

Spring 2008 MCID Workshop Series (March 26, 2008)
Robert Cottrell, formerly of *The Economist*
The Death of Journalism?: The War Between the New and the Old

WORKSHOP 2 (of 3): THE DEMAND SIDE

Why are audiences and advertisers deserting traditional media? Do they want something similar and better, or something quite different? What do we do for information when we don't read newspapers? Are social networks in the news business? Are blogs peaking? Which will seem more dated in 20 years—newspapers, or computer screens?

This workshop began with a recap of Workshop 1: THE SUPPLY SIDE, and specifically the ways in which technology has turned traditional journalism—and its business model—on its head by democratizing communication. As such, journalism as a profession has seen a bleak descent to the extent that a professional journalist is now equivalent, in both pay and status, to a grade school teacher in a public school. What does this mean for both audiences and advertisers? And more specifically, what are audiences looking for in news stories? This led to a discussion among the participants about recent news stories that have been of particular interest to them, which Mr. Cottrell remarked was in line with the results from a recent study from The Project for Excellence in Journalism. Those results indicated that in the last year, approximately one-third of mainstream news coverage focused on two subjects, the 2008 presidential election and Iraq; distantly followed by what passes as foreign news coverage (a.k.a. coverage of U.S. interests abroad); which is followed even more distantly by domestic news on issues such as health, education, etc. which garners less than 1% of news coverage. While this last point would seem to indicate that the mainstream news media overlooks subjects that should be of interest to their audience, this is not the case as audiences prefer breaking news stories (the bridge collapse in Minneapolis, for instance)—not evolving stories that are more about process than events. As such, mainstream media is giving the audience what it wants: a lot of domestic politics, some coverage of U.S. interests abroad—in addition to more serious foreign news coverage overall—and no detailed or prolonged coverage of domestic news unless it is a breaking news story, preferably a disaster of some sort. What about the advertisers? This is where problems are beginning to arise, as advertisers are now moving in one direction. Mr. Cottrell used the example of the recent Dove “Get Real” campaign which was a fantastic success—thanks to interactive online media and content—despite not one dollar going to buying ad space in a conventional way. Why, then, does anyone still bother putting ads in magazines, newspapers, and on TV? Will this will be fatal to the traditional media? And to what extent is this new online media also satisfying audiences’ desire for news and information?

These questions will be taken up in the third and final workshop, “The Forecast: Scenarios for Journalism in 2018,” which will be held on **Wednesday, April 9th at 6:00 PM in Room 619.**

For this final workshop Mr. Cottrell asked the participants to:

1. Be alert of adverts that have stuck in their minds;
2. Start a blog (in order to illustrate the growing democratization of the media and also as an attempt to demystify journalism);
3. Come up with a couple of sharp observations about what the main challenges and opportunities will be in the next few years for the following mediums:
 - a. Print newspapers;
 - b. TV and radio;
 - c. The advertising industry; and
 - d. Online media.