

The new realities of the news environment

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1. **Basics have not changed.** The two most salient realities of the last half century are still true. First, TV still dominates people’s news diet. Second, newspapers are still the most critical information providers that feed the news ecology. All other media actors are supplemental, complementary players in this environment. But this reality is LESS TRUE now than it was a decade ago.
2. **Un-newsed – biggest threat.** The biggest structural threat is that the un-newsed population is growing. It now stands at 19% of the entire adult population and 27% of those under age 30 get NO NEWS on a typical day. This has doubled since 1994.

You guys will have to figure that one out on your own. It’s partly a consequence of the **proliferation of choices in how people spend their time** and the feverish competition among every societal actor – for profit, non-profit, secular, spiritual, left, right, center, real, virtual, serious, frivolous – for people’s attention. One of the most interesting and important quests underway in the research community focuses on measuring where people direct their attention.

Linda Stone and “**continuous partial attention**”

3. **Audience fracturing – rise of internet.** The self-evident and obvious point is that the audience is fracturing among different media channels. The role of the internet is growing – especially for broadband users, double especially for younger broadband users (those under age 35).
 - a. Home broadband users are now more likely to say they regularly get news online than from newspapers.
 - b. Highly wired young home broadband users now privilege the internet over television.

- c. But they “read” newspapers online and “watch TV” on their computers and iPods. On a typical day, 15% of internet users now say they read the newspaper online.
- i. 14% of online news consumers get news on PDA, Blackberry
 - ii. 24% of radio consumers occasionally listen to radio programs on something other than a radio console – computers (84%), iPods (26%), cell phones (7%), PDAs (2%)
 - iii. 43% of young adult radio consumers occasionally listen to radio programs on something other than a radio console – computers (76%), laptops (34%), iPods (35%), cell phones (13%)
 - iv. 13% of TV viewers occasionally watch shows on something other than TV sets – computers (87%), cell phones (9%), iPods (3%)
 - v. 20% of young adult TV viewers occasionally watch shows on something other than TV sets – computers (70%), laptops (36%), cell phones (16%), iPods (7%)
- d. **Getting “outside” news.** The internet is seen as a separate and distinct channel by more than half the online news consumers. They want to dig deeper and they often want to make their own contributions – especially young people.

Realm of breaking news, commentary, and extra news

Also an arena of **forbidden images** or where tastes and values are different.

4. **Another fracturing: ideological divide in audience.** In addition to fracturing along the lines of different channels, there is an emerging set of ideological divides that characterize audience use of news sources. This also takes place in the context of the slide in public

judgment about the credibility and believability of news is falling. This is a kind of gateway perception that allows people to migrate to choices that fit their views of the world.

- a. Democrats more likely to cite ABC, NBC, CNN and newspapers as their main source of political news
- b. Republicans cite radio and Fox

If you haven't already encountered it, this is my plug for your reading Jay Hamilton's book, *All the News that's fit to Sell*. In my humble opinion, he makes a pretty good case that this is an irresistible reality of the new age.

5. **Another fracturing: More organizations in the news business.** Yet another dimension of the fracturing of the news environment lies in the proliferation in the number of organizations and individuals who consider themselves in the "news" business. More and more sites offer news as an information currency – government sites, health sites, science sites, hobby sites, religious sites, financial sites, comedy sites.
6. **Rise of the "Daily Me."** A companion trend is the rise of customization of information, what Nicholas Negroponte called the "Daily Me"
 - a. More than half of internet users belong to listservs and other email groups organized around a topic, organization, or group.
 - b. More than a third of internet users customize information at Web sites
 - c. 25% get e-newsletters
 - d. Somewhere between 5% and 10% get RSS feeds
 - e. About a tenth listen to podcasts

The growth of information "push" will be one of the biggest tech trend stories of 2007. It's both widgets and RSS.

Idea: One of the big laments of this moment is that as people customize information and try to target the information that flows into their lives they have less serendipitous and chance encounters will important or delightful or enlightening information. That's a

function you know how to provide and one of the things you could more explicitly offer people is the chance to offer people news “outside their zones.”

7. **Expectations and behaviors shift about role of news in people’s lives.** Expectations have shifted about the availability and findability of news and information and that has changed consumer behavior. The proliferation of networked gadgets, especially wireless devices, is shifting the time, place, and context of news for people. Simultaneously, news is an instant thing, an all-day thing, and a timeless thing.

- a. For some information – fuse is shorter (on alert) – smart mob
- b. For some information – fuse is longer (whenever the mood/need strikes) – Searchability and navigability matters a lot now. Google has changed people’s sense of how easy information is to find. long tail effect

(Parenthetically, the other thing Google has changed is people’s sense of how information “fits together.” Sometimes this isolates, disaggregates information. The “whole news package” is broken into bits that have different meaning and relevance to people. But the other thing that Google has delivered is information that ties to the thing you’re engaging right now. People at times want ALL relevant information (including advertising) pulled together. They also want help navigating and that gives power to the idea called the semantic web.)

- c. People **“bump into” news** by happenstance pretty frequently online. There was almost a doubling since 1998 of the proportion of internet news consumers who say they chanced upon news while they were online for some other purpose.
 - 76% of online news consumers say this, up from 48% in 1998
 - 51% said this happened to them in the 2004 election with political news, up from 35% in 2000

d. **Role of people's social networks is growing.** There is a growing expectation that some of the most important information to me will fly into my life when my network believes I need to know it.

i. 43% agree (up from 34% in 1998) with this statement:

“There are so many ways to get the news these days that I don't worry when I don't have a chance to read the paper or when I miss my regular news program.”

So the role of influentials and influencers matters more. People rely in two ways on their networks when it comes to news. First, they turn to their networks for conversation, guidance and context for news that they want to understand further. Second, they rely on their networks to be updated on crucial information.

In some respects that is your core audience and it is narrower than the mass audience you are trying to serve.

8. **Young people are different. They see news is as raw material and they like to talk back and talk amongst themselves.**

News is a community “currency” and community-building fodder. News is an online information “currency” that matters to communities and becomes fodder for remixing and mashups. This is an area where young people stand out especially.

We researchers are not sure exactly yet how to account for many kinds of content creation, tagging, linking, participation in wikis, creation of gaming avatars. But the meta-point to make is that people want to participate and create their own meaning for information. News is a social construct and social event in a way now that it never was before.

9. **Aggregators matter.** Aggregators and portals like Google News or Yahoo! News or the home pages of ISPs like Comcast matter as a gateway to your material. They were the single most cited source of political news during the last election cycle, especially by under-30 political news consumers.

This suggests that the role of portal could matter a lot as a source of your own authority and standing in your communities.

Aggregation matters – not very well understood as a “news” imperative, but it fits with the basic service you provide every day in helping people navigate to the most important, interesting, useful, or entertaining information.

10. Transparency is a powerful value. Transparency is a newly preeminent value, perhaps as central to institutional identity and “brand” respectability as other core journalistic traits like being first, being great story tellers, and being watchdogs. More people want to assess and critique your work.