

# The Golden Age for Editorial Cartoonists at the Nation's Newspapers is Over

A report presented by  
The Herb Block Foundation

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# The Introduction

The Golden Age for editorial cartoonists at the nation's newspapers is over.

At the start of the 20th century, there were approximately 2,000 editorial cartoonists employed by newspapers in the United States. Today there are fewer than 40 staff cartoonists, and that number continues to shrink.

At the same time, the digital age presents more potential outlets for editorial cartoons than at any time in the history of the news media.

"It's never been easier for anyone to find a wide audience for their self-expression; the tough part is getting paid for it," said a nationally recognized cartoonist who asked for anonymity. "The challenge is not one of technology, but of economics."

American newspapers are struggling to master the new economics of the digital age. Profits and circulation are continuing to fall as the industry is evicted from its traditional advertising base. And there are estimates that a third of the nation's reporters have lost their jobs in the past decade.

There are fewer than 1,400 daily newspapers today, several thousand below the peak in 1913. Since then, the nation's population has more than tripled, to 311 million.

For more than a century, American newspapers have relied on an economic model based on advertising revenue to finance their operations. But the advent of the Internet has turned advertising finances upside down, sharply changing the revenue stream for most newspapers. Until the Internet arrived, newspapers charged their highest rates for national advertisements and the lowest for local ads. Today just the opposite is the case, severely affecting the financial underpinnings of most newspapers.

Writing in the *American Journalism Review* in the fall of 2010, *Washington Post* reporter Paul Farhi used his own newspaper's experience to explain the reversal in advertising rates on the Internet. "*The Post* is one of the few local newspapers in America with a national and international following," Farhi wrote. "On a daily basis, the vast majority of its million-plus visitors come from outside the Washington area (unlike the printed *Post*, which circulates largely within greater Washington). This means that only a fraction of those visiting the paper's website are likely to be of interest to local advertisers."

In 1995, well in advance of the current profit decline, the advent of *Craigslist* dealt a major blow to newspaper revenue. At the time, classified ads often accounted for 40 percent or more of newspaper advertising revenue. *Craigslist* ads are free.

Today, Internet technology has given the news reader access to a vast array of cheap or free news that has taken control of the news agenda away from traditional newspapers. Columbia University journalism professor Michael Schudson said only 31 percent of the nation's 18- to 24-year-olds now get their news from newspapers.

The result has been an apparent devaluation of editorial cartoonists in the eyes of the nation's newspaper publishers. Asked what economic value newspaper publishers put on editorial cartooning, an official of one

of the nation's leading syndicates said: "Not much." And publishers who still value editorial cartooning find it much cheaper to purchase their cartoons from a syndicate. That way, said Paul Tash of the *St. Petersburg Times*, "you can pick the best cartoon of the day."

This goes a long way toward explaining why publishers may not place a great economic value on the work of an editorial cartoonist despite the fact that a cartoon may garner the most daily hits on a newspaper's website. Those hits simply do not translate into profits.

Newspaper syndicates, faced with a shrinking newspaper base, are also in a state of compression. The fate of syndicates has been closely tied to the newspaper industry, and they, too, are searching for new markets in the digital age. So far, the growth in syndicates' Internet sales has not made up for the income stagnation created by the loss of newspaper advertising revenue.

To help maintain their revenue stream, some syndicates are adding new cartoonists to an existing package of editorial cartoonists without increasing the cost of the overall package. For example, a syndicate offering a package of 10 cartoonists may now offer a package of 11 cartoonists without increasing the cost to the subscriber. But to keep its own revenue base, the syndicate will reduce its payments to all the other cartoonists in the package.

A 2010 report by the Congressional Research Service, "The U.S. Newspaper Industry in Transition," paints a bleak picture for the industry in the 21st century. Prepared by Suzanne M. Kirchoff, an analyst in industry organization and business for the CRS, the report begins by saying:

"The U.S. newspaper industry is suffering through what could be the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. Advertising revenues have plummeted due in part to the severe economic downturn, while readership habits have changed as consumers turn to the Internet for free news and information. Some newspaper chains are burdened by heavy debt loads. Between 2008 and early 2010, eight major newspaper chains declared bankruptcy, several big city papers shut down and many laid off reporters and editors, imposed pay reductions, cut the size of the physical newspaper, or turned to web-only publication."

Kirchoff added, "Advertising dollars are still declining and newspapers have not found a stable revenue source to replace them. As the problems continue, there are growing concerns that the decline of the newspaper industry will impact civil and social life." She said that while the emerging ventures of the digital era hold promise, they "do not yet have the experience, resources and reach of shrinking mainstream newspapers."

That's not a pretty picture, but it's the picture facing a dwindling cadre of editorial cartoonists as they contemplate survival in the transition to a new age of political satire.

The explosion of all-news programming, all the time, on cable television and the Internet and the increasing substitution of opinion programming based on a decreasing amount of basic news reporting has caused concern about the future role of a free press. Will anyone care?

Some of those answers are beginning to form. The Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, in its annual "*State of the News Media*" report for 2011, reported that for the first time, more people said they get their news from the Web than from newspapers. This, according to the Pew report, also shows that while online ad revenue is projected to surpass print ad revenue, "by far the far largest share of that online ad revenue goes to non-news sources, particularly aggregators."

"In the 20th century, the news media thrived by being the intermediary others needed to reach customers," the Pew report noted. "In the 21st, increasingly there is a new intermediary: Software programmers, content

aggregators and device makers control access to the public. The news industry, late to adapt and culturally more tied to content than engineering, finds itself more a follower than a leader shaping its business. In the meantime, the pace of change continues to accelerate.”

This report by the Herb Block Foundation is an attempt to outline the challenges that editorial cartoonists face. We are not attempting to break new ground or predict the future. Instead we hope to give a clear-eyed view of why the climate for cartoonists is changing and why it may never be the same again, and to provide a basis for discussions about the craft, its value to society and a free press, and its prospects for survival.

**The report is broken down into four parts:**

- The introduction, which explores the economic changes taking place in the newspaper industry as it searches for ways to make money and deliver its product in the new and rapidly changing electronic age.
- The results of a survey of cartoonists who belong to the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists. The survey explores the changing world as it affects individual cartoonists.
- A primer on new technology.
- Eleven “essays” representing a broad spectrum of editorial cartoonists on what they think the future holds for their craft.

# New Technology

by Mark Potts

## Introduction: Faster, Smaller, Better, Cheaper

To contemplate the state of digital technology and how it's radically changing the media and roiling journalism and cartooning, it would be helpful to conjure up a piece of particularly outlandish technology: a time machine.

We'll first use our wayback machine to head back in time about 20 years. Consider the media and technology landscape of 1991: People get most of their news from the morning newspaper. Televisions tune in just a handful of channels. Being a publisher or broadcaster is a great business, and it provides the millions of dollars required to pay for presses or broadcast facilities. It takes deep pockets to be a media mogul; no one else need apply.

In 1991, personal computers are clunky beige boxes that have just graduated to color screens (unless green type on a black cathode-ray screen counts). Data is stored on floppy disks. A gigabyte of data — a fantastic amount — can be stored on a hard drive costing thousands of dollars. Connecting to other computers via a modem involves an interminable period of buzzes and squeaks — and creeps along at an oh-so-slow 300 bits per second.

The Internet, circa 1991? It's a Pentagon-funded communications network used mostly by academics and researchers. The World Wide Web? Just a gleam in Tim Berners-Lee's eye. The @ symbol? A rarely used curlicue at the top of the 2 key on your keyboard. E-mail? Rare. Cellphones? Even more rare, and brick-like. Laptops? Rarer still, expensive — and generally too heavy for the average lap.

That's the state of the media and technology world, circa 1991. Remember? Twenty years later, it seems like the dark ages.

By comparison, what we have today seems incredible: super-thin flat screens, wireless high-speed connections, multi-gigabyte memory chips handed out as promotional items. There are iPads, iPhones, digital books on Kindles. Hundreds of cable or satellite channels. Your choice of music and movies on demand. Shopping for just about anything from your phone or couch. The ubiquitous Web. The Cloud. Blogs. Facebook. Twitter. Groupon. YouTube. Google. Even Google+.

The difference between today and 20 years ago can be summed up in a simple mantra of technological change: Faster, smaller, better, cheaper.

It's all fantastic, but of course, there are more melancholy effects of technology: Newspapers and magazines are in serious, perhaps fatal decline, reducing newsroom staffing as quickly as circulation and advertising plummet. With access to cheap (or free) powerful tools such as blogging platforms, anybody can be a publisher these days; it seems like everybody is. Aggressive new competitors are everywhere, many of which rely on business models (and pay scales) that bear no resemblance to the old days. Publishers and broadcasters — and journalists and journalism — are under siege.

If it seems almost unimaginable, based on where things were 20 years ago, you're not alone. William Gibson, who wrote the groundbreaking sci-fi novel "Neuromancer" (which eerily predicted the Web in 1984), recently

told the Paris Review: “If you’d gone to a publisher in 1981 with a proposal for a science fiction novel that consisted of a really clear and simple description of the world today, they’d have read your proposal and said: ‘Well, it’s impossible. This is ridiculous.’ “

But it’s reality. Science fiction brought to life.

Okay. Let’s climb back into that time machine. We need to spin forward 20 years. What will that world be like? It’s as impossible to predict as Gibson described. At best, we can make sort of educated guesses. But if you can fathom the enormous changes of the past 20 years in technology and the media, you can use them to start imagining the future, 20 years out, more or less.

Indeed, Gibson’s “Neuromancer,” which envisioned a world in which we’re all connected via chips in our brains, may be as good a predictor as any. (Yes, brain chips.) In 2031, today’s amazing iPad will look incredibly clunky, perhaps replaced by flexible screens that can be rolled up or folded up and carried in a pocket. Live, three-dimensional holograms, a la “Star Wars,” are certainly within the realm of possibility. Three-dimensional printers — mind-blowing devices that produce items you can pick up, handle and use — already are being commercialized.

Twenty years hence, newspapers will essentially be dead; indeed, a newspaperman-turned-Microsoft-technologist named Dick Brass notoriously predicted (in 2000!) that *The New York Times* would print its last edition on paper in 2018. That prediction, outrageous then, now looks about right. If newspapers and magazines (and books) persist in print after that, they will likely be as boutique items for specialty audiences.

The rest of the media world will be entirely digital, a supersized version of what’s already stunning today, replete with highly personalized editorial and advertising products, as well as infinite amounts of information and communications that’s not just at our fingertips but follows us around and gets our attention before we know we need it — and entirely new business models for all of this, to boot.

These are, obviously, titanic changes — and there are many we cannot even begin to predict at this juncture. Who saw Facebook or Twitter coming just a few years ago? Or the iPad? But these seemingly wild predictions reflect the pace of change we’ve seen in the past 20 years. Again: ever faster, ever smaller, ever better, ever cheaper.

The past 20 years has seen changes in media and technology that rival anything seen since Gutenberg’s movable-type press revolutionized printing in the 15th century. The next 20 years promise more of the same. As we disembark our time machine (please return your seats and tray tables to the upright position), we can begin to contemplate what those changes portend for journalism and for the journalism business — and what journalists and cartoonists can do to take advantage of the fast-changing landscape.

## A Few Technologies and Trends to Watch

It seems dizzying sometimes to keep up with the quickly moving developments in technology. Every week, it seems, brings some sort of dazzling new advance — a glitzy piece of hardware, a social network with its own in-crowd, a way of purchasing or receiving things online that upsets the way we’ve done things for years. Don’t feel left behind — nobody can really keep up with it all. (Remember: faster, smaller, better, cheaper.)

But there are a few significant technologies and trends, already making an impact or on the immediate horizon, that are worth knowing about and trying to understand. All of them will have enormous impact on our lives; some will continue the revolution that’s roiling the media business. Let’s take a digital Cook’s Tour of what to watch:

## Visual Journalism and Multimultimedia

For all we've heard over the past few years about a multimedia revolution driven by technology, most of our media is still fairly traditional. We still read text stories, look at static, two-dimensional photos and cartoons, and watch a lot of traditional video. But that's finally starting to change.

One of the barriers to true multimedia has been computing power. As impressive as they've become, most computers, tablets and smartphones have been largely limited to displaying variations on traditional media formats. But with inexpensive, off-the-shelf personal computers and mobile devices whose brains rival those of the supercomputers of just a few years ago, just about anything is possible on just about any device—rich interactivity, three dimensions, virtual reality, you name it.

With these powerful new tools, we need to be able to think beyond the traditional boundaries of text and two-dimensional images to look at new forms of storytelling and graphic presentation. A news story might combine text, sound, video and a simulation; an editorial cartoon can be animated and interactive. It may take a new generation of content creators to fully understand how to take advantage of the wide variety of media tools now available to us.

For cartoonists, this will mean thinking beyond traditional pen and ink. Pioneers such as *Newsday's* Walt Handelsman and the *Philadelphia Daily News's* Signe Wilkinson are already finding success with animated cartoons that bring their drawings to life and explore new media. The advent of three-dimensional technology opens new possibilities for striking visual opinions. The creation of instant, if crude, animated movies is possible through sites such as Xtranormal.com. Technologies such as “augmented reality,” which allows the overlay of computer-generated images over existing scenes viewed through the lens of a smartphone's camera, summon up other exciting possibilities. These technologies are just now becoming widely available, and the only limit on them is our imaginations.

## Goin' Mobile

Perhaps the largest single technology trend these days is the explosion in mobile technology. It began a couple of decades ago with cellphones and accelerated in the past few years with the advent of “smartphones,” such as Apple's hugely successful iPhone. By untethering our ability to communicate, look up information, conduct transactions, keep up with the news, interact with friends, watch video, listen to music and play games, the mobile revolution has brought us into an era of constant connectivity. As Silicon Valley futurist Paul Saffo recently told *The New York Times*: “Before the iPhone, cyberspace was something you went to your desk to visit. Now cyberspace is something you carry in your pocket.”

Cyberspace is in a lot of pockets. A recent study by the Pew Internet Research Project found that 51 percent of U.S. adult cellphone owners had used their phones to get info “they needed right away” in the previous month. That means they were checking news, sports scores, restaurant listings, traffic reports and the like (and remember, not all cellphones are smartphones, though the number is growing quickly).

It's not just about using the phone for information; Pew found that 42 percent of phone users had turned to the device in the palm of their hand to “stave off boredom” — in other words, to watch an episode of their favorite TV show or play “Angry Birds” while waiting in line. Among 18- to 29-year-olds, that number soared to 70 percent. Having a smartphone means never again having to spend an idle moment — there's always something available to do.

But that just scratches the surface of what's happening with mobile devices. Because they are “location-

aware,” meaning that they always know where you are at all times (Big Brother alert!), smartphones portend a whole new type of personalized interaction with information. Imagine walking by a store and having your phone buzz with a discount offer. Or finding out that several of your friends are eating dinner at a restaurant around the corner. Or receiving news headlines and traffic alerts customized to where you are. All of this is not just possible, but already widely available through services such as Foursquare.

iPhones, Droids and their ilk also have given rise to a fascinating new software paradigm known as “apps.” Short for “applications” — the traditional computer programs they resemble, but in a smaller form—apps allow users to infinitely customize their phones with services that fit their personal needs. Some are quite imaginative, such as Shazam, which can quickly identify a song being played in the background, or Word Lens, which instantly translates written language, or HistoryPin, an example of “augmented reality” that can layer historic photos over your view of a particular location. Apps — there are more than 300,000 of them for the iPhone — can track the weather, find restaurants, provide real-time simulations of sports events or even pay for your latte at Starbucks with a swipe of your iPhone — a preview of a fast-arriving technology that will turn your mobile phone into a virtual wallet.

The rapid advances in smartphones have interesting ramifications for journalism and cartooning, both in the ability to deliver location-specific information and advertising and in the ability to use a smartphone as a portable journalist’s or artist’s tool. With touch screens and ever-more-powerful built-in video and still cameras and recording ability, smartphones are like a handheld newsroom — you can even edit photos or videos or create art on a phone or tablet. Painting apps such as Brushes and ArtStudio can be used to create high-quality artwork (including several *New Yorker* covers) on an iPhone or iPad. Cyberspace in your pocket will be an important trend for years to come — at least until those brain-chip implants arrive.

## Flat and Thin

If the smartphone was our introduction to mobile computing, then tablets such as the iPad are the next step. After several fits and starts, tablets have established themselves as the most important new computer platform since the laptop — which they threaten to replace. (I’m writing this essay on an iPad, in fact.) A quarter-inch thick, weighing around a pound, tablets have quickly become ubiquitous, sporting a much larger screen than a smartphone but far more portability than a desktop computer or even a laptop.

Apple’s iPad is the best-known of the tablet genre, of course, providing a wide array of services ranging from e-mail to movie-watching to games to apps of all types. But Amazon’s Kindle has been equally influential, presenting a terrific alternative to reading a traditional paper book, at a price just below \$80. Being able to carry around a small device that can hold the equivalent of thousands of books and magazines beats lugging a bag full of heavy books on vacation.

Newspaper and magazine publishers have become particularly excited about tablets, albeit probably for the wrong reasons. Many executives see them and think, “Hey, a tablet is flat and lies on a table — what a perfect replacement for print.” But initial efforts to sell apps that elaborately replicate print publications have been largely unsuccessful, finding small audiences at best and little advertiser support. More successful have been clever news-aggregation apps, such as Flipboard, Zite and Pulse, that draw content from multiple sources, sometimes based on the user’s reading history, to create a customized news-reading experience that’s presented in an attractively laid out package.

What’s next for tablets? They’re becoming ever more powerful and more connected, so that they can extend a user’s computing range almost infinitely. They have the same location-aware features as smartphones, but

they are also doing things such as allowing a user to start watching a movie on the tablet, and then easily finish watching it on a larger screen at home, with just a flick of a finger to send the video from tablet to big screen. We're not far from even more fantastic tablets that offer 3-D viewing — or that can roll up and fit into a user's pocket, thus catching up to one of the remaining advantages of print.

## The Audience Takes Over

One of the biggest trends in technology that has impacted journalism has been the way that readers and viewers have been brought into the process. “The people formerly known as the audience,” as NYU journalism professor Jay Rosen has described them, have changed journalism from a mostly one-way lecture into a cacophony of conversations and audience participation.

This rankles many journalists, who resent losing their longtime sense of control. For better or worse, it also has empowered an enormous new set of participants in journalism and the discussions surrounding it. No longer do you need big bucks to be a publisher or broadcaster. As the business schools say, those once-insurmountable barriers to entry are gone, and competitors to traditional media abound.

Now anybody can start a blog, a Twitter feed, a Flickr page or a YouTube channel to gain a worldwide audience (though most are seen by just a handful of friends) for their writing, photography or artwork. Web commenting areas allow anyone to be a pundit. Notions such as “crowdsourcing,” “user-generated content” and “iReports” are turning the former members of the audience into content creators alongside traditional journalists. The Internet truly is a participatory medium like nothing seen before.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the phenomenon of Facebook, the social network started by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg that now counts 750 active million members worldwide, larger than the population of most of the world's nations. Facebook's statistics are staggering — half of those users sign on every day, and some 700 billion minutes per month are spent on the service, sharing information “updates” with friends.

Facebook, and the nearly as popular 140-character status-broadcast network, Twitter, show the social power of connecting people and giving them tools to easily communicate and interact with each other. These social networks are creating a new definition of news and information: intensely personal and very important to the participants, turning the traditional mass market of media on its head. For many of us, news about our friends is more important than reporting of politics or foreign conflicts that journalists have long used as their definition of “news.”

The rise of Facebook and Twitter in the past few years — and of their inevitable successors, such as Google+, which went from zero to 10 million users in just a couple of weeks earlier this year — demonstrates that the audience is in control and wants its voice to be heard. It will be interesting to see how the power of social media is used as a force for societal and political change from the grass roots up — as we've already seen in the social-media-powered Occupy Wall Street movement and citizen uprisings in the Middle East.

## The Future of Journalism

Okay, let's jump into that time machine again for a minute and look again at journalism a generation ago, when the primary news sources were the daily newspaper and the brief evening newscasts. No CNN, no Internet, no blogs. What happened halfway around the world or halfway across the country? Generally, you'd wait a day or so to find out. How did your stocks or favorite team do? You didn't know until the paper came the next morning. What was the result of the important town council vote? You had to read

your community weekly, days later. Analysis of big news stories appeared in Sunday papers or newsweekly magazines. News was just slower, for better or worse.

Back to the present: We live in an age of instantaneous, 24/7 journalism. Make that 60/60/24/7. News is everywhere, live, as it happens, transmitted by all-news cable stations, constantly updating websites and fast-moving Twitter feeds. Ball scores and stocks are available in real time. Analysis and commentary are instantaneous, on everything from serious news sites to snarky blogs and Twitter feeds. We're living in, maybe drowning in, a fast-moving torrent of news — again, for better or worse.

This creates a raft of new challenges for journalism. With countless competitors able to publish immediately online, the premium is on speed — sometimes, some skeptics believe, at the expense of accuracy. The levels of reporting, fact-checking and editing heretofore enjoyed by many publications are actually impediments in the fast-moving world of online news. Hesitate and you risk being beaten by somebody's quick tweet of a key headline. Rush too fast, and you risk getting it wrong. Ironically, these are challenges that wire services such as the Associated Press and Reuters have faced for decades, and they evolved systems of quality control to avoid speed-driven mistakes. But for many journalists, these are new issues.

Technology is also creating new forms of journalism, and not all of the rules for them are yet firm. How does a journalist handle user-generated submissions? Are objectivity and fairness outmoded concepts when everyone seems to be able to publish an opinion? How do you skillfully combine video, text and interactivity to create new journalistic formats? What's the best way to handle often-vitriolic (and anonymous) reader comments? What are the implications of privacy online? How do you compete with unorthodox competitors such as Wikileaks? How should journalists use social media?

These are issues every newsroom is grappling with. It would be wrong to say that we're in entirely uncharted waters — after nearly two decades of digital journalism, some issues and standards are pretty well settled. But it's still a fast-changing environment, with new challenges and technologies popping up seemingly every day. It's incumbent on journalists to remain flexible and open to change in their profession, but also to wisely rely on long-held standards, judiciously applied, to form the new rules of the road.

## The Changing Business of Journalism

The classic business school transformation case centers on what happened to railroad companies at the turn of the 20th century: Believing they were in the railroad business, rather than the transportation business, they clung to trains — and missed opportunities to capitalize on the rise of automobiles, trucking and air transport.

Sound familiar? Same thing in the media business. Publishers and broadcasters, fat and happy and sitting on enormous, monopoly-enforced profits, didn't realize they were in the information business and were painfully slow to embrace the changes — and opportunities — being wrought in their industries by fast-changing technology. Upstart competitors such as Google, Apple, Huffington Post, eBay and others now sit atop businesses that media companies once thought they dominated.

Over the past few years, newspapers, especially, have seen their core businesses attacked from multiple directions. The traditional triumvirate of newspaper revenue streams — classified advertising, display advertising and circulation — have been significantly eroded. Classifieds, especially, have been a ruinous loss, because the pages of tiny-type want ads accounted for half (or more) of newspaper revenue and profits. But the rise of free or low-cost classifieds competitors such as Craigslist, eBay and Monster.com has crushed the traditional classifieds business. Similarly, display advertising has moved to the Web or disappeared entirely as the result of consolidation in the retail industry. Online competition for advertising and audiences quickly eroded once

wildly profitable media monopolies. It's not a pretty picture — half of the newspaper industry's overall revenue has disappeared since 2005.

This tumult in the news business was accelerated in 2008 by the Great Recession, which slashed advertising revenue and circulation even further. We all know what happened: Tens of thousands of journalists lost their jobs; major newspapers in cities including Seattle, Denver and Oakland were shut down; and just about every other significant news organization downsized its operations. Most papers and broadcast news operations are shells of their former selves — leading to a decline in quality that is further driving away frustrated readers, viewers and advertisers. It's a vicious cycle.

The odds of reversing the decline of the traditional media industry are almost insurmountable. At best, publishers and broadcasters can hope to get to a point where the revenue from digital operations can cover costs — and it's not altogether clear, at this juncture, whether that's possible. There's too much competition for audiences and advertising dollars, much of it working at much lower costs than legacy media companies. Efforts to find other sources of revenue, such as charging for once-free online content, have had mixed results, at best. One Draconian option: to shut down expensive print production entirely and switch to digital-only versions. It's already happened in Seattle and Detroit and is likely to happen elsewhere. Indeed, some experts believe a “digital-first” strategy represents the last best hope to save the newspaper business.

The core issue is how to pay for the kind of high-quality, in-depth journalism that we've come to accept as the norm (at least at the best news organizations). There are any number of interesting experiments going on in search of a workable journalism business model — including low-cost local bloggers such as *New Jersey's Baristanet*, *New York's Batavian* and the *West Seattle blog*; nonprofit regional efforts such as the *Texas Tribune*, the *Voice of San Diego* and *MinnPost*; foundation- and donation-supported reporting entities such as *ProPublica* and *Spot Us*; national chains such as AOL's Patch; news aggregators like *Drudge Report* and *HuffingtonPost* (which also does original reporting); and any number of solo practitioners following their passion for particular subjects ranging from sports to politics to food. These experiments, some of them already successful, others doomed to failure, are charting the future of news.

Cartoonists have their own challenges, and opportunities, in earning money for their work. With traditional print venues disappearing, cartoonists must find new ways to be seen — and paid. That means, increasingly, working as independent contractors and selling their art to multiple customers, some of them nontraditional. For websites? As advertising illustrations? For corporate uses? It's a bit like being a graphic artist, providing illustrations for hire. Cartoonists should also be looking for ways to resell their work through anthologies and collections that can be marketed online and through social media. You've got to be entrepreneurial and aggressive about finding new and profitable outlets for your work.

At least the news business isn't alone in the pain caused by changing technology — the same revolution is radically transforming businesses ranging from music to photography to travel to retailing to movies. Again: They'll teach this stuff in business schools for decades — as an object lesson in what not to do when confronted by enormous change.

## The New Journalist (and Cartoonist)

The journalism business in which many of us started out a few years ago simply doesn't exist anymore. Any other view is romantic and unrealistic. Significant downsizing has cut thousands of jobs, and they aren't coming back, at least not in a recognizable form. The day when a journalist or cartoonist could expect a long-term, stable career, with a pension from a longtime employer, are over.

Journalism today is a much more individualistic business. If you're lucky enough to be working for an established media company, you need to be prepared for frequent, wrenching change, with little sense of loyalty. If you're already independent, you're already in the new world. In some sense, more and more journalists are living freelance existences, selling their services to whoever will pay or even trying to start freestanding businesses that will bring in a sustainable income. (Bad news: A lot of journalists, lacking business sense, don't make particularly good entrepreneurs).

Many journalists have learned the value of personal branding, making a name and distinctive identity for yourself that is independent of where you work. That way, your audience learns to follow you wherever you go. Active use of social media and a bit of self-promotion are key elements of personal branding. Create a strong, identifiable brand for yourself, nurture it and stick to it, and you've got something that can supercharge the skills you bring to your craft and create demand for your services. Nobody else is going to promote you like you can.

The jobs that do remain in journalism are often very different than the old newsroom job descriptions. Titles like community manager, blogger, search engine optimizer, programmer and social media expert reflect skills that nobody really learned in journalism school or in traditional newsrooms. These aren't difficult skills, and you need some of them to thrive in the new environment. You probably don't need to learn a computer language to survive, but you'd better be comfortable with, if not fluent in, social media such as Facebook and Twitter and have an understanding of how the media business really works.

What does all this mean for cartoonists? Well, to a large extent, cartoonists are the prototypes for the model of a modern journalist: independent, scrappy, a bit entrepreneurial. They follow their own muses rather than do editors' bidding. In today's world, that's a good way to operate. Work for yourself, promote yourself, look out for yourself. Pen and ink will continue to be the basic tools of the cartoonist, but technology provides other media such as animation and interaction. Enthusiastically embrace social tools such as Facebook and Twitter to spread the word about what you do, to cultivate online fans and to build your personal brands. In many ways, a cartoonist's style and signature is a perfect example of personal branding; today, the cartoonist must learn to propagate and reinforce that brand with the new digital tools.

## **Conclusion: Predicting the Unpredictable**

Imagine having a front-row seat for the Industrial Revolution. Innovation after innovation flashes by — the steam engine, mass production, the telegraph, the automobile. Pretty thrilling stuff. Well, that's what's happening in the media business right now — a technological revolution every bit as profound as the one that remade industry.

But change is both exciting and scary. This revolution has cost thousands of jobs and shaken long-standing institutions to their foundations. And it's far from over. Technology continues to evolve at an ever-quicken pace (faster, smaller, better, cheaper), and there are innovations even now under development that we can't envision any more than we could have predicted Facebook, Twitter or the iPad just a few years ago.

Journalism, the journalism business and journalists will have to keep adjusting to these radical changes. Flexibility and open-mindedness will be key to success. Clinging to old ways, hoping that they'll somehow make a comeback, is a losing strategy.

That sounds bleak, and scary, but in fact, we're in a golden age of journalism and media. With these new tools and technologies, more media are being created, by more people, in more formats, than ever before. Journalism is changing, but it isn't broken. It's the business models underlying journalism that are in peril. There will continue to be wrenching change while these business models are sorted out. That won't be a rapid process — even after nearly 20 years of change, we're far from done understanding what the future of media will be.

No one has described this process of change in the media business better than NYU professor Clay Shirky, whose masterful 2009 essay, "Newspapers and Thinking the Unthinkable," managed to both reassure the pessimists and encourage the optimists. We'll close with some of Shirky's wise words about the uncertainty the media business faces, and why there's reason for hope:

*"Society doesn't need newspapers. What we need is journalism. . . . Any experiment ... designed to provide new models for journalism is going to be an improvement over hiding from the real, especially . . . when, for many papers, the unthinkable future is already in the past. . . . No one experiment is going to replace what we are now losing with the demise of news on paper, but over time, the collection of new experiments that do work might give us the journalism we need."*

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