

Interning at “Gazeta Wyborcza” and Observing the Future of Journalism

Over the past decade or so, a new major task has emerged for newspaper and media companies: trying to adapt journalism to the internet-frenzied world of the 21st century. Throughout the course of my summer internship at “Gazeta Wyborcza,” I was able to observe firsthand how Poland’s second largest daily newspaper deals with the issue of adapting print journalism to the world of the Internet. As I am planning to continue graduate studies within the field of journalism, this experience taught me that the future of journalism really lies in multimedia and internet-related creativity, and that journalism will almost surely be a completely transformed discipline within the next few decades. This paper will investigate how the “Gazeta Wyborcza” addresses the issue of the changing face of journalism.

The “Gazeta Wyborcza” commenced its online presence fifteen years ago, but today the newspaper’s activities online have transformed completely since 1993. In an interview with “The Editor’s Weblog,” Jaroslaw Kurski, the first deputy editor-in-chief of the “Gazeta Wyborcza,” said in March of this year: “Our board has an ambition that in three years time more than half of our revenues will come from other sources than print.” Kurski’s statement demonstrates the importance of innovation within online journalism, especially as the circulation of printed newspapers is declining at a steady rate across the world. The American Journalism Review recently predicted that in 2044, America’s last newspaper will run in print (Foley). Although predictions vary, it is undeniable that the future of print journalism is bleak.

Yet “Gazeta Wyborcza” and other major newspapers are definitely not giving up, but rather turning towards innovation. The “Gazeta Wyborcza” has two major online websites: www.gazeta.pl and www.wyborcza.pl, which have differing functions: the former publishes more breaking news and articles which do not necessarily appear in print, while the latter website

is usually an online version of the print version of the paper. The paper's 24 hour online presence allows it to communicate breaking news to its readers before they can buy the morning's paper, and also enables it to compete with other 24 hour news sources such as television and radio.

However, there is much more to the "Gazeta Wyborcza" website which makes it an appealing alternative to the printed version of the paper. For example, under every single article posted online, there is a button that reads "Podyskutuj na Forum" ("Discuss this on the Forum").

Clicking on this button will take the reader to a forum where anyone can post responses or reactions to a given story. This enables the newspaper readership to actively participate in debate and also gives them a platform from which to spread their ideas on a given matter.

"TechNewsWorld" calls these online news participants "citizen journalists," explaining "there are the bloggers, the commentators, the contributors who are not trained journalists themselves. They're called citizen journalists, and they are everywhere, demanding their say" (Noyes). The "Gazeta Wyborcza" seems to have truly adapted itself to these "citizen journalists," granting them the ability to not only respond to articles, but also directly to journalists on their blogs.

The fact that nearly every journalist working at the "Gazeta Wyborcza" has a personal blog is perhaps what makes the newspaper stand out to me most in terms of its online presence. Both of the newspaper's websites have a wide variety of multimedia such as videos and slideshows that provide people with engaging ways of receiving the news, but this is not uncommon across newspapers around the world. The newspaper's forum is also not that unique, as forums are fairly frequent methods of making newspapers interactive. However, I am not familiar with any other major newspaper that has as many blogging journalists as the "Gazeta Wyborcza." Examples include general blogs, like Bartosz Weglarczyk's blog "Endgame," which does not have a specific topic but rather serves to highlight things that the well-respected

journalist finds interesting and worthwhile, or blogs that are subject-specific, such as Maciej Kuzmicz's "Swiat Inaczej," which focuses on faraway foreign lands like China and Nepal. All of these journalists have a "comment" button under each entry, which allows readers to respond directly to the journalist, who in turn very often respond directly to each reader. This kind of journalist-reader (or trained journalist-citizen journalist) interaction would be unimaginable without the Internet, but has proved to be a very useful, educating and engaging method of dealing with journalism and the distribution of information and exchange of opinions. The blogs also have another function, namely allowing journalists to publish online stories that get rejected at the journalist meetings. A number of times over the course of my internship, I observed the journalist in charge of running the morning meeting turn down story ideas, yet because of the high readership and interest in the blogging world, these rejected story ideas were still read and distributed online.

Another observation I made about the changing face of journalism was the surprising amount of writing and research that took place within the office. At the "Gazeta Wyborcza," many journalists remain in the office for long periods of time, with foreign correspondents in other countries covering major stories. This was also mentioned in the "TechNewsWorld" article about how journalism is changing: "Indeed, journalists of past generations would scarcely recognize the profession today. Most journalistic research is done on the Web; interviews are frequently set up, if not conducted, over e-mail, and telephone interviews have become the norm. Many reporters never leave the office all day" (Noyes). Working amongst these in-office journalists made me realize the benefits and shortcomings of this relatively new development. While this form of journalism may be less hands-on and less riveting, it is an absolute necessity for newspapers today to have journalists watch the news flood in every second from news

agencies like the Associated Press and Reuters. Without journalists working and writing from the office, newspapers would have no way of keeping track of newsworthy stories and actually turning around articles in time for them to run in print while they are still topical.

Despite the fact that the death of print journalism is on the mind of nearly every journalist, working at the “Gazeta Wyborcza” has proven to me that journalism will never die; in fact, it seems as though it can even truly be enhanced through the creative use of the Internet and new multimedia. As Jaroslaw Kurski says in his interview, “If print becomes irrelevant, we will spread our ideas in any other way. Newspapers will not die, they will change. Last but not least: a Polish word for a newspaper - "gazeta" - does not have any "paper" in it. So even if futurists are right and print newspapers will disappear, Gazeta will remain.”

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