

Media convergence

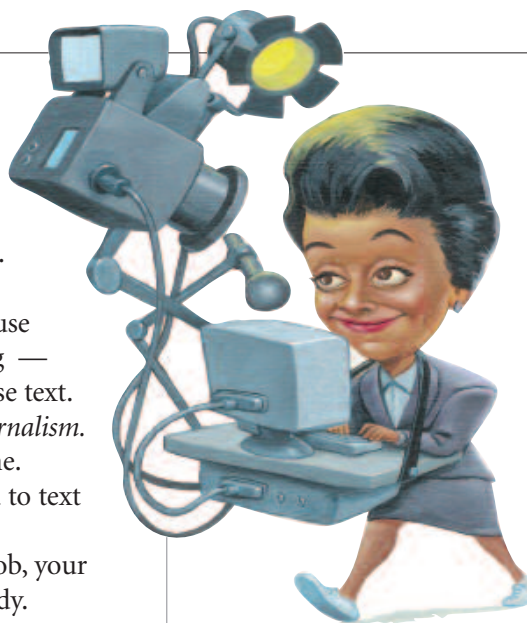
Text + photos + audio + video + graphics = multimedia.

Suppose you decided to profile Ludwig van Gogh, a brilliant painter/composer. Which medium, or *media*, would produce the best story?

To display his paintings, you'd use photographs. To present his music, you'd use audio recordings. To show him at work — conducting an orchestra or painting — you'd use video footage. To explain the meaning and impact of his art, you'd use text.

In short, to create the ideal profile, you'd need *multimedia*. *Cross-platform journalism*. *Media convergence*. Whatever you call it, it's an idea whose time has finally come. Stories once trapped on paper can now be posted online; stories once confined to text and photographs now incorporate audio, video and interactivity.

Technological innovations are transforming 21st-century journalism. Your job, your newsroom, even the stories you write will soon change dramatically. So get ready.



THE CONVERGED REPORTER: MYTH OR INEVITABILITY?

At the News Center in Tampa, Victoria Lim is the consumer reporter for WFLA-TV. But she also expands her TV reports into stories for the Tampa Tribune, where she writes a weekly column. And she wins awards for the multimedia projects she posts on the TBO.com Web site.

Lim is known as a “converged reporter.” In the future, will all journalists need to exhibit that much versatility?

Some say yes. They point to Preston Mendenhall, MSNBC's international editor, who traveled to Afghanistan in 2001 lugging a backpack that contained a laptop, a satellite phone, digital cameras and microphones. Transmitting reports from the field, he single-handedly acted as reporter, producer, editor and engineer.

Others are less enthusiastic about “backpack journalism.” Some, like online journalist Martha Stone, worry about the “mush of mediocrity” that results when you overtax busy journalists.

“While some multimedia journalists can handle a variety of tasks efficiently and professionally,” Stone says, “most will only deliver mediocre journalism. While some may excel at writing the story for print or broadcast, they may produce poor-quality video or still pictures. . . . Quality comes from those journalists who practice a defined job, be it writer, videographer, photographer or editor.”

Asking reporters to become do-it-all superjournalists is unrealistic, it's true. Still, as newsrooms evolve, reporters should be prepared to expand their skills, whether that means learning how to post audio interviews, write blogs or record podcasts.

“If I were still reporting,” says new-media guru Rob Curley, “I'd be doing everything I could to show just how invaluable I was to a news organization's ability to survive all the changes we're going through.”

CONVERGENCE: COMING SOON TO A NEWSROOM NEAR YOU

Different journalists mean different things when they talk about convergence. (Some even avoid the word, preferring to use the term *fusion*.) But generally, convergence takes three forms:

NEWSROOM CONVERGENCE

In a converged newsroom, journalists from different media (TV, radio, newspaper, online) all share the same workspace instead of occupying separate offices in separate buildings.

One of the most notable examples is the News Center in Tampa, Fla. In 2000, the staffs of the Tampa Tribune, WFLA-TV and TBO.com — all owned by Media General Inc. — moved into a huge \$40-million facility with a TV studio on the first floor and a joint newsroom above it.

Sharing a newsroom encourages cross-platform cooperation. When editors from different media attend the same meetings and plan coverage together, they can steer each story to the format that tells it best.

NEWSGATHERING CONVERGENCE

Here, reporters, editors and photographers collaborate on story production. In its simplest form, news crews might share a helicopter to report on a flood. A TV newscast might borrow



From a small studio in the business department of the Orlando Sentinel newsroom, Wilma Colon delivers a daily news-headline Webcast that appears on the Sentinel's home page. Colon is a “converged reporter” who also writes for the Web, reports for *El Sentinel* (a Spanish-language weekly) and produces segments for the local Telemundo telecast.

one of the newspaper's graphics. A TV reporter might cover an event for broadcast, then write a longer story for the Web site.

With training, print reporters learn to deliver TV news reports; photojournalists shoot photos, video and conduct interviews.

In other words, journalists *multitask* in *multimedia*, whether it's one story produced by a team of TV, print and online staffers — or one reporter preparing variations of one story for several different media.

CONTENT CONVERGENCE

This is where the final story is presented in multimedia form,

combining text, images, audio, video, blogs, podcasts, slide-shows — the options are continually expanding. At present, content convergence is still in its infancy, but you can glimpse the future on innovative Web sites.

Imagine, years from now, a new hybrid medium combining the audio and video of TV, the responsiveness and resources of the Web, the portability and print quality of newspapers. Editors and reporters will become “content producers” trained to choose the most effective, entertaining storytelling techniques from a vast menu of multimedia options.