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Committee Report/Analysis

## Newspapers in the Internet Age Los Angeles Daily News

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The Internet has made publication of information—which used to be difficult and costly—simple and inexpensive, accessible to all. It has changed the way we live, and the newspaper industry is being forced to reinvent itself. An average two-newspaper subscriber will receive more than twenty pounds of newsprint per week. The cost of publishing: newsgathering, journalism, editing, publishing and distribution, is staggering.

The sales of newspapers account for less than one-quarter of these costs. The remainder comes from advertising revenues. Newspapers everywhere are losing circulation to the more efficient electronic media, and with it go the all-important advertisers, the lifeblood of the newspaper business.

Older consumers have a comfort level with the print media, but this is a dwindling market, and younger consumers, who are quick to embrace all things digital, don't spend as much time with print as their predecessors did. Ironically, more people consume newspaper content than ever before, but much of it is delivered online or republished through third-party alternative media—modes that generate little or no revenue.

Professional journalism should not be confused with merely repeating information and data. News stories are subject to a rigorous process of reporting, interpretation, fact checking and editing. Newspapers employ scores of expert journalists who underpin their work with in-depth analysis and research. Internet information carries with it no such reasonable assurance of reliability. The web is rife with reactions, opinions and anecdotes.

### The Daily News

Newspapers serve an important civic function, as virtual town halls. By identifying and tracking the top issues of the day, they help to unify and focus readers, to promote involvement and inform the public debate. Much of what appears on the web, in blogs, bulletin boards and news sites, starts with daily newspaper stories.

Websites are now a fact of life for those in the newspaper business, and for many, a welcome complement to their traditional offerings. The Los Angeles Daily News recently launched its "valleynews.com" which allows an interactive community dialogue, with unlimited space for local events and news, even providing a portal to their print edition.

The publisher admits that online offerings do not yet work out economically, either from an advertising standpoint or from

readers, for whom it is free. The value is as part of an entire information delivery system, and the creation of an interactive community hub. The culling of intelligence and opinions from multiple sources is important to a balanced presentation of the issues.

The Daily News business section may be ripe for reinvention into more of a forum for the local business community. This would mean transforming a one-sided delivery system, with reporters telling readers what is going on, into a forum where everybody can join the discussion.

### Into the Future

Formats are increasingly likely to emulate the digital home-page model. Lead-ins—the print version of the digital link—for the entire newspaper will migrate toward the front page. In contrast to the traditional jumble of ads and stories, users will demand more intuitive and efficient formats.

As the world moves ever faster, newspapers must become quicker and more agile to meet readers' expectations. Papers are likely to change shape, size and density, functioning more like portals, news finders and indexes, providing abstracts or executive summaries of news stories with links and references to in-depth material. Podcasts of news stories have already begun to appear in some media, allowing commuters to safely multi-task.



Expect to see more newspapers working to improve the ease of feedback, by embracing digital systems and providing direct links to journalists. Access by email is already well established as the universal means of interaction with the media.

Newspapers, being tangible, convenient and disposable, have a unique relationship with their readers. As active "push" technologies, physically delivered to the reader, they are without rival. So long as there is a local, walk-in market for services, shopping, dining and recreation, there will be an opportunity and a need for regional and hyper-localized publishing.

Historically, new technologies have challenged the status quo. Radio did not do away with newspapers, television did not wipe out radio, and in the long run, it is unlikely that the Internet will displace its predecessors—it is more likely that the Internet will settle gradually into its place in the multi-media universe.

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*John McKeon has left his position as publisher of the Daily News. The current publisher is Edward R. Moss.*