

Draft of Remarks for Tom Rosenstiel  
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It has become fashionable lately to be gloomy about newspapers. As someone who digs into research, however I see something different. Yes, certainly the financials are rough, and newsrooms have shrunk. But the data contain important fundamentals that point to a clear direction for the future. I want to take a few minutes to offer a little of that research. Some of it comes from a new survey of ASNE and RTDNA newsrooms leaders we are releasing today jointly with those two groups. It speaks to how the news ecosystem works today and newspapers' place in that system.

First, newspaper executives today are not as gloomy as others. **Slide 2 (Direction)** In the new survey, more ASNE editors think journalism is headed in the right direction than in the wrong direction—51% vs. 49%. And this is in striking contrast to what we see among broadcast executives, where pessimists outnumber optimists by two-to-one. You are even more optimistic than Online News Assn. members were a year ago.

One reason for this is many of you sense a culture of change in newsrooms that you find exciting. **Slide 3 What has helped?** When we asked what has helped your newsrooms most, 53% of you cited a change in culture or change in staff structure and leadership--twice the number that cited adapting to the Internet or other new technology. In other words, something bigger than multi-media or getting back into the breaking news business, is going on here. It is a shift in attitude, a sense of possibility. And if you are right, this too could be a distinction for newspapers. This sense of culture change is far stronger among ASNE members than RTDNA—by a difference of two to one.

“We have a clearer sense of mission.” One editor volunteered. **Slide 4 quotes**

“A more flexible culture [and] a greater sense of urgency has strengthened our journalism,” said another.

“The opportunities before us are dazzling, far exceeding anything I could have imagined when I came into the business 25 years ago,” another responded.

You are also less likely to think the Internet is changing the fundamental values of the profession than broadcasters are. You are worried--53% feel the net is changing your values and not in a good way—but that is less than the 62% among RTDNA members. **Slide 5 Fundamental Values**

What you are worried about most is loosening standards, particularly declining accuracy. Explained one editor, “There is too much emphasis, I believe, on getting information fast—even at the expense of accuracy, thoroughness and fairness,” a sentiment we heard echoed in many comments. This, however, seems a matter over which you can exercise some control.

The evidence also suggests newspapers have something unique to offer—more so than other media. **Slide 6 Unique Content** When we asked what percentage of the material in

your publication was not reported anywhere else, 63% of you said more than half your content. That is double the percentage broadcasters told us.

And that assessment is born out in our recent study of how news is reported in one city, Baltimore. **Slide 7 Baltimore** While most of what the public received in the media were just repetitive—fully 83% of the stories contained no new information--of those that broke new ground newspapers produced most of them. General interest newspapers like the Baltimore Sun produced half of the stories that contained new information—48%—and another print medium, specialty newspapers focused on business and law, produced another 13%.

Another advantage for newspapers is your content has continuing appeal. **Slide 8 Nielsen Data** Of all news websites in America with at least a half a million unique visitors a month—that's basically 200 websites—half are newspapers—by far the largest single group. Another 13% are aggregators of legacy media, which is also mostly print. Just 14% were online only creators of original content. But there are warning signs here. Local newspapers make up just 25% of the traffic on this list and there are hints in the data, just hints still, that with more access to national and international news, and time being finite, that people are spending less time with local news.

The key to exploiting this—and increasing that traffic--will be to understand the news consumer of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So what can I offer you about that?

First, people no longer have a “primary” news source they rely on. Instead, 92% of Americans graze for news across multiple platforms each day, most of them all throughout the day. The good news for you is they do not graze very far. Online, for instance, most people regularly visit less than a half dozen sites. Very few, 3%, range past 10.

But consumers also look at you differently now. They don't sit down with the newspaper all at once—at breakfast or after work—to have you give them your news agenda. Only 35% of Americans can even name a favorite news website. **Slide 9 Multiple Platforms.** Instead, people navigate more one story at a time—looking the news they want when they want it, something they heard about at lunch or in a meeting. That story may come in an email sent by a friend—roughly half of those online send news this way. It may come from some non journalists they follow on social networks—30% of those online get news that way. It may come local list serves that are more hyperlocal than you can ever be. It may come on their cell phone--40% of cell phone owners get news that way. The news now is mobile, shared, and participatory.

What about the public square? Are people just retreating to their own interests, their own ideology? The evidence suggests the answer is an empathic no. Most people say they like to get news they didn't know they cared about—not just follow specific subjects. And the most popular sites, by far, are national and international news sites with a broad range of topics. People visit these sites more often, and they stay there longer per visit than on subject specific sites—almost twice as long.

The message here is that you are no longer simply a gatekeeper or even singular or primary source for people. Instead, you are something closer to a service, part of a family of sources they rely on to answers to their questions. You must win them all over again each day story by story with answers they seek or stories they cannot find anywhere else and that you make salient to their lives.

Your role is more varied and subtle than a gatekeeper. **Slide 10 Functions.** Depending on the story, I would offer seven roles: you may be an authenticator of what facts are reliable, or a sense maker focused on putting familiar facts in order, sometimes a watchdog, and sometimes simply a witness. You may be a forum leader letting your audience talk, or a smart aggregator of other's content and sometimes you are an empowerer putting tools in your audience's hands. You need to know when to play each role, and what service each story is providing. You have more tools, but the job is tougher.

And you have to perform that with smaller staffs. 92% of you in this survey have cut. **Slide 11 Cuts** And the cuts are sizable. A third of you have cut 25-50%. **Slide 12 – Effects** But only one in six of you feel your staffs were too small to do the job. The challenge is to figure out what stories make you essential—something that may mean more than simply being hyperlocal. Many of you say this will require constant trial and error. “Our mantra this year is experiment and fail quickly,” one editor volunteered. “Don't be afraid of change and don't stick with something too long if it doesn't work.”

If there are questions about content, there are even bigger questions on the business side. **Slide 13 Pursuing now** As a rule your organizations are still betting most on building conventional display advertising online. Revenue from non-news products is next, followed by micro-sites, and then local search. Pay walls are fifth on your list, though in three years you expect it be No. 2.

And there are some alternatives you really don't like. Fully 88% of you said you have serious reservations—the highest category of concern—about government subsidies. **Slide 14 Reservations.** And 76% worry about donations from interest groups that do advocacy. This, you believe, is a commercial problem best solved in the marketplace.

In short, at a time when reportorial journalism is shrinking, newspapers have more unique content than other media, a growing audience online, and a new culture of experimentation. Most of you also want a commercial solution to your revenue crisis. And this may require editors to help lead the way, not leave it to the business side alone.

To do that, I think it is useful to ask what function your news organization serves in your community—beyond telling stories and selling ads. **Slide 15 What is Your Role?** I would offer this definition: You collect, synthesize and distribute community knowledge. The question then becomes are there new businesses in that function you aren't exploiting? Are you really selling all the knowledge you have? Are there new knowledge products you could create, with different target audiences and revenue streams? Whatever your

answers, you are still in a better position to create these products and businesses than many of your rivals.