



## **New media: the changing face of journalism**

Article by [Dave Porter](#) □ January 2011

Journalism – and print media in particular – is in freefall. For most other people and most other professions the internet and the digital age has been a boon, for journalism it has presented its biggest challenge in nearly half a century.

Bigger certainly than the switch from hot metal to on-screen page design heralded by Eddie Shah and Murdoch's Wapping fortress. The main casualties in that scuffle were the compositors – or comps – who had been used to enjoying bigger wages than many of the journalists whose papers they were in charge of printing.

For the reader back then, they saw little difference in the papers delivered through their door, except perhaps that a free paper would now be pushed through the letter box to rival the paid one.

But the arrival of digital media has radically changed the landscape for journalist and reader alike – albeit in depressingly skewed ways. The traditional reader no longer exists and the print journalist is struggling to cling on to both their job and the idea of their profession as one which challenges power and scrutinises decision makers on behalf of the public.



Nowadays, that role is being unseated by the arrival of the citizen journalist who can use their blog, webpage or internet-based publication to pursue their own little corner of journalism. Suddenly, it has become a crowded place in the world of journalism.

The unavoidable and irreversible fact is that the flight of advertising revenues from traditional print media such as newspapers to the internet has crippled papers, whether local, evening or national. The three traditional money-spinners for papers in advertising terms were jobs, property and cars – and it was precisely these three which proved so attractive to the internet.

Why wait for your local paper to arrive to find out about the latest properties on the market when you have instant access on the internet? Where do you go to find a new job or buy a new car? The net is your first port of call in both cases.

The result has been a huge dent in advertising revenue, a steady decline in circulation for all papers, and a haemorrhaging of journalism jobs on a scale never seen before. Add to that strikes, closure of district offices and the creation of centralised sub-editing pools and you have an industry on the ropes.

And this was just the first wave of change which came rolling in with the internet. A further revolution in working practices was also on its way.



For papers themselves, a combination of complacency, a traditionally weak union and a lack of editorial clout at the top of the industry meant that by the time the wave hit it was already too late for many. It's a sad fact that newspapers group are never run by journalists and always by

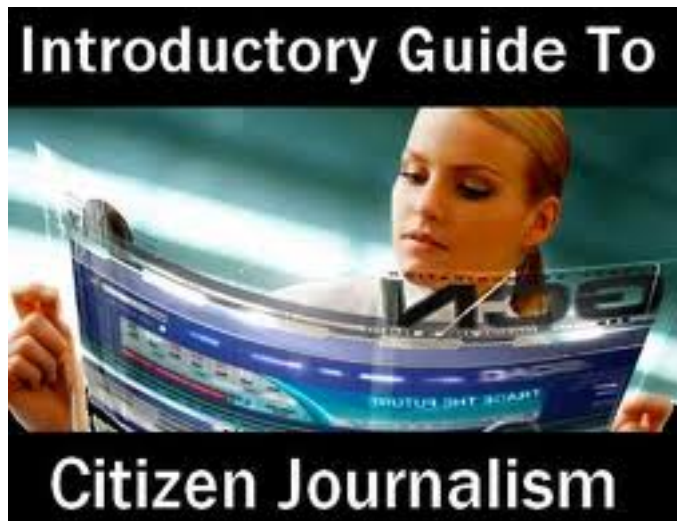
MDs with a business or sales background, delivering high returns for shareholders and not much concerned with what goes on in the newsroom. They didn't see the internet coming and are still playing catch-up today.

Manchester is a good prism to view the changes which befell the industry. The MEN Media stable includes both the MEN and a coterie of 14 or 15 weekly papers which stretch from Macclesfield in the south to Accrington in the north. As reading habits changed and no one was willing to wait until midday or later to find out from the paper what was happening, the MEN swiftly changed from an evening paper to a morning/midday one.

Like many papers it has excised its past and the tag of an evening paper. So we have the Bolton News where we used to have the Bolton Evening News and the Lancashire Telegraph where we used to have the Lancashire Evening Telegraph.

What took them so long, you might ask? And it's a fair question. There is a whiff of Lowry and industrial decline in that 'evening' moniker which made it feel dated even before the arrival of the internet.

Evening papers are in a precarious position, wedged between weekly papers with a genuine, local community interest invested in their readership and national papers serving an entirely different purpose. They are finding it hard to justify their once unique position in people's reading habits and have suffered calamitous erosions to their circulation.



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