2001 (Alexander and Hanson, 2007), hasn't redefined how and what the majority of America's community newspapers do, it has changed dramatically what a few of them do. Take, for example, what's happening with journalist blogging at the 100,000-circulation daily News-Record in Greensboro, N.C. John Robinson, editor of the News-Record, reports that the paper has 23 journalist bloggers, all of them in one way or another helping the newspaper extend its reach and connect with readers on a wide variety of topics. "We see this as a valuable extension of our journalism," said Robinson, 53, noting that the paper's bloggers talk to readers in various ways other just via the newspaper. For us, reporters know a lot of stuff. Some we can't get into the paper," Robinson said, "because of deadlines or space or even because of style."

And that's where blogs help fill the gap, he said.

Journalist bloggers at the N-R put their personalities into their writing; for sure, they write with a different voice online than they do with the newspaper, and they have the ability online to link to other Web sites or other pieces of information. All this "really does change the reporter's voice," Robinson noted, creating informality in how messages are communicated. In addition, journalists have the ability to use audio online, allowing readers to hear something (for example, conversations or interviews) for themselves. "It's not only journalism but communication in a different style," Robinson said of his newsroom's bloggers. Robinson concedes there's probably more work involved for traditional print reporters who are then asked to blog—on top of their traditional reporting duties. Still, he maybe in part because of N-R performance evaluation incentives that take into account what journalists do to explore their online potential, newsroom staffers at the N-R are "raising their hands and standing inline" to blog. "The idea that we can stand still and only focus on the daily newspaper, that idea doesn't wash here," Robinson said. "The fact is, I haven't polled the bloggers here, but I would submit they really like it (blogging) because it's fun."

But don't require a reporter or any other newsroom staffer to become a blogger, Robinson advises: "The last thing you want is to force someone to adopt this new way to talking to readers because they will be lousy at it." Robinson said that in an era when newspaper circulation is declining and ad revenues are static, newspapers need to revise the mind set in journalism that if a reporter blogs, he/she should be paid more for that duty. "That kind of newsroom culture needs to change," he stressed. "'Gee, I'll do this if you pay me extra,' needs to be broken down," Robinson said.

The author of a blog on the newspaper's Web site titled "The Editor's Log," Robinson said blogging has helped increase traffic to the N-R's Web site. He cited as many as 800,000 page views in one month: "Do I really think those are people behind those page views? No, but that's the only data I have." And aside from freeing reporters and others at the N-R from the traditional "straightlaced objectivity and pyramid style writing of daily newspapers" (Alexander and Hanson, 2007), blogging has helped Robinson's newspaper connect more deeply and personally with readers.

That connection, he says, is valuable. "It's very important," said Robinson, editor of the N-R for the past seven years. "In one way, it's another way for readers to tell me what they think. In another way, it's interesting and informative for me to be able to read how they (readers) talk to each other. Sometimes conversational threads spin off in directions I'd never think they would go."

### ***Page designer blogger at the News-Record***

Some advocates of blogging tout it as making journalism more playful and reader-friendly, notwithstanding its straying from the traditional journalistic tenets of objectivity and fairness.

Naysayers of journalist blogging often condemn it as a form of biased, reporter personality-infused communication. But that's a shallow argument, according to Lauren Rich Fine, Merrill Lynch's chief publishing and advertising industry analyst for the past 18 years. "You can't make everyone happy," Fine recently admonished members of the American Copy Editors Society (Fisher, 2006). "Those days are gone. No one will pay you for it. You'd better have a better balance of what they (readers) want than what they need if you expect to sell papers. . . This (newspaper) industry has really gotten defensive, afraid of taking risks, afraid of bias at the same time people want you to take a stand."

Such is the warning not to be paralyzed as a journalist for fear of revealing your bias; and that caveat hasn't entirely fallen on deaf ears in America's news rooms. At the News-Record in Greensboro, for example, 26-year-old page designer Melissa Umbarger blogs four times a week. "Mel's Kitchen" is for people who don't have a lot of cooking experience and who eschew fancy cooking techniques.

Umberger has about five years professional experience in journalism and freely admits that you might sense her disposition when you read her blog. "But I think there's a difference between personality and bias," she said. "I think I inject a lot of personality into my blog but I do so without injecting my political bias.

"I can be a little more flip or a little more snarky," with her blog than she would be in a print newspaper story, Umberger said. "In a print newspaper story, I wouldn't make fun of things. . . And with our other blogs (at the N-R) if some dumb criminal does something stupid, you can post it and make fun of it and write with wit and personality without portraying your bias."

She takes exception to traditionalists who argue that a journalist should remain detached and pure and that his/her personality should not show up in print. "I'd say to the old school that things change and evolve and there's a lot of people out there who don't pick up a newspaper anymore and you've got to reach them somehow," said Umberger, noting that her blog averages about 60-80 hits a day, among them loyal readers and posters from such places as China, Canada, Japan and Australia. "I think as long as you put out a quality print product every day, the blogging just enhances that," she said.

Her advice for journalists thinking about blogging for their newspapers? "Have fun. That's the biggest thing. If it gets to the point where it's a chore for you, the readers will be able to sense that and they won't read it. In our newspaper (blogging) has never been something that's forced. If we want to write a blog, it's okay. If we don't want to, it's not questioned."

Blogging, as noted by Richard Craig in his 2005 book titled *Online Journalism*, helps "enrich stories for readers" and "not only (provides) information but the context needed for users to understand it." That kind of enrichment and added context, Umberger says, attracts readers. And it's also a shot in the arm for journalists who take their craft seriously, she said.

In addition, Umberger says she loves blogging because it offers her instant gratification ("As soon as I can think of something to say, I can hit send and it's on the Web site"), and it's that kind of psychological rush that helps win over more and more journalists to blogging for their newspaper, she said. Not to mention the fact that a blog is a good choice to park story details and nuances that can't be fitted into the news hole in the printed newspaper. "I think for most of the journalists who blog, it's just another medium for them to convey information that might not make it into the paper the next day," she said. "Sometimes you pick up tidbits of information that won't make it into an article but will still be amusing and informative for readers," and a blog is a good place to insert that, Umberger said.

Any down sides to blogging? According to Umberger, a journalist blogger should develop a thick skin because readers sometimes will attack. "If you make a mistake or

happen to be inaccurate or write something and have a spelling error, people are quick to point that out," she said. "And people are allowed to post anonymously. So there's no reason for them to be nice about it. Sometimes they can be quite mean . . . I got a really nasty letter from a woman when I wrote about the difference between dressing and stuffing. It was a very derogatory letter about my southern roots. . . But overall, I'd say people are fairly nice."

### ***The (Reidsville, N.C.) Free Press***

Digital media professionals, among them members of the blogging supplement "old media oligopoly," dramatically changing the nature of how news is produced, who produces it and who reads it, according to a 2006 Carnegie Corporation report titled "Journalism's Crisis of Confidence: A Challenge For the Next Generation."\_

In short, the media landscape is fast shifting--much toward the Web. Increasingly, the Web is where people turn for news and information. \_For example, a May 2004 survey of 18-to-34-year-olds conducted by Frank N. Magid Associates found that while TV is this group's most used source of news, their second most preferred news source is the Internet, with 44 percent of 18-to-34-year-olds going to such portals as Yahoo.com and MSN.com at least once a day (Carnegie, 2006).\_

Jeff Sykes is creator and publisher of a totally online news magazine in Reidsville, N.C.--a town of about 15,000 people a few miles from the north edge of Greensboro, N.C.\_ Sykes, 35, says that if newspapers don't jump head first, full force into the Internet, through blogging or other means, they won't last long.\_

"It's got to happen or newspapers will cease to exist," says Sykes, noting that his six-month-old online publication, The Reidsville Free Press ([www.reidsvillefreepress.com](http://www.reidsvillefreepress.com)) on a good day gets up to 300 hits and on an average day about 180 unique visitors.\_ "That's the bottom line," Sykes says of newspapers hesitant to dive into the Internet. "I think everybody realizes that. Research from a lot of people smarter than me shows that the old model of doing newspapers has got to change. Those that embrace that change will come out on top, and those that don't will be left behind."\_

Sykes tries to play off of what he describes as a "very robust and vibrant blogging community" in nearby Greensboro. "They're kind of on the national vanguard of the whole blogging trend," he said, noting that the Greensboro News-Record is leading the charge. "I'm trying to learn from what they've done and what they are doing and (am) trying to bring that to my area. . ."\_

He wants to see his publication grow and is in the online news business for the

long term. “I’m not just doing this as a hobby off to the side,” says Sykes, who has four years experience working on newspapers in Hickory, N.C., and Lynchburg, Va. He says he’s striving to get people in Reidsville “to buy into the whole citizen journalism concept” and to realize that his publication is not just a public relations booster for the community. It’s a true news purveyor that covers business, government and development in Reidsville in a professional way.

But where does blogging come in?

It definitely has a role, Sykes says, but he prefers not to term it blogging inasmuch as Reidsville is a rural, conservative, tobacco and manufacturing community, where high school drop out rates are high and the percentage of young people going to college is low. “They think of blogs as a left wing/right wing rant sessions-like something that Rush Limbaugh would do. They have a negative connotation of blogging.”

That connotation notwithstanding, once people buy into the concept of participating online in a conversation about news in the community, Sykes believes his publication will grow into a sustainable business enterprise. But he won’t abandon his basic journalistic roots.

“Risks for a journalist blogging lie primarily in getting caught up in an ego trip and trying to one up a commenter who may be combative,” Sykes said. . . . “I think a journalist who blogs should be one who is mature enough to handle the responsibility and walk the fine line of objectivity.”

Journalists expressing willy-nilly their opinions and personalities via blogging about news need to re-think what they’re doing, Sykes suggests. “I don’t really care for the journalist infusing their personality (in a blog). I think the best newspaper journalist will be able to maintain a balance between using the best of what a blog has to offer-- immediacy and links--with their ethical training and let the information speak for itself . . . I would say that if you wouldn’t put a byline on it, don’t blog it. Blog doesn’t mean no rules. It means immediate and interactive. If you can’t stand by your work, what is the point? You are still a journalist and should act as such. A bit of humor and first person observation is ok, but not sharing your opinions on the people/events/institutions you cover.”

Readers will soon see through a journalist blogger who spews opinions and they won’t like it, Sykes said. He cited a recent example of a religion reporter in Greensboro interviewing U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. “The reporter made a statement in her interview that ‘We love you here in Greensboro,’ and some people gave the reporter hell for saying that,” Sykes said.

“America wants and Americans expect objective journalists in the old sense. We’re going to need it. It’s one of the founding principles of democracy in the society we

live in. I think the founding principles of what journalism is will always be there. The technology will change, but people will want and expect the truth, and they'll always want to be able to judge the facts for themselves.”\_

So is Sykes making money from his fledgling online news magazine?\_ “So far it's been a tough sell,” he responded, “but I really haven't been actively selling. I've been passively selling. . . I recently spoke to a group of editors and publishers in North Carolina. They asked me: 'How in the world are you going to make money?' I said: 'That's the \$64,000 question.’”\_ \_ \_

### ***The (Spartanburg, S.C.) Herald-Journal***

As the number of people who go online for news and information increases and as daily newspaper circulation declines, some print journalists have turned to blogging as a way to help keep them in the news business.\_

Among them is 28-year-old Jason Spencer, one of four journalist bloggers at the New York Times-owned 55,000-circulation daily Herald-Journal in Spartanburg, S.C.\_ Spencer, a reporter who focuses on topics ranging from politics and elections to science, writes a blog titled “Hydrogen Buzz,” which, covers, among other things, hydrogen research.\_ Some weeks, he says, he blogs once or twice a day, three or four days a week. He balances blogging with his regular print journalism reporting duties at the Herald-Journal, where the newsroom culture encourages (as part of the employee performance evaluation) Web activity.\_

On any given day, his blog will get between 30 and 1,700 hits.\_ “I'm happy when it's up to 1,700,” Spencer said. “When it's down to 30, it's discouraging. I think some of it (blog traffic) has to do with Google programs that crawl through the Web to catalog and come up (with key words) in their searches. . . All of this is still a learning experience for me.”

Though Spencer blogs voluntarily, he thinks blogging signals part of the wave of the future for anyone seriously interested in working professionally in journalism.\_ “Blogging,” as one business writer recently put it, “isn't just for computer nerds and writing geeks anymore.” For example, Technorati--a search engine that tracks blogs--in mid 2006 tracked more than 40 million blogs (Thomas, 2006). \_By November 2006, Technorati was tracking nearly 60 million blogs (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technorati>).

However, you need not cite such numbers to convince Spencer of the potential power or reach of online journalism. “I think 10 years from now, when some of the editors now who might not totally agree with blogging or at least with the time I spend doing it. . . I'll be looking for work in an industry that will be 90 percent online or 100 percent online. (Probably) in my lifetime, the (newspaper) industry is going to be radically different or maybe totally digital.”\_

For now, Spencer says his blogging is making him a better, more effective journalist. \_ Some material, for example, that he can't or won't work into a newspaper story he can cover with his blog. “Right now, it's the way online journalism is going,” Spencer said. “You can elaborate (in a blog) on the smallest part of a topic. . . Sometimes I'll just do a blog on our phone conversation. Or I can do a blog on

something insignificant to the readership as a whole, but to people in online culture it's important." \_

Writing a blog about hydrogen--a hard topic to make sexy, Spencer acknowledges--is easier the more you do it, he said. \_ "You just recognize the different kinds of things you can use for your blog," said Spencer, who's worked professionally in journalism for six years. "And with me, it always helps to organize my thoughts when I write stuff down. If I see something, I might say, 'Hey, I can do a blog entry on that.' \_

"It can make you a tighter writer for the newspaper," said Spencer, who might be the kind of journalist newspapers need given the research finding that many readers are scanners and turned off by long blocks or deadly huge masses of type (Marren, 2006). "I think the more different kinds of writing you can do makes you a better writer, and this (blogging) is just one of those. It's not like 'dear diary' but it's definitely looser." \_

He notes that blogging improves the newspaper and vice-versa. He likens it to one form of communication reinforcing the other. \_

"Basically the more stories I write in the paper, the more reason I have to blog. And the more activity (reader posts) from the blog, the more foundation we've laid for future news stories." \_ An example he gave would be writing a blog about a political endorsement. "We don't do newspaper stories on endorsements, but I could do a blog entry on it," he said, noting that blog readers would then be better informed about endorsements. \_

One way blogging has helped tighten his writing for the newspaper is that Spencer doesn't feel so pressed to jam every odd and end into a story. \_ For a self-described "completist," that's a big plus, Spencer said: \_ "I would rather err on the side of thoroughness to the point where it makes the story longer than it needs to be. . . One of the things I keep in my mind is I realize I don't have to put every little quirky detail in the newspaper story. It's easier for me (as a blogger) to self edit and take it out and make it into a two or three-graph blog." \_

He cited the example of his being at a political function where a candidate was sending out a personal post card with his (the candidate's) cell phone number on it. That kind of information didn't make it into a newspaper story, but Spencer blogged about it. \_

As to the potential downside of journalist blogging, Spencer isn't troubled much by those who argue that reporters should not inappropriately cross the line into the opinion domain. He says the Herald-Journal's ethics policy specifies what reporters can and can't do in their blogs. \_ A review of that document--titled "The New York Times Company Journalism Ethics Policy"--confirms his take on it. In part, the policy notes that while "Web pages and Web logs (the online journals known as blogs) present imaginative opportunities for personal expression and exciting new journalism...they also require cautions, magnified by the Web's unlimited reach..."

"If a staff member publishes a personal Web page or blog on a site outside of our company's control, the staff member has a duty to make sure that the content is purely that: personal. Staff members who write blogs should generally avoid topics they cover professionally..."

The ethics policy specifically cautions journalist bloggers at the Herald-Journal to be weary of injecting their personal opinions into their prose about controversial topics covered in the newspaper: "Bloggers may write lively commentary on their preferences

in food, music, sports or other avocations, but as journalists they must avoid taking stands on divisive public issues. A staff member's Web page that was outspoken on the abortion issue would violate our policy in exactly the same way as participation in a march or rally on the subject."

So far, the policy seems to work for Spencer: "I know in our ethics policy we can't take a stand (in blogs) on controversial issues. An example would be abortion. I'm a news reporter. I can't go on a blog and say I'm pro-choice or pro-life. That would be a violation of the ethics policy, and I understand that. \_But I have done things--on hydrogen--that's like friendly advice. It's not really taking a stand. . . I don't really know what it's called." \_

He admits and hopes his personality comes through in his blog. \_On one occasion, for example, he blogged about a fuel cell conference and described it as "really cool"--something he said would not do for a newspaper story. \_"I think the . . . online culture is different," he said. "If I'm doing crime news or breaking news and I'm doing three to four graphs for our Web site, that will be written as if it were going into the newspaper (with none of Spencer's personality in it.) "But I think the whole blog culture is more colorful. Blog--even the words sound loose. It sounds freer." \_

Don't be afraid to become a blogger, he advises others in journalism. \_

Yes, it can be more work and something else to worry about--on top of everything else on a reporter's plate. But it can be fun and different, Spencer says. \_"This is at least something I have interest in and I know there's people out there who have interest in it. As to worrying, I worry more about stories I write in the newspaper that hardly anyone will read." \_ \_

### ***The (Charleston, S.C.) Post and Courier***

Infusing their personal feelings into their prose, bloggers have been tagged irresponsible, rambunctious, opinionated ranters with no place in mainstream journalism. \_ But defenders of blogging say it goes to the heart of what journalism should be--recasting news as personalized "spirited conversation" free from many of the constraints and conventions that have led readers away from newspapers (Friend, Challenger and McAdams, 2005). \_

Dan Conover, a reporter for the Charleston, S.C., Post and Courier, is one of six journalist bloggers at that 100,000-circulation daily. \_ He's not troubled that there might be a little bit of himself revealed in his blog prose; he says that's what blogging is all about. \_ "You would find some personality in there (in his Low Country blog)," said Conover, 43, who has been blogging off and on for over two years. "I blog as a human being because I have things to say. That pre-dates any interest in blogging for the newspaper." \_

But while his personality comes through in his newspaper's "Low Country Blog," that's not a bad thing, Conover said. \_ "You would not find a lot of me-me-me references" in Low Country Blog, he said. "And in my blogging you wouldn't hear me making sweeping announcements of what's good and what's bad." \_

What you will discern from the Post and Courier's Low Country Blog is a more personal kind of writing than you'll likely encounter in a traditional print newspaper, according to Conover. \_ "We expect journalese out of print media," he said. "What I find (in my blog) is not so much that I strive to inject me into my writing. But instead I try to

write in a more personal way. \_It's more the language and voice and conversation than it is the jokey, funny look-at-me kind of writing. . . Blogs are not meant to just replace news stories. It's a different medium and it's used for different purposes.”\_

It can be troubling for mainstream traditional media gatekeepers that bloggers, with a personal conversational touch that appeals to readers, develop quite a loyal audience. \_“One of the problems traditional media will have in the next few years with bloggers is a blogger is his or her own brand,” Conover explained. “What we like to think of now traditionally is that reporters and editors at newspapers are interchangeable-plug and play. Very few of them reach a point where they are a brand in their community.\_ When you have people who have demonstrated expertise in a particular area and people can interact with them, that person (the blogger) can become a brand in some sense. I think that's very frightening for traditional media. . . Because if you're good and you're working online, you can build a larger audience that's independent of the audience of your newspaper.”\_

At the Post and Courier where he was formerly city editor, Conover teaches other staffers about blogging. \_He's also trying to help change a mindset in the newspaper industry that blogging requires no additional work or thought--let alone resources.\_

“I think one of big problems that those of us involved in helping develop this media have to confront is all too often media companies look at this (online journalistic work) as a way of extracting more profits out of the same labor pool. 'You write about a city government. You can write a city government blog.'\_

“The people who really don't understand (blogging) just see it as repurposing reporter content. It's fundamentally different than just publishing a story in a different media.\_ The difference is you engage the reader. If you're not (engaging), you're not really blogging.”\_

The interaction or relationship between journalist and readers defines the essence of blogging, according to Conover.\_ But how do you make that engagement happen?\_

Sometimes it's through a printed newspaper article that points to a blog link on the paper's Web site.\_ Conover recalls, for example, that when he wrote a 10-inch column every day, for 17 days, called the “Buzz From the Blogs” about Charleston's Spoleto Festival, reader response was tremendous--garnering as many as 1,600-1,700 hits a day. Readers wanted to have their say, he noted, about the snippets of blog comments he included in his newspaper column.\_

That kind of reader/writer back and forthness has changed how Conover, in the news business for 16 years, approaches journalism.\_ “Basically, to a lot of people, I'm a heretic now. (But) I can't go back to looking at news as something we lecture to people on. For me, I require more of media now that it lets me dig deeper and lets me respond (online) to what I've written.\_ And it's making me smarter. I'm a better writer in the sense that now people will challenge me on intellectual grounds. . . What's happened to me as a blogger is if I write something that certain people are going to disagree with, I'm going to be challenged by people who are smarter than I am. \_

“That's like martial arts training for reporters. . . You better be good, because you don't last if you're not. What I'm saying is that being in a community of writers, I feel respected by someone who will actually respond to me instead of just flaming me.”\_

Used to be the case with traditional ink on paper media, Conover noted, that if a reader got angry at you, she would call the editor and curse and that would be the end of it.

Not so with the new media environment. “In print, you get something wrong and it stays wrong,” Conover said. “Online it's never over. It's easy to fix something (online) as well. And because it's so easy for online writers to go back and revise their personal writing history, the temptation exists for bloggers to edit themselves retroactively, so it's like they've never been wrong.”

Conover says transparency is the single most important guiding principle for online journalism. “If on Monday, I write that (S.C.) Governor Mark Sanford was a Democrat up until three years ago, and that's factually incorrect, and someone calls me on that, what we would do in a newspaper is run the correction on 2A and (we) wouldn't repeat the error or tell you what went wrong. Online, I would go back to the post about Governor Sanford and highlight the incorrect text and change that font to strike through and leave it there for all to see. Then I would correct it and add an editor's note in parentheses explaining (why the error was made.)”

“The purpose: One, it's transparent. Two, it reassures the readers we aren't going behind their backs.”

### ***Colleton County, S.C., bureau chief/reporter***

Say you publish a pretty good twice-a-week community newspaper in a rural county of about 30,000 people, and you don't have any newspaper competition to speak of, save that your region's big city daily, the 100,000-circulation Charleston, S.C., Post and Courier, has a bureau reporter in your home county; that reporter covers breaking news, public meetings, festivals, courts and even the community calendar.

Then, quite suddenly, the plot thickens. That same bureau reporter, 32-year-old Andy Paras, begins to blog. (He blogs, he says, because a superior at his increasingly Web conscious newspaper “volunteered me to do it.”) Paras is usually allotted only a limited number of inches of newsprint space in the big daily; now, as a journalist blogger, bureau reporter Paras can supplement or flesh out a story online; space is no problem.

That's the situation the twice-weekly Walterboro, S.C., Press & Standard, which serves Colleton County, S.C., finds itself in. (The Press & Standard currently doesn't have a Web site, but intends soon to have an online presence.) The combination bureau chief/reporter Paras--a journalist blogger for about four weeks when he was interviewed for this research paper in late June 2006—wasn't yet getting a lot of reader traffic on his blog site (only about 20 hits a day at the time he was interviewed). However, that could change, he says, if the folks in Colleton County develop an appetite for reading local news every day instead of just twice a week.

“My goal in a county of about 30,000 people is to get a thousand (hits) a day. It's a fun challenge,” said Paras, who (at the time he was interviewed for this paper) had been covering Colleton County for the Post and Courier for about 18 months. “People here are used to getting their news twice a week from the local weekly. I want them to get in the habit of reading me once a day. . . I use the blog to cover breaking news in real time. If something big happens here, I can have the story up in less than an hour.”

The power and attraction of blogging, Paras said, is that it allows a reporter to quickly capture, shape and share more information (than would be possible via newsprint). For example, the Rice Festival is Walterboro's big annual celebration. Paras wrote about the festival for the Post and Courier but he also uploaded lots of festival pictures and news to his blog-titled "Colletonnow." (The blog link is promoted at the end of each of Paras' stories in the newspaper.)

Similarly, when Paras covers a county council meeting, he might be allotted only about 12 inches of space in the newspaper for his story, so his piece may only deal with one issue. His blog helps him cover the remaining 15 issues discussed at that meeting.

In addition, because he knew he would not have sufficient room in the newspaper, Paras said he used to be afraid to approach people who might have a bit of news, "but now I just go to my laptop and type it in."

Paras notes his online contributions are a work in progress and he is trying to define his blogging style. He aspires to be a little lighter as a blogger (than as a print newspaper journalist), without talking about himself. "I just want to have a conversation with people and let them know what's going on," he said. "It's definitely a lot less structured than what's in the paper."

He tries not to express his opinion in his blog but isn't above making a borderline colorful observation. Example: When a local was arrested for growing marijuana among his eggplants, Paras blogged about "being impressed" with the alleged criminal's "garden skills."

"But I wasn't making an opinion about his guilt or innocence," he noted. "I don't express my opinion in public. I'm not going to do it on the blog. . . But I try to have fun even with the mundane press release. It doesn't always work, but you try."

### ***The Shelby (N.C.) Star***

Skip Foster, 40-year-old editor of the 15,000-circulation daily Shelby Star, is among six newsroom staffers at The Star with a blog link on the paper's Web site. Foster, with 18 years professional experience in print journalism, blogs about three times a week. (Find his blog at: <http://sfosterstar.blogspot.com/>)

For Foster, blogging's value is that it offers the newspaper a chance to forge additional connections with the community "because blogs that are alive are conversational," he said. Plus, he noted that blogs allow reporters and editors at The Star a chance to convey information that would not fit the traditional definition of news (yet still interests readers.) Example: On Thanksgiving Day 2006, Pete DeLea, courts and government reporter for The Star, visited firefighters, police officers, volunteers working that holiday at a refuge for the homeless or less fortunate, and waitresses having to work at a diner on Thanksgiving; plus, he blogged about them. His blog, titled "Share why you're thankful" and focusing on what locals thought about working on Thanksgiving, included quotes and pictures of folks in Cleveland County, N.C.

DeLea's writing went from Web to the printed newspaper. "We ended up re-publishing a lot of that stuff (by DeLea) and that was great," Foster said. "It was kind of cool."

Another benefit of blogging, according to Foster, is that it allows the newspaper to discuss some journalism issues—“our screwups and that sort of thing”—that might not otherwise be worth bringing up.

A community’s newspaper cannot be too transparent, Foster said, and blogs help foster that transparency. “I was a Poynter ethics fellow and I think of it (transparency) when it comes to the credibility of what we do. The more the transparency, the better. . . Foster says you don’t want to “take people on a tour of the newspaper and they feel like they’re entering some sort of defense department installation. I think being transparent (lets readers) know we are human beings ‘and here’s why we did that knuckleheaded thing or here’s why we don’t think it was knuckleheaded.’”

But what about the skeptics who say reporters and editors have no business blogging or don’t have the time for online writing?

“I would say to that person something you can’t write in your report,” Foster responded. “Grow up. . . If they’re not ready for blogging, then give me a break. It’s just like saying we don’t have time to answer the phone. . .It’s the very same thing.”

Alan Jenkins, managing editor at The Star, blogs about once a week (sometimes more) on the newspaper’s Web site. Jenkins’ blog—titled “Alan’s Post Adolescence”—is at: <http://ajenkinsstar.blogspot.com/>

Jenkins, who has been blogging for 18 months and who has eight years experience in journalism, says he blogs at The Star “because it’s a major initiative here. . . One of the goals for our paper is to fully integrate content across both platforms (paper and the Web).”

The 28-year-old Jenkins likes to bring a personal touch to his blog. A few months ago, for example, he blogged several times about his trying to lose 15 pounds by working with a personal trainer. His blog columns—a lifestyle story, according to Jenkins—were promoted in the print edition of the newspaper, and some of his blog appeared in the paper’s pages (another example of going from Web to print at the Shelby Star.) While Jenkins acknowledges that his blog didn’t attract a lot of reader posted responses, folks came up to him in the community to ask how he was doing. “A lot of people were reading it (Jenkins’ blog), though few people saw reason to comment,” he said.

What Jenkins refers to as “moblogging” (mobile Web blogging where reporters are on the road and reporting live with pictures and short bursts of information on their blogs) is apparently being put to good use in Shelby. “Moblogging” affords the Shelby newspaper an immediacy or spontaneity that’s hard to achieve in the paper’s printed edition. Case in point: On Election Day (Nov. 7, 2006), a Shelby Star reporter roamed from precinct to precinct—from voting place to voting place in Cleveland County, N.C., and to the political parties’ headquarters—“basically wherever there was election stuff going on,” Jenkins said, “and that allowed him to tell a traditional story in a non-traditional manner. . .(via blogging). Folks stayed plugged in all day. Some folks told us that was the most interesting part of the (Election Day) coverage for them.”

### ***Advice for journalist bloggers***

If you own or manage a newspaper in America you've by now encountered that curious term “blog” (or even curiouser—the burgeoning “blogosphere.”).\_ You can't escape being intrigued that bloggers have helped break or develop some huge blockbuster stories since making their debut in the late 1990s.\_ There’s the rhetoric that bloggers are

transforming journalism, changing it from lecture to conversation and helping make readers better, more informed citizens (Gillmor, 2006). Bloggers are “creating new kinds of networks and communities online” and they are extending the public dialogue and conversation about the issues of our time (Friend, Challenger and McAdams, 2005).

Still, however, many newspaper journalists say they’ve got enough to do *offline*, making them loathe to jump headfirst into the blogosphere.

But what if a journalist does make the jump? What then? How to proceed? What are some of the do's and don'ts of journalist blogging?

Here's a sampling of advice:

1. “One thing to remember is that the absence of space limitations online should NOT be viewed as an invitation to ramble on about things. People want the blog to move along already. Keep the items short and keep them coming. Provide helpful links when you can, then get out of the way. Another thing to remember is to break news on the blog. Forget the notion that it's better to break a story in the paper. It's usually not. We'll still hold something if it's a project we've been working on, but we take the day-to-day Seahawks stuff to the blog first.”--Mike Sando, Sports Reporter, The News Tribune, Tacoma, Wash.

2. “Understand that you only need to do it (blog) after careful consideration and a thorough analysis of the process. Don't just create a blog for blog's sake. Make sure it adds value to the coverage and the experience for the writer and the reader. Be prepared to be challenged and know how to respond. Make sure you have the time, energy and guts to stick with it.”--Jeffrey Sykes, Publisher and Editor, Reidsville (N.C.) Free Press

3. “It's up to the newspaper's management and their strategy of course, but I would be careful as a regular full-time employee of the paper trying to blog for the paper because there could be conflicts of interest. It's easy for employees to set policy or represent the paper as a whole without intending to. Readers assume that what an employee says reflects the opinions of the organization. Blogs are almost like editorials and less like articles; the writer inserts mostly opinion, so they are subjective and that's where things get tricky.”--Rachel Hale, Online Manager, BlufftonToday.com (Bluffton, S.C.)

4. “Don't judge blogs or citizen journalism based on what you read in the trade press. Spend some time visiting sites. Leave some comments and watch what happens. Decide who and what you like. If you think blogs are all alike, just self-styled experts spouting opinion, gossip and wild conspiracies, then expand your blog reading list because, well, you're wrong.

“It's the message, not the medium. . . What you need to care about is the message -- the journalism --you're delivering, and the way you're helping readers connect to each other. We see blogging, podcasts, audio and video as an extension of our mission. The integrity and credibility of your report--this is key--will not be harmed by moving aggressively into participatory journalism.

“Let loose of the reins. . . Open the doors to interaction and listen to the people coming inside. These are your customers, after all. It's risky, yes, but be bold. You'll learn something and be able to do better journalism.” “Don't plan yourself into paralysis. Experimentation is good.

“People forgive your missteps if they sense you're trying, listening and learning. A corollary: Ignore those who trash you right out of the gate without any constructive

criticism. “If you aren't an innovator -- I'm not -- be an imitator. Lots of creative experimentation is happening; steal their ideas. . .” -John Robinson, Editor, Greensboro, N.C., News-Record (from his July 30, 2005, blog “The Editor's Log”)\_

5. “Strive for the facts, and there has to be some kind of public benefit. Keep that foremost. You hear a lot of horror stories of bloggers going off and writing things that aren't true.” --Ian Leslie, City Editor, The Beaufort (S.C.) Gazette\_

6. “Just try it. Just do it.” --Jason Spencer, Reporter, The (Spartanburg, S.C.) Herald-Journal\_

7. “Read blogs. The number one problem that I see with newspaper people who want to enter the blogging world is they don't want to read anyone else's blog. . . . It's similar to any other good conversation. You start by listening to the conversation. . . I think what happens is people (in the newspaper industry) say, 'Okay, we'll start blogging' and they tell Harry 'Go start blogging.' Harry will probably make an ass of himself.”-- Dan Conover, Reporter, The (Charleston, S.C.) Post and Courier.\_

8. “Do it and figure out what works (for your newspaper. . . The reality is we can't afford to ignore online communities. Particularly young people are going onto message boards and blogs. The way we are doing it now is to kind of figure it out as we go along.”--Justin McGuire, Online Editor, The (Rock Hill, S.C.) Herald\_

9. “A lot of what I see is kind of like the columns I used to write when I was in college-just standing around thinking about what to write about. Pointless. Blogs should have a point and be interesting.”--Stephen Guilfoyle, Editor, The (Chester, S.C.) News & Reporter\_

10. “I would do it. It don't see any reason not to. I guess everybody is afraid it will be more work. But it will be what you make of it. . . I think it's going to make you a better reporter. It's got me asking more questions-even about simple things. You're more organized and you're more attentive to detail and you're talking to a lot more people. Also, it kind of puts a human face on reporters.”--Andy Paras, Colleton County Bureau Chief/Reporter, The (Charleston, S.C.) Post and Courier

11. “Write often and find different ways to present the material. A blog is not just another place to provide content when you have time.”—Alan Jenkins, managing editor, The Shelby (N.C.) Star

12. Realize that a journalist blog is part of a new way for a newspaper to connect with its community and to its customers. “It's not an option anymore (for newspapers).”—Skip Foster, editor, The Shelby (N.C.) Star

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### ***To blog or not to blog as a newspaper journalist? Post mortem thoughts***

Mainly through interviews and e-mail exchanges with journalists who are part of the mushrooming blogosphere, (and through perusing published work about blogging) this research has attempted to ascertain why and how selected news people at newspapers are blogging. It has also looked at how blogging is changing journalism, taking into account the pluses and potential minuses--from the perspectives of the bloggers themselves--of this fairly new means of conveying information.

Common themes include journalists blog because they want to supplement their stories with information that can't be squeezed into the printed news hole; expand the community conversation or dialogue with their readers; expose themselves to ideas (from

their readers) that they might otherwise never have contemplated; connect with readers who primarily live in a digital rather than print world; extend the reach of their messages via a means that is not geographically constrained; improve or sharpen their writing skills; and explore, with a more playful, less regimented bent, their craft.

Why are blogs popular among some newspapers?

“ In a media world that's otherwise leached of opinions and life, there's so much life in them (blogs),” says Jeff Jarvis, a former San Francisco Examiner columnist, founding editor of Entertainment Weekly, and currently president and creative director of Advance.net, the Internet sector of Conde Nast. ( Blogging) exposes you to worlds that most people, let alone reporters, never interact with” (Alexander and Hanson, 2007).

Similarly, Julia Wallace, editor of the 640,000 daily circulation Atlanta Journal & Constitution, manages a 500-person newsroom that has 60 bloggers (which monthly get more than 1 million page views). Referring to how technology has brought unprecedented change to newspapers, she noted recently that the AJC is constantly striving to find new and better ways to connect with readers, and that's where blogs help.

“ We are a converged newsroom,” Wallace told an audience at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, S.C., where she spoke to a group of high school journalism teachers in a workshop sponsored by the American Society of Newspaper Editors. “We are about print and online, and you can't just play one of those games.”

Beginning in the early 1990s, thanks to the creation of the Internet as we know it today, by reclusive academic Tim Berners-Lee and his associates at a Swiss research facility, some newspaper publishers looked at the Net and saw opportunities to collect, package and transmit words and pictures in different, new ways. These avant gard publishers set about exploring, experimenting, wondering, imagining how the Net might change their work, their newspapers and their readers. Sixteen years ago (an eternity it seems in Internet speak) publishers began grappling with and making inroads into what recently has been called “the new architecture of information and media” (Jarvis, 2006).

That said, thousands of newspapers-large and small--in America still have no journalist bloggers and seem to be giving, for that matter, only token (static shovelware) attention to online culture. For them, the best way to reach readers is through ink on paper. Blogging, executives at some of them say, is a waste of time and energy, is fraught with potential legal minefields, or would stretch already overworked and underpaid journalists-especially those working at small newspapers.

Bill Rogers is executive director of the South Carolina Press Association, whose membership includes about 85 weekly newspapers and 16 dailies. Particularly at the smaller weeklies, Rogers noted, editors or reporters are already doing all they can--without blogging. “They have small staffs that work hard to put out a print product that serves their community,” Rogers wrote in a response to a query for this research paper. “ They are already covering local news, so why do they need a blog? Big dailies don't have space for the highly local news, so it may make sense to them.

“ Second, there is the liability without reward. Someone has to edit these entries for libel and content. This liability is a big negative, so where is the positive? There is little money to be made in most communities by adding a blog. There is a good chance you are just taking ad dollars out of your paper if you can manage to sell a blog ad. “I'm not a fan of blogs. To me they are not something I have any trust in and are a waste of time.”

Benjy Hamm, editorial director of Landmark Community Newspaper, Inc., is a bit

more diplomatic. Hamm works for a company that has 55 paid newspapers, five dailies and the rest weeklies, in 13 states. While he said many of those papers are not into blogging (and it's a local manager's or editor's decision on whether the paper pursues blogging, Hamm noted), he thinks that blogging might be "a wonderful way to add to the interaction between journalists and those people who are likely to come into contact with journalists in a community."

Already, even without blog links on their Web sites, journalists working for LCNI properties connect closely with their readers and others, Hamm said: "One great thing about editors and reporters at small town papers is that they are very visible in the community. They go to the meetings and events and festivals. People recognize them and talk about their newspaper in stories, at church and in doctors' offices. Readers also have numerous opportunities to be heard in the paper."

Hamm noted that LCNI is looking closely at a variety of online activities—including podcasting, blogging, audio online, video online, message boards and forums, and Web updates of what's in the printed newspaper. Some of LCNI's papers are further along in these Internet ventures than others. "In some places, people are picking and choosing what they can do now," he said. "But a lot of these places (newspapers) are staffed by two to five people. The reality is they can't do all of these things at the same time."

Doug Fisher, a former AP news editor who teaches journalism at the University of South Carolina, has written extensively about blogs for journalists and others. (In addition, Fisher has been a key player in the development of the path breaking HartvilleToday.com, a citizen journalism project that last year became an essential component of the weekly Hartsville, S.C., Messenger.) (Fisher and Osteen, 2006). He, like Rogers, thinks that folks working at many newspapers might already have their hands full—without blogging. However, Fisher suggests that they ought not to quickly dismiss the potential benefits of blogging.

"If blogging helps connect you to your community, . . . newspapers may well feel they already are connected, so what does blogging offer?" Fisher asks. "In that case, however, I think they are just putting off the inevitable. Their younger audience is still more electronic and online oriented and is becoming more so every day. And . . . no matter how well connected you think you are, there always is part of your community that you are not connected to as well as others."

Fisher acknowledges that the potential downsides to journalist blogging and may be driving some newspapers away from it: "There are always the risks of perceived bias, breaking stories before print publication and, depending on the level of editing, legal complications from improper posts. In some ways, however, I think those may be less (at smaller dailies or weeklies) than at larger papers in metropolitan areas.

"First, in some ways community newspapers are like blogs and always have been. Because of their closeness to their communities, they have more of a community and personal flavor to them -- some of the world's great journalists, as well as some of its worst scalawags, have been community newspaper editors. Feedback and connection to the community, among the reasons to blog, has always been quicker and more intense -- at the barbershop, the food store, the church pew. So it seems to me the reason for a community journalist to blog is more pragmatic, as a way to publish off the print cycle and as a way to reach younger audiences."

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