

Task Force on the Professions in the New Millennium

By Steve Geimann, Bloomberg News

Mass communications are being transformed by rapid changes in technology, pressuring practitioners to speed adaptation and the academy to keep up with industry developments.

Newspapers, magazines, broadcasters, public relations and advertising agencies are changing. Expansion of the Internet and its World Wide Web are giving readers and viewers the power to gather all kinds of information – once the domain of professional journalists and other mass media practitioners.

Differences between print and broadcast are also vanishing, forcing re-evaluation of the compartments that segregated newspaper and television reporters. Several journalism programs, such as at the University of Kansas, reshaped the curriculum to expose students to all formats. Other institutions continue to teach in separate sequences.

“We are all going to be just media journalists,” declared Dan Potter, news director at A.H. Belo Corp.’s WBAP-AM in Dallas-Fort Worth, at the Radio-Television News Di-

rectors Association 2000 convention.

By one estimate in early 2001, 50 media companies were engaged in some partnership or affiliation that could be considered convergence or blurring the lines between print and broadcast. University of Kansas journalism dean Jimmy Gentry said of those 50, 25 are “doing it in a major way.”

Public relations and advertising face similar online challenges that could create similar upheavals for those professions. Online access by consumers had made reaching a mass audience to sell a product or coordinating the image of a company more difficult.

For some companies, the rise of the Internet and e-business, and the decline of a mass market has forced companies to reconsider brand development and advertising.

“If e-business is going to work, it cannot be an add-on or an afterthought. It has to be part of every function,” Nestle USA Chief Executive Joe Weller told the Asso-

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ciation of National Advertisers in Dana Point, Calif., in mid-October, as quoted in *The New York Times*.

The technology of the Internet also gives public relations practitioners more tools for strategic communications and to create one-to-one relationships, said Sam Waltz, chairman of the Public Relations Society of America.

“Ethical terrorism,” the practice of a company’s critics building Web sites to stage surreptitious attacks on a firm’s practices, has emerged as a new threat, he said.

Advertising and public relations programs several years ago began to merge the two disciplines under the heading “Integrated Marketing Communications.” Many schools that adopted the IMC concept have sent their first graduates into the field, to mostly enthusiastic response, the American Advertising Federation has reported.

As the new millennium begins, three trends seem clear:

First, the Internet and the Web have accelerated the once-slow evolution of our disciplines and created all-day news and information consumers. The technology is being used by half of all U.S. residents, even if new statistics show Americans spend less time online, and is growing rapidly worldwide. Statistics in the summer of 2000 showed half of all U.S. resi-

dents go online to get information or news.

Second, the rapid pace of change in communications technology and the tools to use the Internet or wireless phones will make it difficult to settle on one single and enduring application. Instead, many experiments will be tried, and few will succeed, even for a short time.

Third, the need for journalists to tell stories, find facts and provide context will remain, and become even more critical. The flood of information has made journalists the most critical element in an information society. At the same time, these professional journalists must adapt to a continuous news cycle demanded by an increasingly global audience.

“Students must be firmly grounded in the professional disciplines of gathering and verifying information, thinking critically about the facts at hand and preparing a reliable, accurate and fair account,” said Robert Giles, director of the Neiman Foundation at Harvard University, as he spoke to journalism educators in Phoenix in August 2000.

Giles and other veteran journalists, once dismissive of the Internet and other technologies, have come to recognize that the features have won a place alongside existing services, much like radio joined TV in mid-century.

Editors and TV producers generally agree that journalists with strong writing and critical-thinking skills, who can adapt quickly, have an edge over prospective reporters able to work in just one medium. Professional journalists have been encouraging universities to prepare students with those skills, and leave equipment training and style issues for the newsroom.

For the purposes of this review, the Internet has been the driving force, pushing new applications and experiences. Other equipment and services, such as digital television and wireless telephone services, also have changed how people get news and information, while making it easier for journalists to do their jobs. The latest technologies will even enable customers to see video on the small screen of a portable telephone, features that already are available in Japan.

The pace of technology development seems only to be accelerating, not slowing. It seems certain that any future technologies will find a way to become useful in the collection, creation and consumption of mass communication.

Journalism

Newspapers and broadcasters, reluctant to embrace the new tech-

nology as recently as five years ago, have incorporated the Web into every editorial operation. At the end of 2000, almost every daily U.S. newspaper had an online presence. Many newspapers now treat their Web sites as a first draft of tomorrow's newspaper.

Media General Inc., which owns newspapers and television stations, has become a leader in the drive to marry broadcasting, print and online units. In Tampa, Fla., the company's WFLA-TV, Tampa Tribune and Tampa Bay Online (TBO.com) operate combined operations in a new \$40 million building.

WFLA-TV reporters write stories for the newspaper and TBO.com, Tribune reporters appear regularly on WFLA Newschannel 8, and when major stories break, such as a massive downtown fire or the midair collision of a Cessna and a military jet, resources are pooled to keep up with developments. Dan Bradley, news director of the TV station, said the three Tampa operations were forced to combine and succeed.

"If we do nothing, we're destined to die," Bradley said at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication convention in Phoenix. "We must figure out a way to meet the new media demands."

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panies, journalists are expected to contribute to all formats.

These converged newsrooms will be staffed with journalists accustomed to working with continuous deadlines and the ability to write and communicate across numerous platforms, Bradley said. Bloomberg provides regular media training for print reporters, guiding them in the special needs of television, where context has to be incorporated into brief introductions and questions posed to interview guests.

Another recent development involves the creation, by the Chicago Tribune, New York Times and Washington Post among other papers, of 24-hour newsrooms, where local and regional stories are updated continuously. Previously, newspapers updated their Web pages with stories from that day's print edition, and used the Associated Press and Reuters to provide breaking national and international news.

Late in 1999, the Times created a Continuous News Desk, headed by Jerry Gray, a former metro desk reporter and editor. "We're not trying to be a wire service," Gray told *Editor & Publisher*.

Washingtonpost.com Editor Douglas Feaver said the newspaper keeps its Web site updated. "People come to our site expect-

ing to see Washington Post journalism, and we're trying to find a way to deliver it." Some stories are developed just for the online version. At the Post, an online editor sits in the main newsroom to coordinate updates for the Web page.

People now have access to news all day, making the comprehensive nightly newscast less relevant than the all-news cable channels, and the daily newspapers published once a day can barely keep up with breaking developments in major stories.

A few media-connected Web sites, such as NBCi.com, have created portal sites where users "enter" the Internet to search onto other sites. Newspapers such as the Washington Post and broadcasters such as NBC, CBS and ABC are using their sites as the magnet for customers, boosting the number of "visits," which helps determine advertising rates for Web sites.

Other early efforts by broadcasters have consisted of video archives and brief written synopsis of the days' news, sometimes married with video clips stored in digital files. In Election 2000, all the U.S. TV networks used their Web sites to post running totals of vote counts, exit-poll results and other details mentioned during on-air broadcasts.

For journalists, it seems clear that an agility to swiftly adapt and manage the new technologies coupled with core values embraced by the profession will become prime assets in seeking and keeping a job in the newsroom of tomorrow.

Copyright issues determining the legality, or liability, for carrying over-the-air broadcasts on the Internet remain to be resolved, an uncertainty that has delayed more rapid expansion of so-called webcasting.

Outside the United States, media companies have been more aggressive about partnerships that capitalize on new technologies. The British Broadcasting Corp. is moving a step ahead of its U.S. counterparts by forming partnerships with telephone providers to deliver text news updates to handheld phones. The company also had an agreement with AvantGo Inc. to develop personalized news and information for delivery to handheld phones or organizers.

In the future, U.S. television stations will put into service new services over high-capacity digital channels that must be activated by 2006. These channels initially were intended for high-definition images – clearer, crisper, more detailed images. The stations also can use these for interactive services, on over-the-air frequencies.

Experimentation will continue, and some efforts will fail. A few years ago, PointCast Inc. promoted “push technology” to send customized news to a user’s PC screen instead of requiring a customer to dial into an Internet site. “But this technology failed to deliver what those users really wanted: digital-quality video and audio, on demand, over the Internet,” said a McKinsey & Co. 2000 report.

All the new technology and cheaper access to communications as well have prompted the rise of Independent Media Centers in three dozen key global cities, groups that use shoe leather, handheld video cameras and the Web to report on government actions and meetings, such as the World Trade Organization gathering in Seattle. In some cases, these centers are connected to the protests, serving as an alternative voice to the mainstream press.

“Their 21st century hybrid of Web and digital technology and old-fashioned radical zeal is snowballing in scope and influence,” the Boston Globe wrote in October. “To

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participate in an event one covers is anathema to traditional reporters. IMC reports and organizers, however, call objectivity a myth."

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Public Relations

Public relations practitioners and educators have moved the furthest and the quickest in assessing the challenges and threats of a new millennium. The Commission on Public Relations Education of the Public Relations Society of America spent two years working on recommendations for a new PR curriculum. Journalism lacks an equivalent.

The practice of public relations has changed more starkly than journalism and advertising, growing from a reactive and responsive era of the 1960s, when social unrest ruled the day, to today's role in building relationships — with consumers, workers, civic leaders and communities.

"Public relations communication itself evolved from one-way mes-

sage delivery into a two-way exchange involving listening to publics; assessing their needs, expectations and demands; resolving conflicts between groups, and affecting public opinion and behavior," the commission concluded in its October 1999 report. Like the rest of the Society, the PR practice has been buffeted by the social and corporate changes worldwide.

Corporations are spending more on public relations, more than 20 percent in the past year, underscoring the rising importance of the practice within corporations. Investor relations spending rose 11 percent, the Harris/Impulse Client Survey showed, reflecting a rush to staff a new PR division, *PRWeek* reported in October.

Globalization of businesses, rapid mergers and acquisition of businesses, fragmented audiences and the rapid rise of the Internet have forced many public relations practitioners to play a new role. National boundaries are irrelevant, and customizing a message based on geography is a risky strategy.

"Globalization is creating a new world," said Michel Ogrizek, global head of marketing and communications for UBS Warburg, at the Institute of Public Relations conference in London this year.

The Internet has propelled global-

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ization, in good and bad ways from the perspective of public relations practitioners. A company's message can be available, inexpensively, to anyone who wants to visit a Web site for the latest information. The success of such messages is directly related to the number of unique hits on the site.

The 2000 U.S. presidential election, and the razor-thin difference between the candidates in Florida, made the state's Division of Elections a frequently visited site. The office posted results, statements and news releases, allowing anyone, anywhere, to obtain first-hand information during the vote-counting process.

Lobbying efforts, for corporations or grass-roots groups, also have posed a new challenge to the public relations profession. Grass-roots organizers have traded in leaflets and fliers attached to walls or telephone polls with a flood of e-mails. “Every time we do an action, we send out an e-mail and a hundred people show up,” said Meda Benjamin of Global Exchange, a San Francisco non-profit that promotes human rights.

Waltz, chairman of the PRSA in 1999, called globalization one of the five trends confronting the practice of the profession. “In addition, the fragmentation and proliferation of media, coupled with the growth of the personal communications devices, are effectively shifting the gatekeeper function from the sender to the receiver in the communications model,” Waltz said last year.

Those changes will require a new kind of practitioner, the commission concluded. Former journalists, once primary candidates for PR jobs, have the necessary skills but lack “conceptual understanding of the scope of public relations.” Lawyers, doctors, government workers and management consultants often offer relevant attributes but are frequently most valuable in narrowly-focused areas of public relations practice. Critical variables in successful relationship management means developing and sustaining trust and credibility in open communication, behaving appropriately, and leading change among trusting stakeholders, the commission said.

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"Too many of us have confused management and administration with leadership, and we think one presumes the other," Waltz said.

"Not so! The successful organization is one that reeks of leadership from top to bottom, that builds in integrity and character and trust and credibility in every one of its relationships from bottom to top."

In its final report, the PR Commission recommended that students graduating with undergraduate degrees possess knowledge of broad issues and skills to practice their craft.

Knowledge includes communication and persuasion concepts and strategies, communication and public relations theories, relationships and relationship building, societal trends, ethical issues, legal requirements and issues, marketing and finance, public relations history, uses of research and forecasting, multicultural and global issues, organizational change and development and management concepts and theories

Some of the skills include research methods and analysis, management of information, mastery of language in written and oral communication, strategic planning, issues management, audience segmentation, informative and persuasive writing.

Advertising

Technology has swept through the advertising industry faster and perhaps with longer lasting effect than either journalism or public relations. These changes have also made it possible to personalize a message to an individual consumer even as ad spending remains flat, according to some studies.

This also has opened emotional debates about privacy and confidentiality, while giving advertisers more power to reach only the audiences they seek. In short, the era of point-to-point promotion and advertising has arrived. By tracking a consumer's purchase, or the Web sites visited during an online session, or by remembering items bought at the grocery, advertisers have gained a powerful tool to reach an audience.

"The future of interactive advertising is a bright and happy one, because it will reduce the probability of a feminine hygiene product ad showing up on my TV screen to roughly the same probability of my ever buying such a product, at least for my own use," wrote Matt Carmichael in *Advertising Age*.

"A major challenge advertising faces comes from the real-time video recorders that allow TV viewers to pause action even as the program is being broadcast ... The equipment lets home viewers zip past commercials..."

Executives and advertising practitioners have grappled with these issues, sometimes prodded by government, and often responding to consumers.

At universities, the integrated marketing communications concept has won considerable support. Northwestern University's IMC curriculum focuses on the coordination of all "organizational communications" directed at building positive relationships with potential customers, stakeholders, including the financial markets, and employees.

At the Association of National Advertisers conference in California in October, the new technology was described as a "business revolution that strike terror" for many executives. The revolution is the "abrupt and wrenching dislocations" of the past year in interactive marketing and advertising, wrote Stuart Elliott in his

New York Times advertising column.

The Internet is the cause. Consumers accustomed to being hit by commercials on television, surrounded by ads on car radios, distracted by roadside billboards, aware of splashy ads in newspapers and magazines are now finding messages whenever — and sometimes wherever — they are in cyberspace.

Dana Blankenhorn of *Advertising Age* recently compiled a list of activities, possibilities and trends that may become commonplace in the next five years. The list included ads targeted not to a demographic or psychographic group, but to you specifically—ads that know what you need, what you want, what you imagine?

Or, a home with smart appliances, each connected to an always-on Internet connection, that communicate with a central database to keep track of what's in your refrigerator, knows when the washing machine needs repairs and can make other devices activate on cue.

Companies are experimenting with advertisements over wireless telephones that will send you a text message today and, perhaps, a video message in the future when you are within walking dis-

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Palm Pilot could perform the same function.

"Maybe wireless won't carry ads as we know them, but wireless surely will carry marketing content that informs users and perhaps defrays the cost of access," wrote Bradley Johnson, interactive editor of *Advertising Age*. "We need to be flexible in our definitions; TV was not radio with pictures, and wireless won't be the Internet unplugged."

A study in Europe showed consumers receptive to advertising delivered by mobile phones. Phone giant Ericsson and Mediatude, a London-and Stockholm-based mobile marketing solutions company, released the study showing nearly 40 percent of consumers found the advertising delivered via mobile phone was compelling, and nearly 20 percent wanted more information after viewing the ads.

Experts also are working on undergarments that measure your body's vital function and, detecting your glucose level is dropping, automatically inject you with insulin, or clothing that senses a heart attack coming and tells you to take a pill.

The developments appear fanciful at the start of the millennium, but then the Internet, the wireless phone and even television were hardly imagined a century ago.

"Every day I'm hearing something new, what works and doesn't work," said John Costello, chief executive of MVP.com Inc., a Internet retailer of sporting goods that opened early in 2000. "We're seeing five years of industry consolidation taking place at Internet speed. It's a very humbling experience."

A major challenge advertising faces comes from the real-time video recorders, known as TiVO and ReplayTV, that allow TV viewers to pause action even as the program is being broadcast over the air. The equipment lets home viewers zip past commercials, or other unwanted programming. And what is surely ironic, TiVO its selling is products using TV ads — the very feature the equipment obliterates.

A greater threat may come from the ability of Web-based marketers and businesses with extensive data on consumers to capitalize on the private information of customers. Such possibilities have triggered a massive privacy effort among policy makers and the Internet industry. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission, the government's agent on privacy concerns, has warned that public fears required companies to act, or face government intervention, although by the end of 2000 the agency appeared to back away in favor of self-regulation.

Conclusion

The start of a new millennium has given our professions a chance to look closely at the changing trends and new challenges. Yet the calendar had less to do with the developments than the escalating pace of technology developments. Market demand for new services, with greater agility and less cost,

is fueling many of the devices available to consumers. But technology doesn't make journalism, or advertising or public relations different. Practitioners universally argue that the tools can make the job easier, especially for well-educated and well-grounded professionals.

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