

Digital Journalism Credibility Study





Digital Journalism Credibility Study

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About the Online News Association

The Online News Association is composed largely of professional online journalists whose principal livelihood involves gathering or producing news for digital presentation. The membership also includes academic members and others interested in the development of online journalism. In partnership with Columbia University, ONA administers the prestigious Online Journalism Awards.

The mission of the Online News Association is to promote and uphold the highest standards of journalistic excellence in the digital presentation of news.

Our founding principles:

We believe that the Internet is the most powerful communications medium to arise since the dawn of television. As the Internet becomes a primary source of news for a growing segment of the world's population, it presents complex challenges and opportunities for journalists as well as the news audience.

Editorial Integrity: The unique permeability of Web publications allows for the linking and joining of information resources of all kinds as intimately as if they were published by a single organization. Responsible journalism on the Internet means that the distinction between news and other information must always be clear, so that individuals can readily distinguish independent editorial information from paid promotional information and other non-news.

Editorial Independence: Online journalists should maintain the highest principles of fairness, accuracy, objectivity and responsible independent reporting.

Journalistic Excellence: Online journalists should uphold traditional high principles in reporting original news for the Internet and in reviewing and corroborating information from other sources.

Freedom of Expression: The ubiquity and global reach of information published on the Internet offers new information and educational resources to a worldwide audience, access to which must be unrestricted.

Freedom of Access: News organizations reporting on the Internet must be afforded access to information and events equal to that enjoyed by other news organizations in order to further freedom of information.

About The John S. And James L. Knight Foundation

Established in 1950, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation makes national grants in journalism, education and arts and culture. Its fourth program, community initiatives, is concentrated in 26 communities where the Knight brothers published newspapers. The Foundation is wholly separate from and independent of those newspapers.

About NFO WorldGroup

NFO WorldGroup is one of the world's leading providers of research-based marketing information and counsel. NFO has facilitated Fortune 500 clients' business decisions for more than 50 years by providing in-depth knowledge and understanding of consumers and brands through research. NFO is a worldwide leader in Internet-based research and maintains one of the world's largest interactive panel communities. They are one of The Interpublic Group of Companies (NYSE:IPG) and have majority-owned operations in 40 countries.

Acknowledgment

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To contact the Online News Association, visit <http://www.journalists.org>

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Introduction

From the ONA Board of Directors

IN THE FALL OF 2000, THE ONLINE NEWS ASSOCIATION approached the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to propose the first national study of the credibility of digital news. At that point in Internet history, we knew that 80 million Americans were spending an average of 8.8 hours a week online and that news sites were among their favorite Web destinations. What we didn't know was whether those news consumers were making distinctions between one online news source and another – say, between WashingtonPost.com, the Drudge Report and Yahoo News – and whether they thought digital news sites are as credible as other kinds of news sources. We also didn't know how newspeople themselves view digital journalism and whether the practices and experiments prevalent in online newsrooms are affecting traditional journalistic standards of fairness, accuracy and credibility.

ONA was committed to finding the answers to these critical questions.

The Knight Foundation agreed to fund the project, and in January, 2001, research got underway. Over the next 10 months, media consultants Howard Finberg and Martha Stone conducted national surveys of online users and of media workers, produced under their direction by the NFO WorldGroup, a research firm based in Connecticut. They organized brainstorming sessions and roundtable discussions with both traditional and online journalists, and they conducted personal interviews with more than 50 of the industry's top editors and reporters. They drew on the journalism credibility studies produced by other groups in recent years to ground the discussion of digital news in a broader professional context.

The results of their efforts are sometimes gratifying, sometimes disconcerting, often surprising. Clearly, online users regard the digital medium as a vital and largely credible source of news and information. Troubling, though, is that questions about the credibility of online news appear to be more pressing and prevalent among journalists themselves – an issue the report explores at length.

The study concludes with some ideas about ways online newsrooms might work toward enhancing the credibility they already enjoy. These are not offered as prescriptions or directives. But in a professional environment in which so many thoughtful, experienced journalists reach widely differing conclusions about similar issues, it is important to take these issues public, so that we can learn from – even as we sometimes argue with – each other.

It is that kind of active, engaged dialogue – both within the news industry, and between the industry and its readers – that the Digital Journalism Credibility Study is designed to spur. Doug Feaver, executive editor of WashingtonPost.com and an ONA board member, is fond of saying that good journalism is all about deciding what's right, one situation at a time. This study hopes to provide a framework for those decisions.



An Executive Summary

THE ONLINE NEWS ASSOCIATION'S DIGITAL JOURNALISM CREDIBILITY survey confirms what many observers had guessed: media workers – across all media types – are concerned about the standards, practices and credibility of digital news. More surprising, perhaps, is the survey's finding that the online public is not.

In fact, it appears that the public accepts online news as a choice on its menu of news sources. Even so, many online readers offered neutral or uncertain responses to questions regarding that issue. Just as important, online readers who do have an opinion tended to be more positive about the credibility of online news than the media workers in the survey – and in many cases, more positive than the media workers expected them to be.

In particular, the study found:

1. The Biggest Challenge May Be Convincing Traditional Media that Online News is Credible News.

The online public generally shows more confidence in news sources than the members of media organizations who participated in the study. Media workers do not rate online sources as highly in terms of credibility as traditional media. More often than not, the issues surrounding news credibility are of concern to media respondents and not to the public.

2. The Public Has Accepted Digital News as Another Option on its Menu of Credible News Sources.

Readers said online news is about as credible as news they obtain from other, more traditional news sources. For example, when the public's scores are ranked, readers rate the cable television Web sites as the third most credible news source out of 16 possible choices, ahead of national network news, national radio broadcasts, local television news and their local newspapers. And even local radio Web sites, which were ranked last of the 16 news sources, are considered credible by 41 percent of the public. Thirteen percent of online readers say the Internet is their most trusted source for news.

3. Many Readers Don't Identify the Credibility of Digital News as an Issue.

Many in the public remain neutral on the issues surrounding online news – they neither agree nor disagree – let alone feel strongly about the online news media and credibility. Although online readers, in most cases, are receptive to using online news, they are more likely to have a firm opinion about the credibility of traditional media while remaining far more neutral about online news sources. Online news credibility is not a pressing issue for the online public, as evidenced by the large number of neutral and unsure responses to the survey.

4. Younger People are More Comfortable with Online News and Less Concerned with the Separation of Advertising and Editorial Content.

Younger members of the public are more likely to say online news is credible and less likely to express concern about the separation of news and advertising content than are their older counterparts. Younger media workers in the survey were also more likely to say online news is credible than were their more senior colleagues.

5. In the Digital Age, People Still Rely on Conventional Media. News Web Sites Currently Act as Complementary Sources of News for the Public.

Most online news sources fail to attract unique traffic; rather, a large portion of the online audience comes from people who use traditional sources as well. Americans are using online news in addition to traditional media rather than using online news instead of traditional sources.

More specifically, the study concluded that:

- Media respondents to the survey were more likely to have made up their minds about a news source's credibility and were more likely to be critical than the online public was. Among the rankings produced by the survey's media respondents, there were five sources (local TV news, local radio stations, other news Web sites, local TV Web sites and local radio Web sites) about which more than 25 percent - and as many as 40 percent - say the source is not credible. By comparison, no more than 12 percent of the public say any particular news source is not credible.

- Both media respondents and readers say online presentations are as credible as news they obtain from other, more established media. Almost 78 percent of readers and 75 percent of journalists who participated in the survey say cable television Web sites are credible or extremely credible, and 68 percent of readers and 65 percent of media respondents say national broadcast television Web sites are credible or extremely credible.

- When it comes to credibility, online readers are more concerned about accuracy than timeliness. In a list of 11 story characteristics affecting credibility, online readers rank "story is up to date" fifth, after accuracy, completeness, fairness and trusted source.

- While less than half (47.1 percent) of the public agrees that "online news is more up-to-date than other news sources," timeliness ranks first when online readers are asked why they prefer the news sites they visit most often.

- Asked directly if the separation between advertising and editorial content matters to a news source's credibility, the public overwhelmingly (95.9 percent) says yes, it matters. But when ONA asked online readers to rank advertising-editorial independence as a variable affecting news credibility, it barely made the list (ninth of 11 attributes, ahead of audio/visual quality and entertainment value).

- About 40 percent of the online public is confident it can discriminate between advertising and editorial content, with another 30 percent expressing neutrality or a lack of opinion on the issue. That confidence is positively correlated with a reader's general trust of online news, which increases in time spent online, and with

the number of times a reader has visited a particular online news site. In other words, more than two-thirds of readers say they aren't all that worried about being duped by an advertising message disguised as a news story. And the more time they spend online, the less worried they appear to be.

- What readers are concerned about is more subtle and perhaps more pervasive: two-thirds (65.6 percent) of the online public said advertisers and business interests influence how news is reported. Of those, 75.5 percent said it is important or extremely important that a clear separation between advertising and editorial be maintained.

- When asked to agree or disagree with the statement: “*Online news sites are my/consumers’ most trusted sources for news,*” 13 percent of the online public agreed, 44 percent had no opinion, and 43 percent disagreed. Media respondents predicted that 79 percent of online readers would disagree with the statement.

The gap in perception between media representatives and the online reading public may not surprise many online journalists, at least some of whom have argued that the “digital media credibility gap” has always been a professional – and not a public – issue. But the survey’s findings should prompt journalists and the public alike to confront a critical issue: Is there something the media perceives or knows about the ethics and practices of online news organizations or operations that the public does not know? Or are traditional media just being resistant to online news?

In addition to the surveys, the ONA’s Digital Journalism Credibility Study presents a broader discussion of the professional experiences and insights of more than 50 journalists and media experts working in all types and sizes of digital media. The report suggests concrete reasons why working journalists across media may have concerns – well placed or otherwise — about the credibility of digital news. Topics of discussion include:

Who Is a Journalist?

An informal survey of 56 online newspapers and 16 online television sites, as well as the in-depth interviews conducted by ONA, suggest that the great majority of online news workers do have traditional journalistic training and experience. But interviews with journalists and comments submitted by media respondents to the survey suggest that the media in general may not perceive that to be the case.

What Kinds of Challenges to Credibility Have Downsizing, Reorganization and Retrenchment Posed for Online News?

Smaller staffs means less time to double-check, correct technical errors and make sure the links work. Of the 72 news organizations surveyed, 75 percent reported editorial staffs under 10; 56 percent had five employees or fewer, and 25 percent reported having only one online staff member.

What Kinds of Training or Professional Perspectives Should Media Workers in Online Newsrooms Be Expected to Have – Practically and Ideally?

Technical issues have typically taken precedence over ethical concerns when it comes to newsroom training – but that may be changing in online newsrooms. In an ONA’s informal survey, 65 percent of online newspapers and 75 percent of the online television newsrooms said they provide technical training, as compared with 23 percent of online newspapers and 10 percent of television sites that said they provide standards or ethics training. But such industry leaders as MSNBC.com, WSJ.com, USAToday.com, NYTimes.com and ChicagoTribune.com have adopted the ethics codes and guidelines of their parent news organizations. And editors from MSNBC.com and the NYTimes.com described comprehensive training programs that

The findings of the ONA Digital Journalism Credibility Survey may prompt journalists and the public alike to confront a critical issue: Is there something the media perceives or knows about the ethics and practices of online news that the public does not know? Or is the media just being resistant to online news?

incorporate – and, indeed, focus on – standards, ethics and traditional journalistic values.

How Are Online Newsrooms Working Through the Challenges Presented by the Pressures to Produce Revenue?

The study describes the *LA Times*' widely discussed decision to integrate its advertising and editorial departments. It also provides eight specific examples of ways in which various news organizations have been dealing with sponsored content, and presents an in-depth discussion of advertising policies and processes at CBSMarketWatch.com and USAToday.com.

How Are Online Newsrooms Handling the Web's Two Hallmark Characteristics: Immediacy and Interactivity?

Newsrooms handle corrections and the rush to publish in a wide variety of ways, with many of the professionals interviewed by ONA acknowledging that the push to get the story first remains very much a part of the online news industry culture. Even so, there's a clear recognition that getting it first is not as important as getting it right; brand credibility is at stake.

Corrections policies vary widely across online news sites, with some sites, like Salon.com, WashingtonPost.com, and ChicagoTribune.com, including corrections links off their entry pages. Others choose not to post corrections at all or fail to link corrections with the original story.

Despite the Web's capacity to provide direct interaction between readers and journalists, many online news organizations – including NYTimes.com, USAToday.com, CNN.com, MSNBC.com and WashingtonPost.com — do not provide e-mail links to their staffs. *The New York Times* policy discourages its reporters from answering reader e-mail. Others – including Salon.com, SeattleTimes.com, ChicagoTribune.com, and C|Net.com – do provide direct links from their stories to their reporters' e-mails; they say it's a way of connecting the writers with the communities they cover, improving their understandings and holding them more accountable.



What We Already Know

A Review of the Literature

There is no shortage of studies about journalistic credibility. In fact, professional and academic researchers have been absorbed by the subject for decades. In 1985, University of Texas Journalism Professor Maxwell E. McCombs posed the key question: “How much do they really hate us out there?”¹ A decade later, in an *Atlantic Monthly* admonition, media critic and journalist James Fallows offered an answer. Reciting a litany of offenses, including an increasing trend toward well-paid television-talk-show hucksterism, Fallows concluded that journalists were out of touch, out of sync and out of excuses: “...There is an astonishing gulf between the way journalists—especially the most prominent ones—think about their impact and the way the public does ... a contrast between the apparent self-satisfaction of the media celebrities and the contempt in which they are held by the public.”²

Since then, Fallows’ gloomy assessment of the press – spelled out more fully in his 1997 book, *Breaking the News* – has become the stuff of media documentaries and talk-show debates. Organizations from the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press to the American Society of Newspaper Editors have spent millions of dollars describing and explaining the credibility gap, and their conclusions about the media have been consistently, emphatically negative. What is the answer to McCombs question? If research is to be believed, the answer since the mid-1980s has probably been, “More than they should – and much more than the press would like to admit.”

Nearly two decades of research reflects ‘a troubled image of journalism’ in which public trust and media credibility are on the decline. Earlier studies suggest the public makes little or no distinction between different types of media when it comes to assessing credibility.

The Research

Early news credibility research³ focused on the characteristics of a news source as well as on the medium or “channel” that transmitted the message; by the mid-1950s, researchers were gauging the relative credibility of news delivered by televi-

sion, newspapers, magazines and radio. By 1985 studies had also begun to investigate the messages' senders and receivers; a major project by the Associated Press Managing Editors was among the first to compare the public's perception of news credibility with the views of journalists themselves.⁴ By the late 1980s, studies of all types were detecting a significant decline in the public's perception of media credibility, regardless of the message, its delivery system or its audience. The Gallup Poll between 1985 and 2000 plummeted 20 percentage points on the question of whether the news media gets its facts straight.⁵ Explanations for the widespread decline in public trust ranged from media quality and standards (ASNE, 1997)⁶ to the impact of marketplace pressures (Pew, 1999).⁷

In May 1996, the Pew Center reported that while "the news media has a generally positive view of itself in the watchdog role, ...the outside world strongly faults the news media for its negativism. . . . The public goes so far as to say that the press gets in the way of society solving its problems. . ." A year later, the American Society of Newspaper Editors launched a four-year, \$1 million project designed to identify the reasons behind the public's declining trust in the press. Its conclusions described "a troubled image of journalism" and offered a slate of issues to be addressed, including accuracy, respect for readers, objectivity, fairness and community values.

"I am here to talk to you about editors and their responsibility for the credibility of newspapers when many readers have concluded we have none."

-- Sandra Mims Rowe, president of American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1998 convention speech

In 1998, Gallup released a poll called "A Matter of Trust" about the public's perception of the rise of "infotainment," or the proliferation of entertainment news, sometimes to the exclusion of hard news. The issue of overkill or sensationalistic reporting was also examined. The poll concluded that the rise in

infotainment and sensational stories may have been partly to blame for the decline in trust in media, from broadcast to newspapers to online news.⁸

By 1999, even journalists were ready to admit that something was amiss. In its study, "Striking the Balance: Audience Interests, Business Pressures and Journalists' Values," the Committee of Concerned Journalists and the Pew Foundation reported that roughly one-third of media respondents said a decline in public trust was the most important problem facing journalism. In a commentary on the study's findings, Bill Kovach, Tom Rosenstiel and Amy Mitchell observed that there had been a sea change in journalists' perspective about their own performance: "Something important has changed in journalism. Not only is the public increasingly disaffected from the press. Journalists now agree that something is wrong with their profession."⁹

But if journalists were becoming less than positive about their performance, much of the public was downright disgusted with it. "The public increasingly distrusted journalists, even hated them ... by 1999, just 21 percent of Americans would think the press cared about people, down from 41 percent in 1985. Only 58 percent would respect the press's watchdog role, a drop from 67 percent in 1985,"¹⁰ the study concluded.

Both the ASNE and "Striking the Balance" studies examined the blurring of advertising and editorial content, and its impact upon readers. Fifty percent of ASNE survey respondents said "newspapers allow advertisers' interests to influence news decisions,"¹¹ a concern mirrored by the 53 percent of journalists in the Pew study who said profit pressures are "hurting the quality of coverage rather than just changing the way things are done."¹²

Sandra Mims Rowe, then president of ASNE and editor of *The Oregonian*, described the study's findings at the 1998 ASNE conference:

I am here to talk to you about editors and their responsibility for the credibility of newspapers when many readers have concluded we have none. We don't trust you, they shout. You can't even get little things right, so you must really blow it on

*the big things. You're arrogant. You don't respect the privacy of others. You're too negative. You're too liberal. You don't write about things important to me.*¹³

Despite such criticisms, Rowe argued, the nadir in newspapers' relationships with their readers presented opportunities for change and for a renewed journalistic commitment to integrity and credibility. But two years later, the Radio and Television News Directions Foundation's 2000 study of radio listeners who followed the news suggested readers were less trusting than ever of the print media.¹⁴ Asked which media they found most trustworthy, 36 percent said national television; 24 percent said local television; 15 percent said newspapers; 11 percent said radio; 7 percent said online media; and 7 percent said they didn't know.

In 1997, a group of 25 men and women formed the Committee of Concerned Journalists to engage journalists and the public in a discussion of what journalism is supposed to be. Its project included 21 public forums (attended by 3,000 people), interviews with 100 journalists, editorial content studies and historical research. The results of that study were published in May, 2001; entitled *The Elements of Journalism*, authors Bill Kovach and Tom Rosentiel conclude that the Fourth Estate is rapidly becoming an endangered species. Outlining nine principles that could save it – including “Journalism’s first obligation is to the truth” and “Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience” – the authors describe in new terms many of the same issues and media excesses that have been the grist of public discussion and academic research for decades. In short, the more things have changed, the more they have managed to remain the same.

*“Journalism’s first obligation is to the truth,”
and “Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise
their personal conscience.”*

– *The Elements of Journalism* authors Bill Kovach and Tom Rosentiel

Into the midst of all of this media breast-beating and public finger pointing, the digital medium has introduced a new set of questions and a new kind of ethical and professional challenge: Do traditional rules apply to new media? Will – and should — the ethics and expectations established in and by legacy media survive their relocation to the Web? And if news consumers are less than trusting of familiar media delivery systems, what will be their response to information they access on a computer screen? Researchers have already begun to explore some of the questions of credibility associated with the online delivery of news:

- A 1999 Pew study indicated that believability ratings are substantially higher for online news sites than for their corresponding traditional news outlets.¹⁵ For example, 54 percent of online users surveyed said CNN.com content was believable, while only 40 percent of online users rated CNN’s broadcast content as believable.

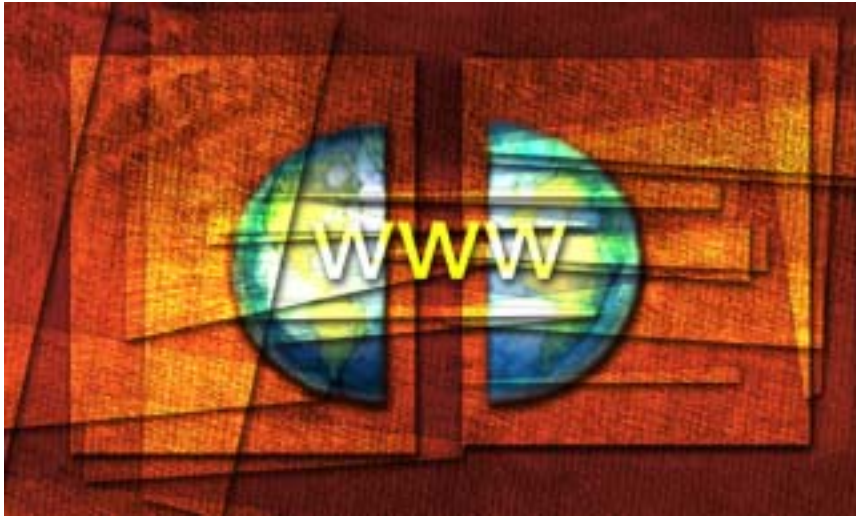
- An academic study concluded that information found on the Internet is as credible as that found in television, radio and magazines, but not as credible as newspapers.¹⁶ The same authors in 2001 examined the Internet as a place for the public to satisfy its need for information, compared with other media.¹⁷ They reported the Internet, as an information retrieval medium, rated highest among respondents, out-ranking newspapers and face-to-face contact, which tied for second place, followed by books and magazines, electronic mail, telephone and television. The study also concluded that Internet information is not subject to the same levels of scrutiny as other media, unless the site has a traditional media counterpart, such as a newspaper.

- According to the Pew Center’s study, “The Internet News Audience Goes Ordinary”¹⁸ the public makes few distinctions between the information that traditional news outlets provide online and offline. Most Americans (55 percent) do not think that news organizations’ Web sites are any more or less accurate than the information available from their traditional outlets. This is even truer of Internet users, 69 percent of whom see no difference between the accuracy of information that a news organization makes available in different formats.

- Jupiter Communications in 1998 found that just over 80 percent of Internet users believe news on the Internet is as trustworthy as news reported by traditional

media. More than 7 percent of the respondents ranked news delivered via the Internet as more reliable than news delivered through traditional media.¹⁹

In summary, research suggests that some readers may trust the news they find on their computer screens at least as much as – and in some cases more than – they trust the news they get from other media. This may surprise many of the journalists working in online newsrooms; they've participated in the debates, conflicts and controversies swirling around the digital delivery of news since its inception in 1996, and they understand the unique organizational, economic and professional challenges online news faces – challenges that until now have gone largely unexplored and undocumented.



Perceptions and Problems

The Credibility of Digital News: Report of a National Survey

In an effort to assess where Americans stand regarding the issue of online news credibility and how at least some members of the media may perceive the same issue, the Online News Association commissioned NFO WorldGroup²⁰ to conduct a national survey. The study not only explored the basic issues of journalistic credibility, but also assessed such key questions as:

- Where do perceptions of credibility for online news fall in relation to traditional media?
- How do members of media organizations view the credibility of their own print/online/broadcast products?
- Does the public consider online news credibility as important an issue as media workers do?
- How concerned is the public about the blurring of editorial content and advertising?
- What story and site elements contribute to credibility?
- Where do the public and the media workers who responded to the survey diverge when it comes to online and traditional news credibility?

More than 1,000 American users of online news with online access and more than 1,300 members of media organizations were asked a series of questions relating to online news. The online public's interviews were conducted between July 3 and July 16, 2001. Representatives of media organizations responded to the survey between July 3 and August 6, 2001. All interviews were conducted via the Internet. (For a more detailed description of the methodology, please refer to Appendix B.)

Key Findings

1. The Biggest Challenge May Be Convincing Traditional Media that Online News is Credible News. The online public generally shows more confidence in news sources than did the members of media organizations who participated in the

The biggest challenge to the credibility of digital news may come not from the public, but from journalists working in traditional media. The public – which uses online news sources to complement rather than replace other sources of news – says the credibility of digital news isn't a pressing issue.

study. Online media workers do not rate online sources as highly, in terms of credibility, as they rate traditional media. *More often than not, the main issues surrounding news credibility were of concern to media respondents and not to the public.*

2. The Public Has Accepted Digital News as Another Option on its Menu of Credible News Sources. Readers say online news is about as credible as news they obtain from other, more traditional news sources. For example, when the public's scores are ranked, readers rate cable television Web sites as the third most credible news source out of 16 possible choices, ahead of national network news, national radio broadcasts, local television news and their local newspapers. And even local radio Web sites, which were ranked last of the 16 news sources, were considered credible by 41 percent of the public. A full 13 percent of online readers say the Internet is their most trusted source for news.

3. Many Readers Don't Identify the Credibility of Digital News as an Issue. Many in the public remain neutral on the issues surrounding online news – they neither agree nor disagree – let alone feel strongly about the online news media and credibility. Although online readers, in most cases, are receptive to using online news, they are more likely to have a firm opinion about the credibility of traditional media while remaining far more neutral about online news sources. *Online news credibility is not a pressing issue for the online public, as evidenced by the large number of neutral and unsure responses to the survey.*

4. Younger People are More Comfortable with Online News and Less Concerned with the Separation of Advertising and Editorial Content. Younger members of the public are more likely to say online news is credible and less likely to express concern about the separation of news and advertising content than are their older counterparts. Younger media workers in the survey were also more likely to say online news is credible than were their more senior colleagues.

5. In the Digital Age, People Still Rely on Conventional Media. News Web Sites Currently Act as Complementary Sources of News for the Public. Most online news sources fail to attract unique traffic; rather, a large portion of the online audience comes from people who use traditional news sources as well. Americans are using online news in *addition* to traditional media rather than using online news *instead* of traditional sources.²¹



The Study

I. Defining Credibility

This section addresses:

The Public Perspective – Investigates the story elements the public values when evaluating a news story’s credibility and uncovers a slight disconnect between what the public says is important for a story’s credibility and what media workers in the survey expected them to say.

Media Workers’ Perspective – Investigates the story elements that were important to media workers when they were evaluating a story’s credibility for themselves.

Advertising Space and Credibility – Provides a preliminary look at the impact of the separation of news and advertising content on the credibility of news.

Understanding the Functions of a Journalist in Terms of Defining Credibility – Explores the public’s understanding of the most important function of a journalist and how that differs from what media workers in the survey said.

What Drives Usage of a Particular Online News Source? Examines the characteristics of a news Web site that contribute to its continued use by the public.

Online News From Trusted Sources – Continues to explore how traditional brand-carryover impacts online news use.

The Public Perspective

The online public says accuracy, completeness and fairness are the three most important attributes in determining the credibility of a story.

While the public values these three attributes as the most important, media workers who responded to the survey predicted the online public would respond a little differently. Media respondents said the public would list “accuracy of the information, fairness of reporting and the news source being a trusted one” as the three most important story attributes. As noted in the table (Figure 1), a trusted news source is viewed as the fourth most important attribute in the eyes of the public. Importantly, the remaining components tested in this investigation were ranked nearly the same by the public and by the media workers who participated in the survey.

Figure 1:
Ranking Online Story Credibility Drivers

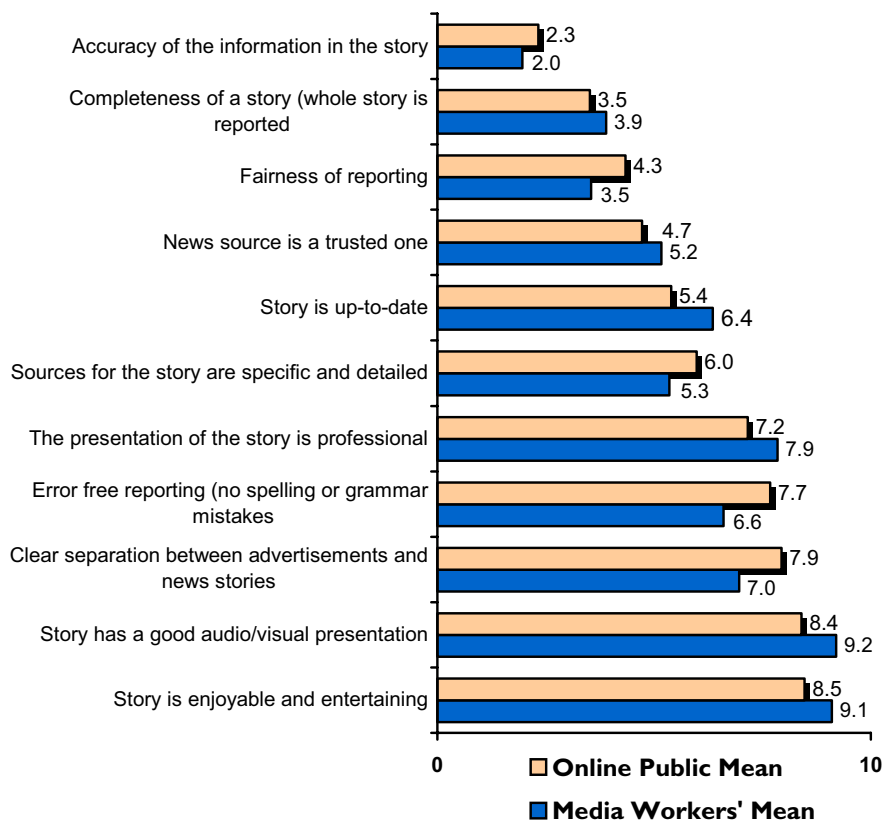
| | Public Rank | Media's Public Rank* |
|---|-------------|----------------------|
| Accuracy of the information in the story | 1 | 1 |
| Completeness of a story (whole story is reported) | 2 | 4 |
| Fairness of reporting | 3 | 2 |
| News source is a trusted one** | 4 | 3 |
| Story is up-to-date | 5 | 5 |
| Sources for the story are specific and detailed | 6 | 6 |
| The presentation of the story is professional | 7 | 8 |
| Error free reporting (no spelling or grammar mistakes) | 8 | 7 |
| There is a clear separation between advertisements and news stories | 9 | 9 |
| Story has a good audio/visual presentation | 10 | 11 |
| Story is enjoyable and entertaining | 11 | 10 |

* Media's perception of how they believe the online public would rate the characteristics of credibility

** When asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "Online news sites are my/consumers' most trusted sources for news," the public indicated it is not yet ready to tout online news as being the most trusted source, with 43 percent disagreeing and only 13 percent agreeing. As seen frequently throughout the study though, when it comes to issues regarding online news, many of the public (44 percent) still have not decided whether they agree or disagree with the issue. However, they're not as likely to disagree with this statement as media respondents in the survey predicted they would (79 percent).

Interestingly, the top six story attributes do not change for any age group within the online public²². Nevertheless, those under 26 years of age are less concerned about the separation of advertisements and news stories than older age groups. Importantly, no significant differences exist across income or gender regarding defining credibility.

Figure 2:
Mean Ranking of Story Attributes



Among technographic characteristics, a slight difference exists between light users who place a *good audio/visual presentation* as the least important and moderate and heavy users who say that making the story *enjoyable and entertaining* has the least to do with making a story credible.

Media Respondents' Perspective

Media respondents and the public agreed on the top four most important factors affecting news credibility, though media workers ordered them slightly differently.

Media workers in the survey were asked to surmise how the public would rate the characteristics of a news story in terms of credibility. They were also asked to rate the story characteristics from their *own* perspectives. The accompanying chart (Figure 2)

outlines the relative order of most important story attribute to least important, according to the online public.

In the previous section, it became clear that the online public wants accurate facts and the whole story. They want the story reported fairly and they want to hear it from someone they trust in a timely manner. When media respondents thought about a story from their own perspective, they, too, said they want accurate information reported fairly. More so than the public, they also said they want the whole story from a trusted source with specific and detailed sourcing information. Neither the online public nor media respondents put much emphasis on the audio/visual presentation of the story or the story’s entertainment value.

The study also examined the media workers’ sample by dividing it into two groups: editors and staff,²³ hypothesizing that different job duties may change the perceived importance of certain story attributes. No significant differences were found.

Advertising Space and Credibility

As illustrated in the chart (Figure 2), when taking into consideration all the attributes that contribute to a story’s credibility, having a “clear separation between advertising and news” falls low on the public’s list relative to other attributes. Nevertheless, because this is an issue of debate among members of the media, the issue is explored later in this report.

What Drives Usage of a Particular Online Source?

As there are different attributes of a news story that contribute to its credibility, there are also certain Web site characteristics that contribute to its continued use and perceived credibility by the public (Figure 3).

Although the public says up-to-date information ranks well below other attributes that make a story credible, timeliness ranks at the top of the list when online readers are asked why they prefer the news sites they visit most often. (It’s important to note, however, that the difference between the top two attributes is a scant 2.4 percent. Given the study’s sampling error of ± 3 percentage points, it’s possible that the public values timeliness and accuracy equally.)

Members of media organizations and the public have differing opinions as to what drives them to use a particular site.

Both groups are likely to say the reason they use a site is because the information on the site is constantly updated. However, the two groups do not agree on the importance of the accuracy of the information as a key driver. Online Americans said accuracy (24.1 percent) is very nearly as important as timeliness (26.5 percent), while media workers said brand recognition (25.4 percent) is as important as timeliness (26.8 percent), with accuracy of information ranked third (14.3 percent).

Figure 3:
Choosing Site Attribute as Key Driver of Traffic; In Percent

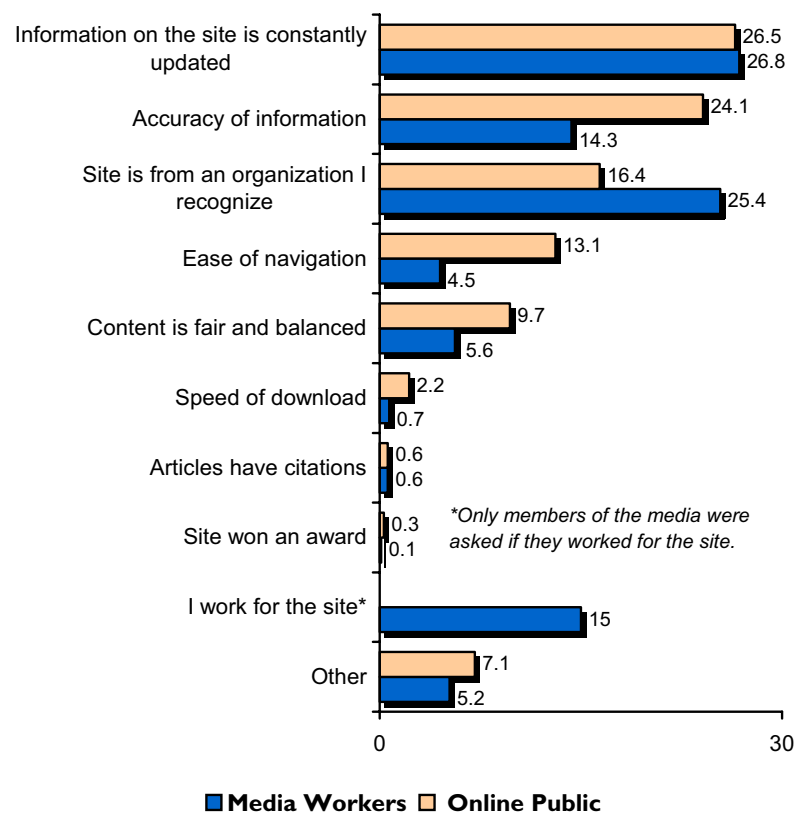


Figure 4:
Public Who Think Traditional Brand is Important; In Percent

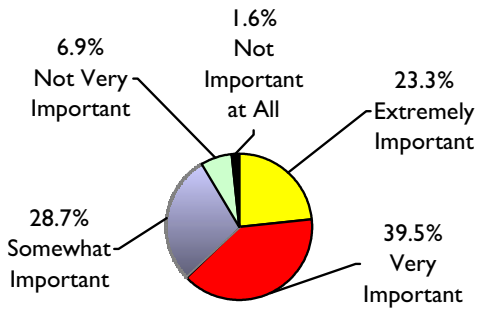


Figure 5:
Ratings of Story and Site Drivers

| | Online News Site | News (Story) In General |
|--|------------------|-------------------------|
| Up-to-date | 1 | 5 |
| Accuracy of information | 2 | 1 |
| Site is from an organization I recognize | 3 | 4 |
| Ease of Navigation | 4 | Not measured |
| Fairness | 5 | 3 |

Online News from Trusted Sources

As an independent issue, traditional brand-carryover is more important to the public than when taken in context with other variables influencing online news site visits.

The public was asked, “How important is it to you that the site comes from a news organization you respect outside of the Internet?” Almost all (91.5 percent) say it is an important issue (Figure 4). Nearly a quarter (23.3 percent) say it is extremely important and when paired against accuracy, completeness, and fairness, in the ordering of story attributes, the concept “traditional brand-carryover” emerged as the third most important attribute as ranked by the public.

As presented in the accompanying table (Figure 5), online readers said accuracy was the most important attribute of journalistic credibility, with completeness, fairness and trusted news source as the next three most important. “Story is up-to-date” ranked fifth in terms of the public’s perceptions of key attributes for credibility. At the same time, the public said frequent updates was the most important reason they choose a particular Web site (26.5 percent), followed very closely by accuracy (24.1 percent)²⁴.

II. Credibility Rankings

This section addresses:

The Public Perspective – Uncovers which news sources the online public identifies as the most credible.

Media Workers’ Perspective – Uncovers which sources representatives of media organizations said they consider most credible.

The Online Public’s General News Use – Investigates how the public’s use of specific news sources relates to the sources they see as most credible.

Frequency of Use – Explores how frequently those news sources are used.

The Public Perspective

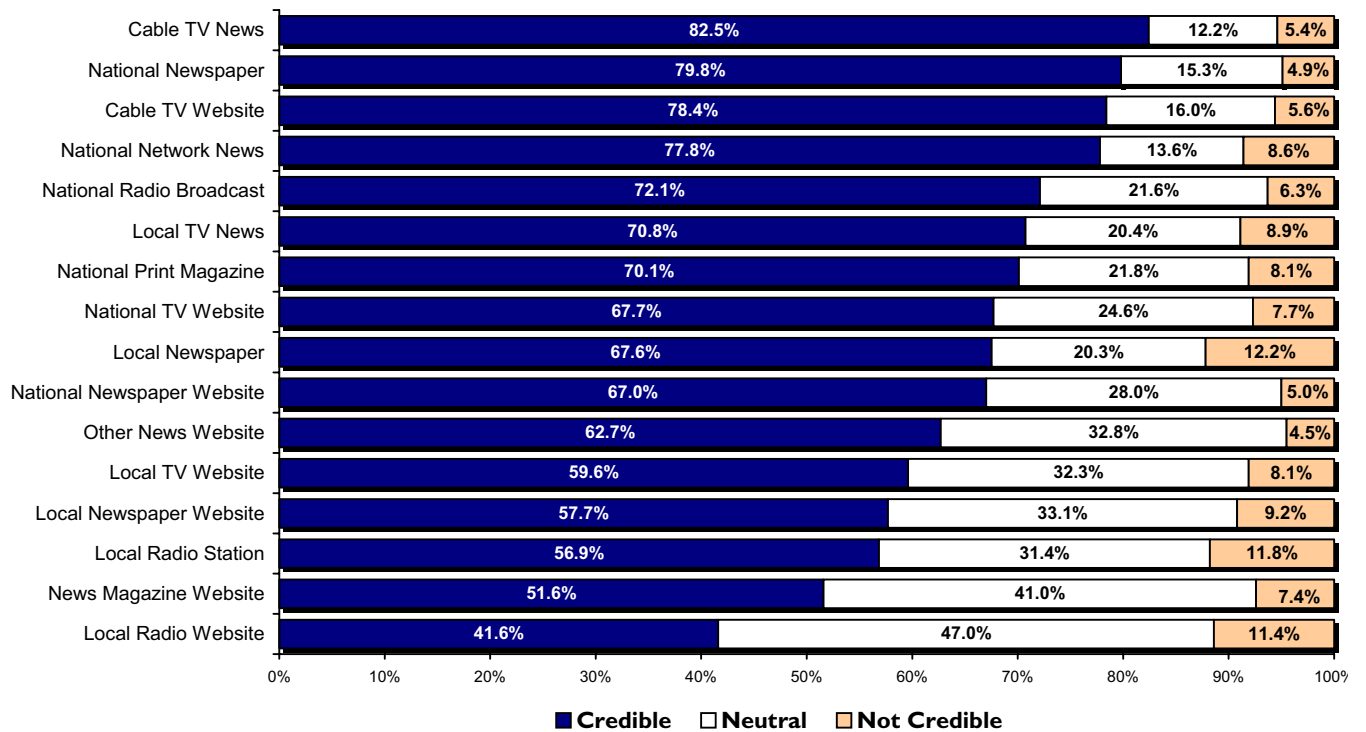
The public has accepted digital news as another option on its menu of credible news sources.

Online readers say online news is about as credible as news they obtain from other, more traditional news sources. When the public’s scores are ranked, 78.4 percent of the public said cable television Web sites are credible, making this the third most credible news source out of 16 possible choices (Figure 6). Nearly 68 percent of readers said national television Web sites are credible; 67 percent said national newspaper Web sites are credible and nearly 63 percent said other news Web sites are credible. Even local radio Web sites, which were ranked last of the 16 news sources, were considered credible by 41.6 percent of the public. A full 13 percent of online readers say the Internet is their most trusted source for news.

The public is more likely to have a firm opinion about the credibility of traditional news media than about online news sources.

When responses are ordered, the public is twice as likely to say that traditional media are credible than it is to say the same thing about online media. It’s important

Figure 6: Online Public's Credibility Ratings



to note that this does not reflect a stronger impression among the public that traditional media are *more* credible than online media; instead, it reflects an online reading public that has firm opinions about the credibility of traditional media while it is far more neutral or yet to make up its mind about online news sources.

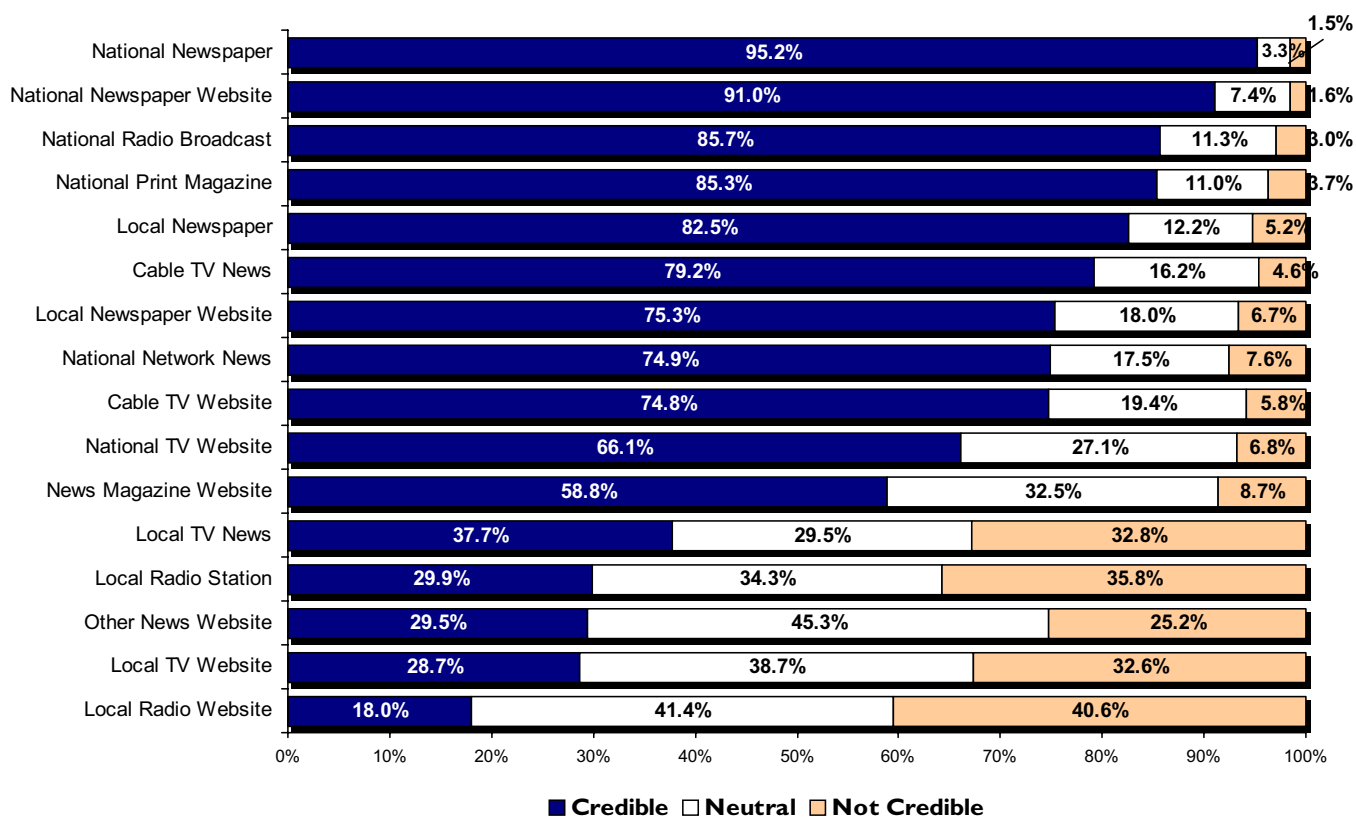
Media workers who responded to the survey viewed the credibility of traditional and online sources as more closely related than did the public (Figure 7). As seen in the chart, they ranked national newspapers as the most credible sources of news, followed by national newspaper Web sites as the second most credible. When the public's answers are ordered, national newspapers are the second most credible source and national newspaper Web sites are the tenth most credible source of the 16 measured.

Moreover, both the online public and media respondents were likely to view national sources – including online national sources — as more credible than local sources. In fact (Figure 6), local newspapers (12.2 percent), local radio stations (11.8 percent) and local radio Web sites (11.4 percent) had the largest percentages of the online public saying the source is not credible.

Most news sources do not necessarily have an up-hill battle to convince the online public they are credible. They need only to bring the issue to mind and provide the public with evidence of their credibility.

As a general rule in survey research, when a large portion of the public indicates a neutral response, the indication is that the issue is not “top-of-mind” or that the public has not thought much about the issue. *It is important to note that the difference in ratings of news sources do not reflect stronger negative ratings for online news sources than for traditional news sources; instead, the differences are mostly attributable to increases in the percent of the online public who feel neutral rather than positive or negative about the credibility of the source.* For example, those of the online public who feel negatively about the credibility of national newspapers represent 4.9 percent, while those who feel negatively about the online equivalent represent only 5 percent. Those who feel neutral or are unsure about the credibility of national newspapers and their Web sites represent 15.3 percent and 28.0 percent, respectively.

Figure 7: Media Workers Credibility Ratings



Media Workers’ Perspectives

Fewer representatives of the media were neutral regarding a medium’s credibility than were members of the online public.

Media respondents to the survey were more likely to have made up their minds about a news medium’s credibility. Moreover, they tended to rate the traditional and online versions more closely than did the public. National newspapers and their Web sites are separated by seven other sources when the public’s responses are ordered from decreasing credibility. However, for media respondents, they are the top two most credible sources (Figure 7).

Note: This study has a sample error of ±2.5 percentage points. Differences in credibility ratings of less than 2.5 percent should be considered statistically insignificant.

Media respondents were more critical of news credibility than the online public.

Among the rankings produced by the survey’s media respondents, there were five sources about which more than 25 percent to 40 percent said the sources were not credible. In the case of local TV news, local radio stations, other news Web sites, local TV Web sites and local radio Web sites, media respondents were far more outwardly critical than the online public.

The online public and media respondents both said local radio station Web sites are the least credible. Nevertheless, 41.6 percent of the public still views this source as credible, while only 18 percent of media respondents said the same. The online public says cable television news is the most credible source, with 82.5 percent reporting it credible. While a nearly equivalent 79.2 percent²⁵ of media respondents said cable television news is credible, that response placed cable television sixth in the media respondents’ ranking of all news sources.

When responses are viewed by the type of media a respondent reported working for — online, print, and broadcast — the data (Figure 8) show that the general trend was to rate news sources within a person’s media type or industry as slightly more credible.

**Figure 8:
Rating of News Source Among Different Media Groups**

| | Media Workers Rank | Online News Workers | Print News Workers | Broadcast News Workers |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| National Print Newspapers | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| National Newspaper Website | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| National Radio Broadcast | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 |
| Print Magazine | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 |
| Local Print Newspaper | 5 | 7 | 2 | 8 |
| Cable Television News | 6 | 6 | 7 | 6 |
| Local Newspaper Website | 7 | 9 | 6 | 10 |
| National Network News | 8 | 8 | 8 | 5 |
| Cable Television Websites | 9 | 4 | 9 | 7 |
| National Television Website | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 |
| News Magazine Website | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 |
| Local Broadcast Television | 12 | 13 | 12 | 12 |
| Local Radio Station | 13 | 14 | 13 | 14 |
| Other News Website | 14 | 12 | 14 | 15 |
| Local Television Website | 15 | 15 | 15 | 13 |
| Local Radio Station Website | 16 | 16 | 16 | 16 |

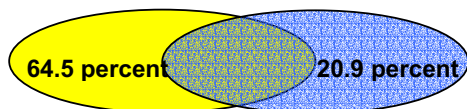
As seen in Figure 8, when responses are ordered, the three segments of media respondents — online, print and broadcast — appear to generally agree. However, there are times where sources are rated very differently, depending on which segment of the media one examines. When we ordered the responses of those who said they work in print, local print newspapers ranked much higher than online or broadcast sources. In fact, all media segments showed some bias toward their own outlet. Those who said they work for broadcast news sources rated the national network news more credibly than those who said they work in online or print.

The Online Public's General News Use

While fewer among the public surveyed reported accessing an online news source versus a traditional news source “in the past week,” those who did say they’re likely to use it more frequently than they use other sources of news. Traditional media are used by more people but are used less often.

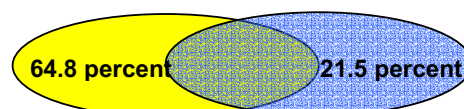
**Figure 9:
Comparing News Sources Used During Previous Week**

Public's Local Newspaper Use*
Print Only Both Online Only



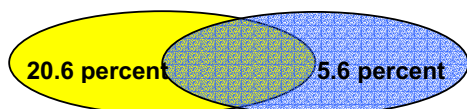
*12 percent use neither

Public's Local TV Use*
Broadcast Only Both Online



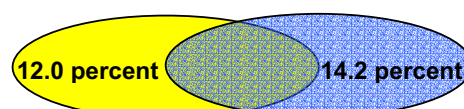
*12.6 percent use neither

Public's Magazine Use*
Print Only Both Online Only



*69.7 percent use neither

Public's National Newspaper Use*
Print Only Both Online Only



*61.4 percent use neither

Greater numbers of consumers turn to traditional sources such as local radio (84.9 percent) and local newspapers (72 percent) to get their news, but certain online sources are used more often in a week than other traditional sources. Of online sources, “other news Web sites” like Yahoo News and AOL News, are the most popular, with 57.2 percent of the public reporting having visited one in the past week. National newspaper, local newspaper and local television Web sites are each used by about one-quarter of the public. News magazine Web sites and local radio station Web sites are each used by fewer than 10 percent of the public.

Online news does not erode a news organization’s traditional audience. In most cases, online news supplements traditional news.

The diagrams in Figure 9 may suggest, in general, that online news complements rather than cannibalizes traditional readership. In the case of local newspapers or local television for example, one-fifth (20.9 percent and 21.5 percent, respectively) of the public views both sources regularly.

Magazines and national newspapers show a slightly different situation from their broadcast counterparts. For both of these traditional news sources, the cost of access (subscription) may act as a barrier to widespread use. Alternatively, actual market penetration and up-to-date print version availability may be a more substantial barrier to wide readership for national newspapers.

The indication is that local television news and local television Web sites do not erode each other’s audience. At the same time, a good portion of the public is not visiting the online version of national newspapers to *augment* their subscription to the print product – they are getting the online version *instead*.²⁶

Frequency of Use

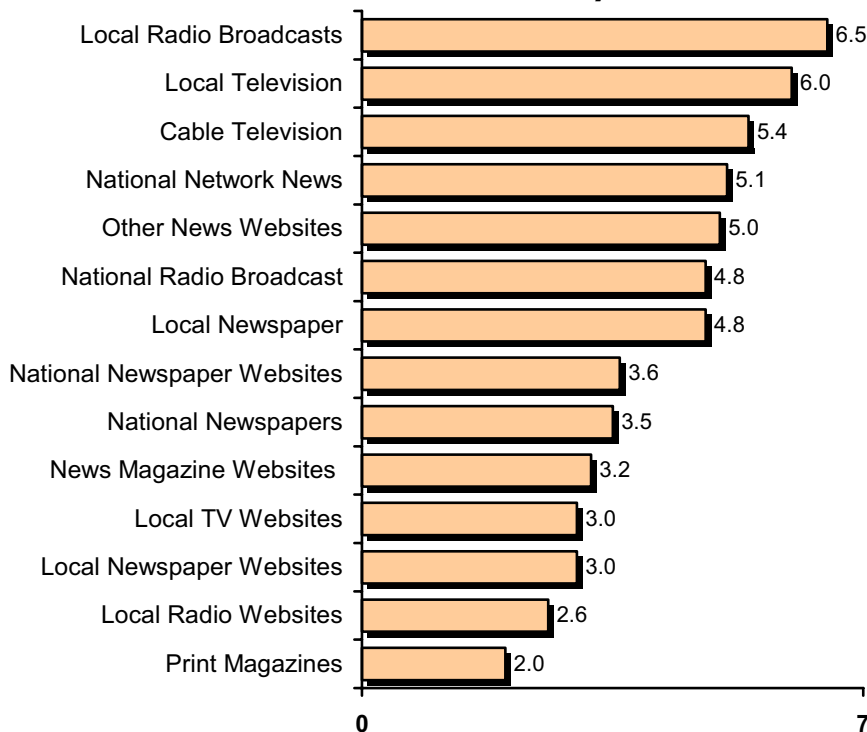
Local radio and local television are the sources the public uses most frequently to stay tuned to the news (Figure 10).

Among those who indicate using a specific source in the last week, local radio and local television are most often used. Local radio users reported using the source an average of 6.5 times each in the past week, while local television users used that

source 6.0 times per week. The average cable television and national network news viewer reported viewing the source 5.4 and 5.1 times per week, respectively. Local newspaper readers and national radio broadcast listeners used the sources an average of 4.8 times per week. The average number of uses for national newspaper readers was 3.5. Although magazines are used by a large segment of the population, of all news sources measured, they were used least frequently. Those who use magazines averaged two uses per week.

Among online news sources, “Other news Web sites” (such as Yahoo! News or AOL News) were used most often, with viewers reporting an average of five uses per week. National newspaper Web sites like WSJ.com, NYTimes.com and USAToday.com were used an average of 3.6 times per week.

Figure 10:
Mean Uses of Media Per Week by The Public



News magazine Web sites were the third most-often-used source, with the average user reporting 3.2 uses per week. Local television and local newspaper Web sites were used an average of 3.0 times per week. Local radio station Web sites, which were viewed as the least credible of all sources measured, were used 2.6 times per week. Print magazines were used least often.

Interestingly, the sources most people report using AND the sources people use most frequently are often the sources they say are the least credible.

Before criticizing the public for most often using the sources they find least credible, it is important to note that different media provide different kinds of content. Cable television news and national newspapers, though widely accepted as credible, do not provide local news and local weather – clear drivers of local media consumption.

III. Credibility Across Different Segments

This section addresses:

Credibility Rankings Across Specific Demographic Segments – Explores how age and gender relate to the perceived credibility of certain news sources.

Credibility Rankings Across Specific Technographic Segments – Explores how Internet connection speed relates to the perceived credibility of certain news sources.

Credibility Rankings Across Specific Demographic Segments

The age of online news consumers and perceived credibility have an important relationship worthy of further exploration. Younger members of the online public are more likely to rate a non-local Web site as more credible than their older counterparts. For example, there are no significant relationships between any age groups within local newspaper Web sites, local TV station Web sites or other news Web sites. On the other hand, within national newspaper Web sites, as many as 72 percent of those under 35 say the source is credible; only 62.5 percent of those 45 to 65 years of age and 43.1 percent of those over 65 say this source is credible.

The tendency for younger members of the online public to believe that a national source is more credible than those who are older is not unique to online news. The same phenomenon can be observed in the case of national radio broadcasts and national network news.

Age is not the only demographic variable that influences a person's perception of a news source's credibility. Women tend to perceive local broadcast news (74.1 percent) as more credible than men do (66.9 percent). Women also view national network news (83.2 percent female vs. 71.5 percent male) and cable television Web sites (80.9 percent female vs. 75.5 percent male) as more credible than do men.

Credibility Rankings Across Specific Technographic Segments

It was hypothesized that the connection speed at which a member of the online public accesses online news might impact his or her ranking of its credibility. Results show that those with fast connections – namely ISDN, Cable, DSL or T1 connections — are more likely to say that national newspaper Web sites are more credible than those connecting on slower modem connections. Three-quarters of those who have fast connections say national newspaper Web sites are credible, while only 62.1 percent of those with slower connections say the same. A similar relationship can be seen in the case of news magazine Web sites or e-zines; 57.1 percent of those with fast connections vs. 48.7 percent of those with slower connections say magazine Web sites are credible. It's worth noting, however, that users with fast connections also tend to assign more credibility to national print newspapers, suggesting that the convenience of faster connections is not what's driving the differences in users' percep-

tions. More likely, faster connections are almost always associated with the workplace; one hypothesis would be that those accessing online news from work have different perspectives about it than do those accessing it from home. Another possibility is that economic and educational demographics of those who have faster connections at home may have an impact upon their perception of online site usage and credibility. A third possibility is that those who have faster connections visit a wider variety of news sites with more frequency and have grown more comfortable with the credibility of online news.

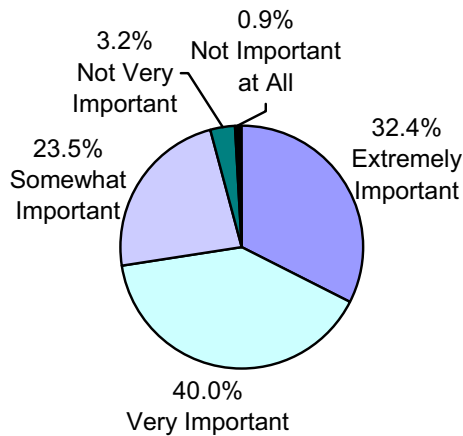
IV. Balancing Business Interests with Credible Journalism

This section addresses:

The Separation of News and Advertising Content – Investigates whether or not the public finds it easy to separate news from advertisements on news sites.

Do Business and Advertising Interests Influence the News? Uncovers areas of disconnect between the public versus representatives of media organizations’ perceptions of how business and advertising interests might influence how the news is reported.

Figure 11:
Public Who Said News/Ad Separation Is Important



The Separation of News and Advertising Content

Asked directly if the separation between advertising and editorial content matters to a news source’s credibility, the public overwhelmingly (95.9 percent) said yes, it is important. But asked to rank a wide array of variables affecting credibility – including accuracy, fairness, completeness and timeliness – and the public ranks the church-state divide well down on the list.

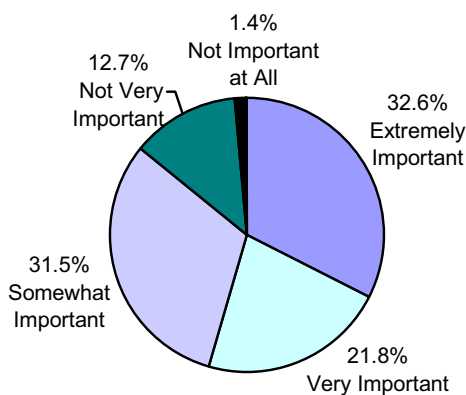
The public’s response to the question of the advertising-editorial divide came as a surprise to the survey’s media respondents. While 40 percent of the public said the issue is very important, media respondents predicted half that many (21.8 percent) would respond that way (Figure 11).

There is one sub-group of the online public that feels more strongly about the separation on news and advertising content. Significant differences exist between those among the online public who use national radio broadcasts and those who use local or national newspaper Web sites, local radio Web sites and local television Web sites. Of those who use national radio broadcasts, over three-quarters (76.3 percent) say a clear separation is extremely or very important. Of those who use national newspaper Web sites, 70.3 percent say the same, as do 67.4 percent of those who use local newspaper Web sites. Just under two-thirds (64.1 percent) of those who use local radio Web sites, and slightly more (68.2 percent) of those who use local television Web sites, agree that the clear separation of advertising and news content is either extremely or very important.

Predictably, those who do not trust what they read at online news sites are less likely to agree it’s easy to distinguish what is news from what is advertising.

The public was also asked if they agree with the statement: *“It is easy to separate what is news and what is advertis-*

Media Who Predict Public Rating of Importance of News/Ad Separation



ing at online news sites.” Four out of ten (42.6 percent) agreed, 32.9 percent were neutral, and 24.5 percent disagreed.

Of particular interest are those who trust what they read at online news sites. Those who trust are much more likely to agree (57.4 percent) that it is easy to separate news and advertising at online news sites versus those who do not trust what they read (36.3 percent).

The study hypothesized that the number of times a person visits an online news site may influence that person’s perceptions regarding news/ad separation. The chart (Figure 12) outlines the data and shows a clear relationship.

There is also a clear relationship between the number of hours a person spends on the Internet and his or her perception that it’s easy to separate what is news and what is advertising at online news sites. An infrequent user tends to be neutral on the issue, but the more often a person visits online news sites, the more he or she tends to agree that it is easy to separate the two.

In order to understand the issue of news/ad separation better, the public was asked to respond to two more statements: 1) *Links to commercial sites or advertisements on online news sites are sometimes disguised as news stories* and 2) *Online news sites sometimes have advertisements that are disguised as real news stories*. More than half of men agree with both statements, 52.1 percent and 51.3 percent, respectively; closer to four out of ten women felt the same way, 43.9 percent and 42.8, respectively.

Those who use online versions of print media (local and national newspaper Web sites, and news magazine Web sites) agreed that links to commercial sites or ads are sometimes disguised as news stories at a higher rate than those who use other news Web sites, or local TV or radio Web sites. Specifically, 57.6 percent of users of magazine Web sites agree, while 54.2 percent of users of national newspaper Web sites agree, as do 53.3 percent of local newspaper Web sites. Less than half (47.9 percent) of those who use “other” news Web sites, like Yahoo News or AOL News, agree with the same statement. The relationship between news magazine Web sites and national newspaper Web sites and their Web-only competition (other news Web sites) is significant.

Do Business and Advertising Interests Influence the News?

As one might expect, the very clear indication is that those who are worried about advertisers and business interests influencing how news is reported are also sensitive to the separation of news and advertising content.

Figure 12:
Online Readers Who Say It Is Easy to Separate News and Advertising Content; In Percent

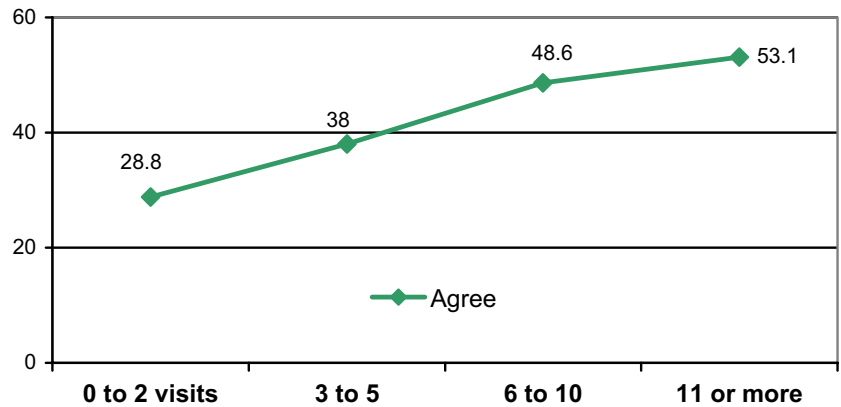
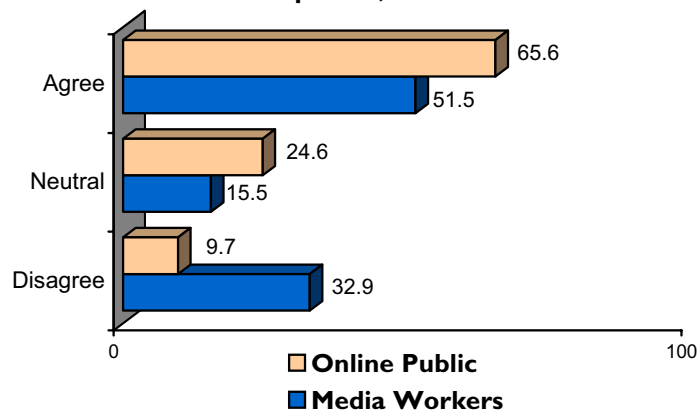


Figure 13:
Advertisers and Business Interests Influence How News is Reported; In Percent



Online readers appear to be more worried about advertising-editorial issues that may be more subtle than actual ad placement or presentation. As seen in the chart (Figure 13) , two-thirds (65.6 percent) of the online public agrees that advertisers and business interests influence how news is reported. Of those, 75.5 percent also feel it is extremely or very important that a clear separation between news and advertising content be maintained.

Those who report the shortest tenure in media organizations are more apt to agree that advertisers and business interests influence how news is reported.

The survey looked at the media workers segmented by tenure: those who say they have been in the business 10 or fewer years, those who say they have been in the business 11 to 19 years, and those who say they have been in the news business 20 or more years. Nearly six-in-ten (57.3) members of the media who say they have worked in the industry 10 or fewer years agree that advertisers and business interests influence how news is reported, while less than half (44.8%) of those who report being in the business for 20 or more years agree.

V. Online News in Comparison to Traditional News Mediums

This section addresses:

Local Television and Online News – Explores the relative credibility of local television and online news sources.

Newspapers and Online News – Explores the relative reliability and credibility of newspapers and online news sources.

Radio and Online News – Explores the relative reliability and credibility of radio and online news sources.

Online News is the Most Complete News – Assesses the degree to which the public and media feel online news is the most complete source of the news compared to traditional mediums.

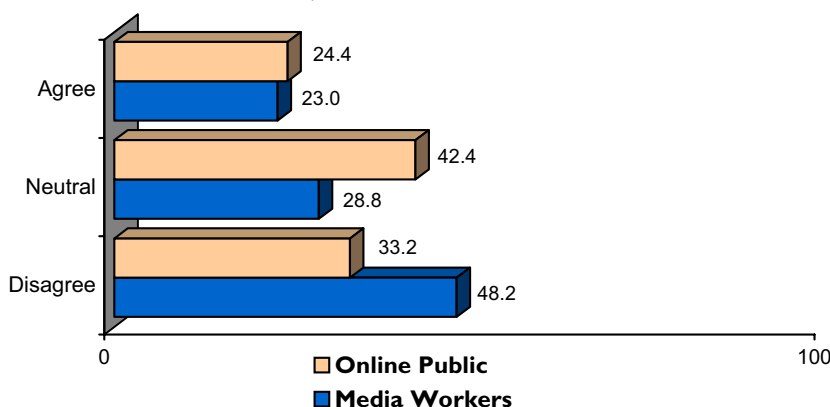
Timeliness of Online News and Traditional News Sources – Addresses whether or not online news is believed to be the most up-to-date source of news.

This section examines how Americans feel about specific traditional sources in comparison to online news sources. The findings outlined in this section suggest that the online public may be more comfortable with the idea of online news than media respondents in the survey predicted they are.

Local Television and Online News

Among both the online public and the media respondents in the survey, about a

Figure 14:
Those Who Say Local Television News Is More Credible Than Online News; In Percent



quarter (24.4 percent and 23.0 percent, respectively) agree that local television is more credible than online news (Figure 14). However, what is interesting and positive for online news providers is that one third (33.2 percent) of the public and nearly half (48.2 percent) of media respondents in the survey disagreed with that viewpoint. What might be even more important is that 42.4 percent of the public has yet to pass judgment on this issue. In today’s competitive media environment, online news has

a strong foothold compared to well-established and ingrained, but less credible, local television news sources.

While the public is unsure about the relative credibility of online news and local television, the media lean heavily towards online news.

Newspapers and Online News

There is a disconnect between the public’s perception regarding the relative reliability of online news and newspapers, and media respondents’ expectations about that perception (Figure 15). More than three-quarters (77.4 percent) of media respondents said the public views newspapers as more reliable than online news sources; in fact, only 28.1 percent of the public said that was the case.

Only media respondents who said they believe online news sites meet the same standards as other more traditional sources come closer to the public’s opinion: 61.1 percent agreed, 22.8 percent were neutral and 16.3 percent disagreed. The chart shows the responses in detail.

While the public remains generally split in thirds on this issue, media respondents skewed heavily towards agreement in favor of newspapers. The clear indication is that members of the online public are not as comfortable with the *reliability* of news they read in the newspapers relative to online news as media respondents believed they are. Since 48.1 percent of media respondents reported that they work for a print newspaper, one would expect to see a slight bias towards newspapers. Nevertheless, the type of media people work for cannot completely explain the media’s hubris in regard to newspapers.

The survey also asked about the *credibility* of online news relative to that of printed newspapers (Figure 16). Regarding credibility, the public’s opinion did not differ much from their views on reliability.

Although the universe of “printed newspapers” is much wider than local newspapers, over one-third (35.3 percent) of the public says online news sources, as a whole, are more credible than printed newspapers, while 23 percent felt the opposite. An additional 41.7 percent are neutral on the question.

Radio and Online News

Just under one-in-four (23 percent) of the online public agrees that they are “more comfortable with the *reliability* of news on the radio versus news online.” Fewer than two-in-ten (16.8 percent) online news readers would agree that “radio broadcast news is more *credible* than online news.” Nearly five-in-ten (48.3 percent) are neutral and just over three-in-ten (34.9 percent) disagree.

Figure 15: Respondents Who Say News In Printed Newspapers Is More Reliable Than Online News; In Percent

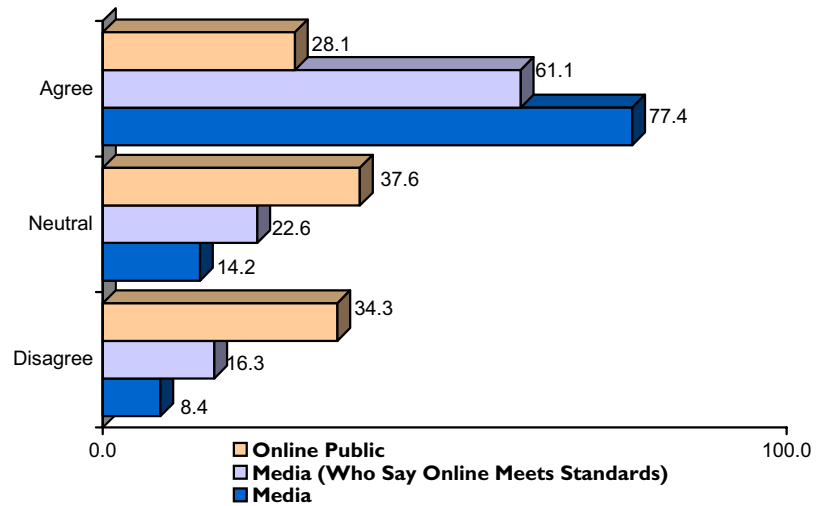
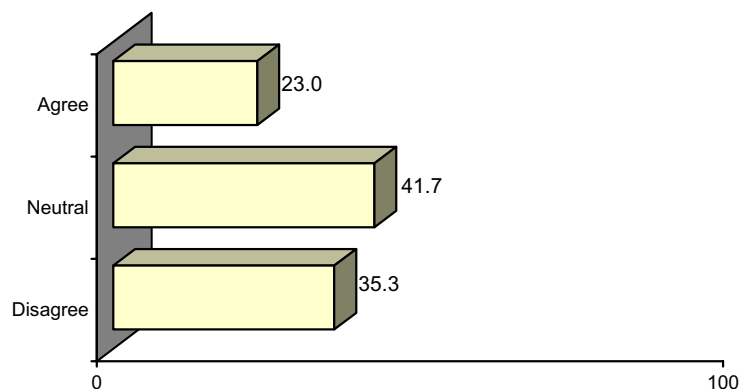


Figure 16: Public Respondents Who Say Printed Newspapers are More Credible than Online News; In Percent

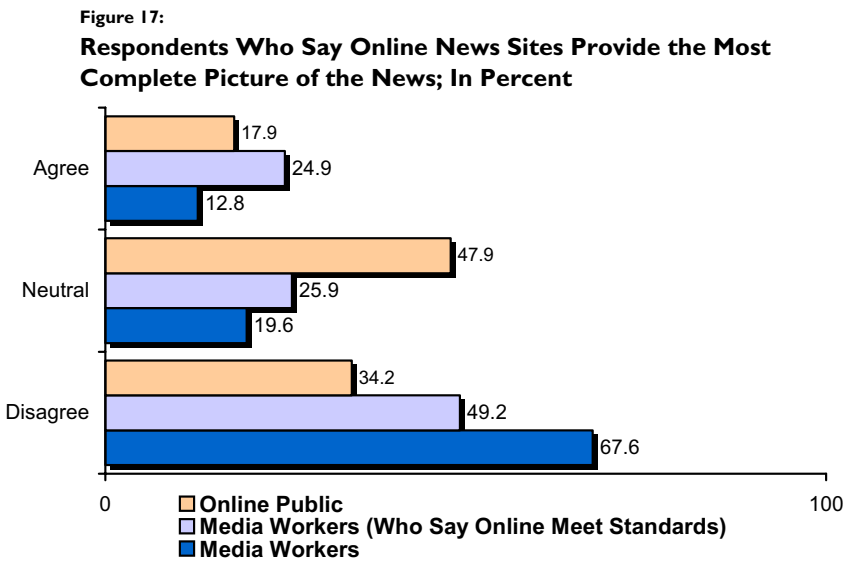


Again, media respondents to the survey appeared less willing to believe that the general public is comfortable with online reporting. To further illustrate this point, it is important to note that only 5.7 percent of media respondents said they have no concerns about the credibility of online news. More significantly, only 9.1 percent of the media who said they work for online news sources have no concerns about online news credibility.

More than any other of the study’s findings, these answers indicate that online news credibility appears to be in the eyes of media respondents and not on the minds of the public.

Online News is The Most Complete News

Many online Americans have yet to pass judgment on whether or not online news sites provide the most complete picture of the news, with 47.9 percent remaining neutral when asked about this subject (Figure 17). Only 17.9 percent agree that online news sites provide the most complete picture of the news and 34.2 percent disagree.



Media respondents to the survey, on the other hand, clearly disagree (67.6 percent). The chart shows that once again, media respondents who said that online news meets the same standards as other more traditional sources expressed opinions more consistent with the opinions of the public as a whole.

Familiarity with the online world and online news sites seems to be a good indicator of a person’s likelihood to agree that online news sites provide the most complete picture of the news (Figure 18). The audience who spends more time online per week tends to agree at a higher rate than those who use the Internet less. This trend is more obvious when looking at the

number of times a person reported going to an online news site.

It is clear that there is a connection between the number of times a person visits an online news site and the amount of time a person spends on the Internet. Both are reasonably good indicators of a person’s likelihood to agree online news sites provide the most complete picture of the news.

The speed at which a user connects to the Internet is also a predictor. Those among the online public with faster connections tend to agree that online news provides the most complete picture of the news at significantly higher rates. However, since faster connections relate directly to the number of sites a person can visit, and since faster connections generally result in less frustration with slow loading pages, connection speed may not be the direct variable impacting perceptions of credibility.

Timeliness of Online News versus Traditional News Sources

The public does not view online news as being as timely as do members of the media.

Less than half (47.1 percent) of the public agree “online news is more up-to-date than other news sources” whereas two-thirds (67 percent) of media respondents agreed. More of the public (33.7 percent) than media respondents (15.7 percent) have not passed judgment on this issue and fewer of the media respondents (17.3 percent) than members of the public (19.2 percent) disagree that online news is more up-to-date than other news sources.

There seems to be a relationship between heavy online news use and believing online news is more up-to-date than other sources. This trend holds true only for online news use and not overall Internet use. Significant differences are found in the minds of the public among those who access online news sources more than five times per week compared to those who access online news sources less frequently. Of those who access online news 11 or more times per week, 59.6 percent report that online news is more up-to-date than other news sources. Only 40.6 percent of light users (3-5 uses per week) agree. Of those who are infrequent users (0-2 uses per week), only 35.8 percent agree with the statement. The largest group of infrequent and light users remains neutral. Between 15 percent and 23 percent of all user frequencies disagree with the statement with larger portions of light user groups disagreeing.

Those who are overwhelmed by the amount of news on the Internet are unsure or disagree that online news is the most up-to-date source, while those who are not intimidated by the volume of news on the Internet see online news as more up-to-date.

The study hypothesized that those who feel overwhelmed by the amount of information on the Internet use online news sources less and are less likely to believe that online news sources are the most up-to-date. Of the 27.9 percent of the public who agrees there is “too much news on the Internet for me to sort through and make sense of it all” fewer than half (43.9 percent) agree online news is the most up-to-date source. Of those who disagree that there is too much news on the Internet, 55.6 percent agree online news is the most up-to-date.

It was also hypothesized that the length of time a person has worked for a news organization may influence his or her perception of the timeliness of online news (Figure 19). Dividing media respondents into three groups – those who reported that they have been employed 10 or fewer years, those who reported that they have been employed 11 to 19 years, and those who reported that they have been in the news business 20 or more years – three fourths (74.9 percent) of those who have been employed 10 or fewer years agreed that online news is more up-to-date than other news sources. Only

Figure 18:
Public Respondents Who Say Online News Provides the Most Complete Picture of the News; In Percent

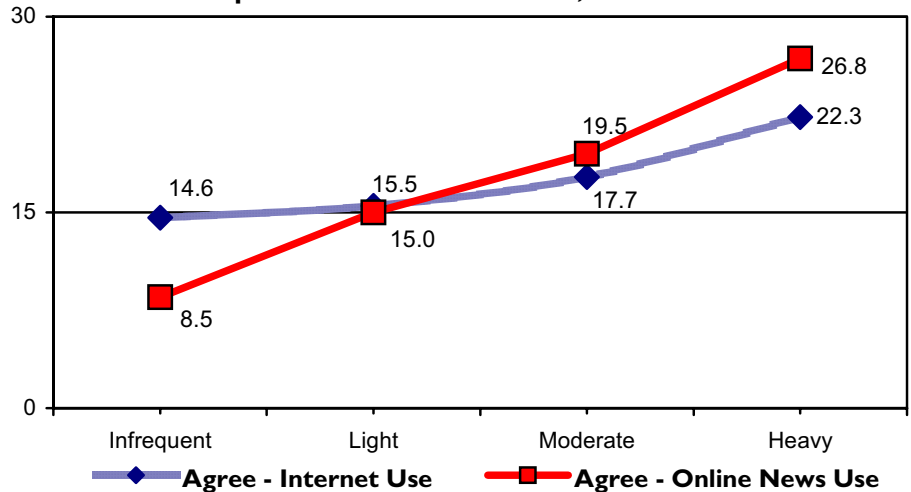
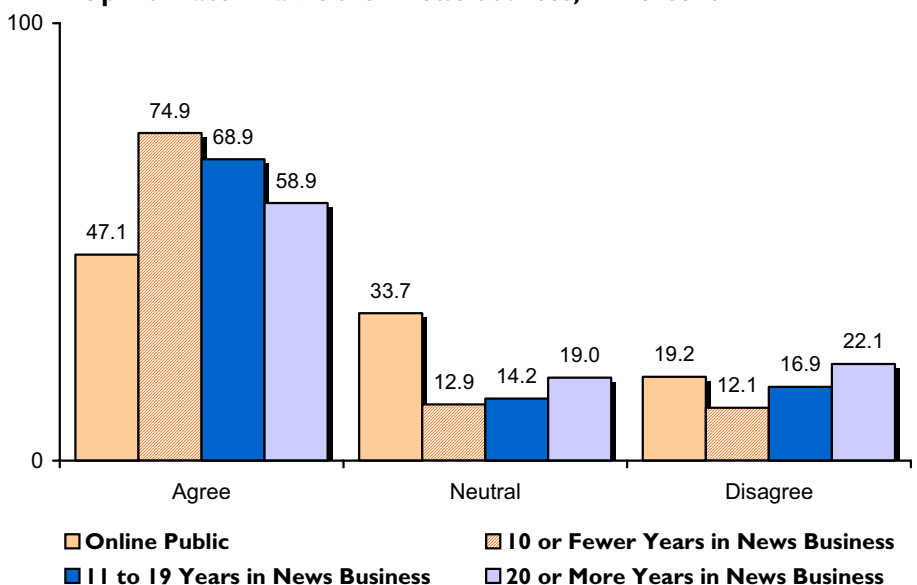


Figure 19:
Media Respondents Who Say Online News Is More Up-To-Date Than Other News Sources; In Percent



58.9 percent of respondents who described themselves as 20-year veterans say the same.

With nearly half (47.1 percent) of the public agreeing that online news is more up-to-date than other news sources, the next logical question is “Does online news provide the most complete picture of the news?” Only a little more than one-third (34 percent) of the public says online news does not provide the most complete picture of the news. What’s surprising is that over two-thirds (67.6 percent) of media respondents said the same. Such significant difference between the online public’s and the media respondents’ perceptions of online news begs the question: is the biggest obstacle for online news overcoming the public’s skepticism, or is its biggest challenge overcoming the negative perceptions of the media itself?



Challenges to the Credibility of Digital News

The Online News Association's Digital Journalism Credibility survey confirmed what many observers had guessed: members of the media – across all media types – are concerned about the standards, practices and credibility of digital news. More surprising, perhaps, was the survey's finding that the online public is not.

In fact, it appears that, for many readers, the credibility of online news is not a major concern – so much so that many of them offered neutral or uncertain responses to questions regarding the issue. Just as important, online readers who did have an opinion tended to be more positive about the credibility of online news than the media workers in the survey were – and in many cases, more positive than the media workers expected them to be.

In particular, two-thirds of the media surveyed said online news does not meet the same standards as more traditional sources of news. A sampling of the verbatim comments of those media workers offers insights into that perspective:

- *As a starting point, I assume online items are NOT credible, accurate, fair, complete. It's too easy to get things onto sites fast, and there's often not the same ethic applied as print journalists (at least older ones) had hammered into them in school and early jobs – accuracy, accuracy, accuracy.*
- *Online news has a reputation for being unresearched, biased, unprofessional, gossip and rumor prone. Most broadcast and general circulation print publications have some standards at least.*
- *An artifact (newspaper, magazine, book) that you can hold in your hands will always be more credible than ever-changing pixels. Longevity will also have to be demonstrated by online sources.*
- *Online is not held to the same journalistic standards as the printed media.*

The findings of the ONA Digital Journalism Credibility survey force journalists and the public alike to confront a critical issue: Is there something the media perceives or knows about the ethics and practices of online news that the public does not know? Or is the media just being resistant to online news?

■ *Anyone can post a Web site and call it online news...while it takes considerable time, effort and investment to establish a traditional news source. This makes some online services suspect to me...and perhaps deceptively critical to others. Credible sources online earned their credibility in the traditional media. Online upstarts *should* have an uphill battle.*

At the same time, the online public's survey responses and verbatim responses reflect greater optimism about and more trust in the credibility of online news:

■ *I don't understand why people think that a Web site is any less credible than print. The same source is divulging the same information in two different forms. How can I not find it credible?*

■ *I check USA Today online all the time and they seem to be more up-to-date on current events and the most credible paper out there.*

■ *You get the same information as the newspaper; it's just online. They still strive to supply accurate facts to the public.*

■ *www.disinformation.com, salon.com are credible because they know that AP doesn't mean always perfect. When every type of media gets their news "facts" from one source, it is no longer credible – it is a disseminated diet of half-truths and editorials, meant for the public to easily digest. These independent online news sources strive to seek out the truth as they find it as journalists, not let someone else do the dirty work for them. Their thinking for themselves allows me to do the same.*

■ *I use yahoo.com every day from work, and I find that it is very up-to-date and accurate. Also the writing style is thorough and informative. Also, new news appears on yahoo.com the moment it arrives instead of waiting for the newspaper the next day.*

Such a gap in perception between media representatives and the online reading public may not surprise many online journalists, at least some of whom have argued that the "digital media credibility gap" has always been a professional – and not a public – issue. But the survey's findings force journalists and the public alike to confront a critical issue: Is there something the media perceives or knows about the ethics and practices of online news that the public does not know? Or is the traditional media just being resistant to online news?

The remainder of the ONA's Digital Journalism Credibility Study explores those questions. Integrating the survey's findings into a broader discussion of the professional experiences and insights of more than 50 journalists and media experts working in all types and sizes of digital media²⁷, the report suggests concrete reasons why working journalists across media may have concerns – well-placed or otherwise — about the credibility of digital news. It describes some of the situations and pressures that have produced those concerns, and it makes a series of recommendations about what digital news organizations can do to address and alleviate them – before they make their way onto the public's radar screen.

Back to the Basics: The Professional Issues

Journalistic credibility depends upon the accurate, complete, fair and substantive reporting of the day's events – across all media, in every kind of news situation, every hour of every day. But in addition to that daunting responsibility, online journalists find themselves grappling with new kinds of professional issues, some of which are unique to the medium. This section of the ONA study explores those issues and addresses some critical questions about the practice and craft of digital journalism:

- Who is a journalist? In a medium in which global publication is available to anyone with a computer and a modem, and in a democracy in which press licensing or credentialing is anathema, what distinguishes a journalist from other online writers? What kinds of skills and experience are most important in an online newsroom?

- During the past year, news staffs at online organizations large and small have downsized, reorganized, and relocated back into traditional newsrooms. How have those trends impacted the technical and editorial quality of online news and, by extension, its credibility?

- What kinds of training or professional perspectives should media workers in online newsrooms be expected to have – practically and ideally? What kinds of editorial policies guide practice in online newsrooms?

“Sometimes it’s a struggle to figure out who’s a journalist in the online world.”

—Staci Kramer, chair Society of Professional Journalists Task Force on Online Journalism

Defining a Journalist

When news Web sites were first established in the mid-1990s²⁸, media companies scrambled to hire employees who could navigate journalistic issues *and* code in HTML. Even as recently as February 1999, the Online Journalism Review described the confusion surrounding job standards in online newsrooms:²⁹

Given the current state of affairs, consumers of online news should rightly ask: Who’s producing this stuff? Is it the same quality journalism I get when I read the corresponding print publication? If the Web staff puts something on the Web site that wasn’t in the print version, is it accurate? Can I trust a Web-only news site?

Nobody says it is easy to corral the issue of standards.

Just listen to Staci D. Kramer, chair of the Society of Professional Journalists’ Task Force on Online Journalism. “Sometimes it’s a struggle to figure out who’s a journalist in the online world,” Kramer told OJR columnist J.D. Lasica in December (1998).

That confusion over what constituted news – and what it meant to be a journalist – appears to have eased in recent years.³⁰ As content management systems became more intuitive and flexible, content could be seamlessly transferred to the Web without human intervention; no longer did editorial workers need to know how to “code.” That, combined with digital news’ increasingly prominent place in the mix of popular news sources, has produced a shift in hiring practices across all sizes and types of digital news organizations.

“I think when newspaper’s first started building Web sites, a lot of more technical people were hired, but editors realized that journalism skills and news judgment were more important than HTML skills,” said Alexandra Egan, editor of Omaha.com. “In fact, as a late-bloomer in the industry, Omaha.com benefited from that experience. The one piece of advice I heard over and over from my more experienced online news colleagues around the country was: Hire journalists.”

Doug Feaver, executive editor of WashingtonPost.com, agrees. Since he became hiring editor in 1998, every new editorial employee has had journalistic skills —

though a job candidate with a journalistic background *and* technical or HTML skills might have had an edge. “The first thing I’m looking for at the WashingtonPost.com newsroom ... I want people who know news,” Feaver says. “Technology is getting easier to use, it’s more of an automatic transfer. You don’t have to be a technology whiz to do good journalism on the Web.”

At NewsCenter1.com, the Rapid City, S.D. site for NBC-affiliate KNBN-TV, production manager Mark Welter says improved technology has reduced the need for technical expertise. “Journalists with a small amount of training can now post stories without much problem,” Welter said. “In our case, the news department has no time to worry about the Web; we are small and understaffed. We tried having a reporter be responsible for the Web site a couple of years ago. The Web site suffered greatly because she was too distracted by her other duties.”

At the StarTribune.com in Minneapolis, editor Ben Welter says changes in the industry haven’t altered news sites’ fundamental need for experienced journalists. “How can someone with no journalism training or experience step into an editing or reporting role at a major news Web site? We maintain the same professional standards as any publication, print or electronic.”

And at Charlotte.com, the city-site affiliate of *The Charlotte Observer*, all content editors have journalism backgrounds. “Generally, we prefer a journalist, because a lot of our work is making decisions of play and appropriateness, and working with the newsroom on getting updates,” says David Enna, director of site operations.

Even so, Enna says, Charlotte.com isn’t the journalistic equivalent of the newspaper and it requires different kinds of editorial approaches and sensibilities. “We are more gossipy, and probably more ‘sensational,’ than *The Observer*. Online readers have an extremely short attention span, and we make a point of trying to grab them in our 15 seconds,” Enna said. “A strongly tradition-minded journalist probably wouldn’t thrive in the online world. One of the things I stress in hiring people is the difference in the media.”

Other sites hired non-journalists for strategic rather than pragmatic reasons, but they, too, have made the shift to a more traditional, journalistic staff.

Vlae Kerschner, editor of SFGate.com, says hiring non-journalists was a strategic decision early on: “The idea then was to hire some people who were

not tied to the journalism world, because the Gate’s leadership at the time wanted to create a site that was more hip than the newspaper, and stressed unconventional news judgment, counterculture values and creative headline-writing skills,” he says.

It’s a strategy that hasn’t survived the site’s development into a primary information source for its readers. “As our audience has grown, many readers expect core journalistic values from a newspaper-affiliated Web site,” he says. “As a result, we have modified, but not eliminated, our ‘alternative press’ type approach, which has been quite successful in gaining readers in the unusual San Francisco market but also turns some people off. News judgment is critical, particularly now that some people rely on us as a primary source of information, which was not true five years ago.”

In August 2001, the Online News Association conducted an informal survey of 56 online newspapers and 16 online television stations across the country.³¹ Of the total sample, 71.4 percent of the online newspapers surveyed and 83.3 percent of the online TV stations reported that all employees making editorial decisions were trained journalists, either through journalism school, a prior news position, or both. On average, 87.3 percent of the editorial staffs in newsrooms that responded to the survey were trained journalists.

Despite this reassertion of the value of journalistic training across digital news sites, many of the media workers who responded to the ONA Digital Journalism

“Anyone can create a Web site and put ‘news’ on it. It shouldn’t be trusted unless it’s from/affiliated with an established print, television or radio news operation. I think online news is often filled with typos and adapted for the Web by computer people, not journalists.”

— Media respondent to ONA survey

Credibility survey continued to count a lack of journalistic skills and standards as among the issues impacting online news credibility. Consider this small sample of comments, made by respondents who self-identified as either online or traditional journalists:

- *I feel that the news content online reflects the print content accurately when comparing reputable organizations. However, the Internet affords almost anyone the opportunity to become a “journalist.” The accuracy of online news, in many cases, leaves something to be desired.*

- *Only the sites of long-standing news agencies that give content (including editing of content) control to journalists, not “Web guys,” can be a trusted source.*

- *(Online news credibility) still has a long way to go. Experienced journalists MUST be in charge of news content!*

- *Online journalism is in its infancy. It will improve. But for now, practitioners too often lack the training and experience — and sometimes the ethics — of established professionals in mainline news organization, especially newspapers. Unless it comes from an established and respected media source, online content is often too trendy, too superficial to be taken seriously. For one thing, there are too few ways to hold online journalism and journalists accountable. To be credible, online journalism must come either from a mainline medium or from a journalist who has already established credentials in other media.*

“Credibility of online news sites may be less so than their broadcast and print counterparts because layoffs and expense cuts over the last year have led some consumers to believe that online news sites now are shoestring operations.”

— Media respondent to ONA survey

- *Online editors are not as qualified as the editors at newspapers, so more thought is put into what to publish in traditional media.*

- *News Web sites often are run by people who have no news background. Technical skills are more important than journalistic skills.*

- *Most of the online news editors are not [sic] real journalists, have no press card - one of the main reasons for less credibility. The demands/criteria for becoming a newspaper journalist are much higher (like education).*

- *You have children writing for Web sites who have little or no journalism experience. Rewriting, missing the point, factual errors...on the whole, it is not credible...*

- *...many online journalists lack the experience of others – just because they know HTML or Java and can find obscure search engines doesn't mean they're qualified to write, lay out or evaluate the news.*

- *(Online news is) not as journalistically [sic] rooted. Most online editors right now don't have a journalistic background. They are more tech savvy.*

The gap between perception and reality when it comes to the journalistic skills and experience of online news organizations may be among the most important challenges to the credibility of online news. If it is the case that the majority of staffers in online newsrooms do have journalistic skills and standards, it is also the case that the online news industry needs to work harder to inform its readers – both inside and outside the media – of that professional fact of digital-media life.

Retrenchment and Downsizing

After a surge of layoffs, retrenchments and re-integration of online news operations back into traditional newsrooms, most online newsrooms remain relatively small.³² Many online news Web sites lost 10 percent to half of their staffs during the past year.³³

That kind of limited staffing and downsizing may have a direct impact on the editorial processes that protect and ensure technical and editorial accuracy; when two or three workers are responsible for the production and maintenance of a publication, there isn't much time to check spelling, grammar and even the accuracy of information. And, according to the American Society of Newspaper Editors' (ASNE)

study of news credibility, journalists and the public believe that even seemingly small errors feed public skepticism about a newspaper’s credibility.³⁴ If the devil is in the details, then a significantly reduced journalistic staff could have a significant impact on details like spelling, fact checking, grammatical accuracy – and credibility, even if the material is coming from a large, parent organization.

The ONA’s informal survey found that even larger TV stations are maintaining minimal online newsrooms; WABC in New York, for example, has three editorial workers, and KPIX, a CBS station in San Francisco, has only one. Meanwhile, editorial staffing at online newspapers was more substantial, but dwarfed by comparison to their print counterparts. Of the news organizations surveyed, 75 percent reported editorial staffs under 10; 56 percent had five employees or fewer, and 25 percent reported having only one online staff member.³⁵

Online news organizations in the survey reported that one- and two-person staffs “shoveled” content directly from the traditional medium, and had little or likely no involvement in molding the content to the medium by editing for brevity, researching contextual hypertext links for stories or building multimedia packages with audio, video, animation and interactivity.

The ONA’s informal review found that the larger the operation, the more likely it was to recognize the need for journalists who could make news judgments. The smaller the operation, the more likely the operation was to be a “shovelware” site with little or no impact on or responsibility for editorial content being republished. As online news becomes more established a component of the media landscape, site growth may create new demands for better-trained, journalistically grounded editorial employees.

Training and Standards

The ONA’s informal survey about journalist training found that both the online divisions of television stations and online newspapers were much more likely to offer technical training than standards or ethics training. In fact, 65 percent of online newspapers and 75 percent of the online television newsrooms in the survey said they provide technical training, as compared with 23 percent of online newspapers and 10 percent of television sites that said they provide standards or ethics training.

Importantly, of the 23 newspaper sites that said they do offer standards training, 83 percent of that training is informal, occurring in the course of daily newsroom discussions and processes rather than through any kind of structured programming.

If, as the ONA’s review suggests, most media workers in online newsrooms have journalistic backgrounds, news organizations may not feel the need for ‘journalism boot camp’ in their newsrooms. But some online news organizations – even those with highly professional, highly experienced staffs — have placed a premium on instilling and reinforcing those values; in particular, many online news sites affiliated with major media brands have in the past year increased their attention to journalistic standards and practices.

While most have no written online news policies of their own³⁶, some sites – including MSNBC.com, WSJ.com, USA Today.com, NYTimes.com and ChicagoTribune.com – have adopted the ethics codes and guidelines of their parent news organizations. And others have been “brought back into

Figure 20:
ONA’s Survey About Journalist Training

| | Yes | Informal training | No | No answer |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| Newspapers: standards training | 23 (41.1 percent) | 19 (82.6 percent of training) | 32 (57.1 percent) | 1 |
| Television standards training | 10 (62.5 percent) | 2 (20 percent) | 6 (37.5 percent) | - |
| Newspapers: technical training | 36 (64.3 percent) | 17 (47.2 percent) | 19 (52.8 percent) | 1 |
| Television: technical training | 12 (75 percent) | 3 (25 percent) | 4 (25 percent) | - |

the fold” in order to maintain their parent company’s journalistic traditions, standards, and brand value.

The ChicagoTribune.com, originally a self-contained unit of the Tribune Company, is one example. In 2000, former newspaper Assistant Managing Editor Mark Hinojosa was named AME for digital news, and it was moved back into the news operation.

“I wouldn’t say they were not up to Tribune standards (at Tribune Interactive), but more of them were younger than the Tribune norm,” explained Don Wycliff, public editor of the Tribune newspaper. “...We went into the Tribune Interactive venture with the intention to make Interactive into a profit center. And now they are abruptly back in the news operation. These are people who consider themselves journalists. I think they welcomed the opportunity to clarify the standards they were to adhere to. It goes to the dilemma: which master are you serving...editorial or business?...There has to be some clarity. The Tribune brand was on the line.”

Protecting the brand is a primary incentive for increased attention to journalistic standards and training in the online divisions of major media companies.

“Our first responsibility of the online organization is not to hurt the reputation of *The New York Times*,” said Martine Nisenholtz, CEO of New York Times Digital. “We also must live up to the standards of the parent.”

The NYTimes.com has gotten serious about standards training over the past year, Nisenholtz said. It now requires five, three-hour sessions for new hires about *The New York Times* standards, and the Internet skills and knowledge sets needed to work at *NYTimes.com*.³⁷ “We were training all along, but now it’s codified—we’ve turned the training into Digital U,” said Nisenholtz. “There are nuances to what we do at the *Times* that matter. We build skills inside, teach them how to prioritize their time, create effective headlines, write captions under deadline, understand multimedia, video archives, present interactivity, the digital system. Our training brings our very young people up to standard.”

MSNBC.com is another online news organization that has upped the ante on standards training in recent months.

“We’re doing a number of things in terms of training to make sure no matter what journalists are doing, they have a sense of journalistic standards. We constructed a big, fat notebook, with everything from sourcing, to how to handle boards and chat, to how to shoot things properly, to financial disclosures for reporters and editors—it’s really comprehensive,” said Merrill Brown, editor in chief of MSNBC.com.

In addition, the newsroom brought in representatives of the Committee for Concerned Journalists (CCJ) to present a series of seminars on standards and practices. All editorial employees were required to attend the 1.5 day seminars at their East Coast and West Coast offices in June and July 2001.

Much of the seminar was based on CCJ’s Tom Rosenstiel and Bill Kovac’s book *The Elements of Journalism*, including topics like the pressure of 24-hour news cycle, making decisions on the run, the challenges of combining MSNBC’s own original journalism with that of their partners, how the site treats content over which it doesn’t have control, and the technological opportunities of multimedia, Brown said.

“A lot of the seminar was built on their book, but adapted for this medium. The willingness to take away from work to talk about standards and credibility is hopefully a demonstration of how serious we are about this,” Brown said.

“It goes to the dilemma: which master are you serving...editorial or business?...There has to be some clarity. The Tribune brand was on the line.”

— Don Wycliff, public editor of the Chicago Tribune

“Old, out-of-date pages, poor design, broken links all make many news sites look stupid. Why would I trust them if they can’t get that right?”

—Online reader

MSNBC.com is also the first – and so far the only – online news site to have appointed a news ombudsman.³⁸ Dan Fischer took the job early in 2001 and now serves as the newsroom’s direct connection to its readers.

Fischer says the CCJ seminar pressed for full disclosure, on everything from advertising to editorial errors. “The CCJ seminar (taught) full disclosure,” Fischer said. “We should use labels to disclose what is advertising and what is news. That’s what Kovac and Rosenstiel advocate. In news stories, it should say, “here’s what we *don’t* know.” That’s not what the media is famous for – for ‘fessing up. That is something the CCJ folks were advocating as a way to be more credible.”

The Credibility of Online Only-Brands

Online-only brands have a very different challenge in building a strong reputation for credible news; they are, in fundamental ways, starting from scratch in the face of considerable skepticism and distrust. Again, a sample of comments from media workers who responded to the ONA Credibility survey provides insight into the high credibility hurdles stand-alone sites will have to overcome:

- A traditional news organization’s credibility transfers directly to its Web site. A “brand name” is a brand name, whether it’s print, broadcast or Internet. Online sources without traditional parent companies are not as credible.

- Considering just the sites I regularly visit, I know that most of the online news is identical to the print media news. When it’s the same, the credibility level would be the same. I don’t put much stock into privately owned, personal Webs for news or anything else.

- Credibility of online news just depends on the source. If it is an online-only services, that raises questions.

Only a handful of online-only brands have managed to build a strong reputation for credible news in a short period of time. C|Net is among them. Editors at C|Net’s News.com, a technology news site, say the development of and adherence to stringent editorial guidelines is largely responsible for their success.

C|Net itself was launched in 1994 to provide users with the latest technology news and product reviews. Its news site, News.com, debuted in September 1996; it quickly built credibility among technology enthusiasts worldwide, and by mid-year 2001 was garnering some of the heaviest traffic among all

content sites.³⁹ Along with the consistently high traffic came respectable advertising sales and a dramatic growth in staff.⁴⁰

Jai Singh, vice president and editor of News.com, says his site’s steady growth and professional credibility are due to its traditional journalistic standards. C|Net was among the first news sites to write journalism and advertising standards policies, which are posted on its site. In accordance with its policies, ads are labeled, and journalists aspire to lofty standards, including editorial neutrality, a strict corrections policy, and the prohibition of accepting gifts, products or services from readers or vendors.⁴¹

Like all online-only news sites, News.com has had its share of struggles in building journalistic credibility from scratch, Singh says. In 1997, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote an article about a “thirst to be first” mentality among online news organizations that it said compromised their accuracy.

The *Times* used as an example a C|Net story about a merger between Netscape and Novell, and inaccurately reported that C|Net had gotten the story wrong.

“This painted us in the online-only media as having no standards,” Singh said. “We were the new kids on the block, and over the course of time, we had to establish our credibility. We have gone from one person to 85 people. That should say some-

“The bull’s eye was on us because we didn’t have a newspaper or broadcast pedigree. The feeling was, ‘how could these guys have ethical standards?’”

--Jai Singh, editor C|Net’s News.com

thing. I have always believed it's about winning the reader's trust. Credibility is what it's all about.

"The bull's-eye was on us because we didn't have a newspaper or broadcast pedigree. The feeling was, 'how could these guys have ethical standards?'"

In an effort to shore up and build News.com's credibility, Christopher Barr⁴², then editorial director for C|Net, worked with staff reporters to create the one of the first-ever sets of journalistic standards on an online news site. Barr credits top management, including founder Halsey Minor and Chairman and CEO Shelby Bonnie, for supporting strong journalistic values rather than stipulating some kind of compromise between the site's advertising and editorial objectives.

Meanwhile, Barr also joined the Internet Content Coalition, a not-for-profit organization devoted to Internet content and standards, to help create online news industry advertising standards. The ICC was formed in 1996 by several high-level Internet executives, including James Kinsella, former general manager of MSNBC.com; Maria Wilhelm, president of The Well; and Neil Budde, editor and publisher of the Wall Street Journal Online to "help create a responsible and business-friendly environment through advocacy, education, standardization and policy," according to the ICC's mission statement. The group drafted a detailed and comprehensive set of online advertising guidelines, addressing sponsorships, links, special advertising sections, targeting ads, contests and sweepstakes and advertising in general.⁴³

While the C|Net initiative succeeded, and a two-page document became an internal policy for C|Net's journalists in 1998 and was posted on Cnet.com in late 1999, the ICC's attempt at industrywide standards failed.

"We ended up never adopting the white paper on standards and ethics, but we did a lot of work getting feedback on how to treat advertising, and how to do journalism ethically." The ICC has since disbanded, Barr said.

Conclusion

Clearly, online news organizations face unique and considerable challenges when it comes to developing, maintaining and protecting the credibility of their product and brand. This section of the ONA Digital Credibility Study presented an overview of some of the fundamentals, from definitions to policies to the assumptions that journalists – online and off – bring to their work. The next section looks more closely at what many observers say is the thorniest and most troubling issue confronting digital journalism today: the separation of advertising and editorial content online.

Business as Usual? The Economic Issues

If there's a single issue about which journalists agonize and debate, it's the longstanding tradition of a church-state relationship between advertising and editorial content. For many journalists, that division is among the cornerstones of journalistic integrity and credibility – and among the most contentious and controversial issues confronting digital news.

"I think there's a huge difference in the credibility – online sites are very often run or influenced by nonjournalists and marketing people who have little or no regard for editorial integrity and separation between ads and editorial," observed one of the media respondents to the ONA Credibility Survey. "That's a scary thing, and affects the credibility of online sites considerably."

Like many of the other issues addressed by the ONA's Digital Journalism Credibility Study, however, advertising-editorial relationships appear to be largely a professional rather than a public issue.

Like many of the other issues addressed by the ONA's Digital Journalism Credibility Study, however, advertising-editorial relationships appear to be largely a professional rather than a public issue. Asked directly if they matter, the public says yes, they matter. But when ONA asked readers to rank advertising-editorial independence as a variable affecting news credibility, it barely made the list. Readers said they're far more worried about accuracy, fairness and completeness in the news they read than they are about the church-state divide.

About 40 percent of the online public is also confident it can discriminate between advertising and editorial content, with another 30 percent expressing neutrality or a lack of opinion on the issue.⁴⁴ That confidence is positively correlated with a reader's general trust of online news, with increases in time spent online, and with the number of times a reader has visited a particular online news site. In other words, more than two-thirds of readers said they aren't all that worried that they're going to be duped into believing that an advertising message is going to slip by them, disguised as a news story. And the more time they spend online, the less worried they appear to be.

What readers are concerned about is more subtle and perhaps more pervasive: two-thirds (65.6 percent) of the online public also said advertisers and business interests influence how news is reported. Of those, 75.5 percent said it is important or extremely important that a clear separation between advertising and editorial be maintained.

Col. Robert McCormick, publisher of the Chicago Tribune built separate elevators inside his elaborate Tribune Tower, one for advertising and one for reporters, to represent the division between 'church and state'

Historical Perspective

The issue of advertising and editorial independence is as old as American journalism itself – though the church-and-state ethic is something relatively new. From Benjamin Franklin⁴⁵ to firebrands like Horace Greeley and Joseph Pulitzer, editors for centuries were more than willing to tailor their editorial presentations to please their advertisers.

It was not until the 1920s – during the era of press titans Col. Robert McCormick, publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*, and Henry R. Luce, founder of Time Inc. — that the notion of a “church-and-state” wall became a part of the journalistic tradition. McCormick actually built separate elevators inside his elaborate Tribune Tower, one for advertising and one for reporters, to represent the division.

But even those media icons were pragmatic in their day-to-day practices. “If we have to be subsidized by anybody, we think that the Advertiser presents extremely interesting possibilities,” Luce told his top aides in 1938. His goal was not to compromise “more than a small fraction of our journalistic soul. That small fraction we are frankly willing to sell for a price.” Less concerned with professional standards than with practical realities, Luce depended upon force of personality to protect his editorial turf: “There is not an advertiser in America who does not realize that Time Inc. is cussedly independent . . .” he said.⁴⁶

That mix of journalistic ethic and common sense has been standard practice in American newsrooms ever since, with editors making independent – and often inconsistent – decisions day to day. Good journalism, according to Doug Feaver, executive editor of the WashingtonPost.com, is all about deciding what's right, one situation at a time. “The essence of good journalism is case-by-case,” Feaver says.

“In the old days, newspaper reporters wrote the news, editors massaged the stories, and put them in the paper, and the business-side people figured out how to sell the advertising and subscriptions,” wrote James Risser, former director of the Knight Foundation Fellowships at Stanford University and a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner. “Today, they're all in it together.”⁴⁷

If that's true in traditional newsrooms, it's also the case in many online news organizations. In an environment in which advertising and editorial content can be highly integrated and new genres of revenue streams are invented every day, the isolationist culture no longer makes sense to many media companies. New approaches – to advertising partners, placements and messages – have been driven by increasing recognition that traditional banner advertising does not, and indeed, may never provide the revenue necessary to support the expenses of maintaining an online news operation.

“What's clear to me as part of this business is that banner ad effectiveness is declining, and that there's downward pressure on CPMs (cost per thousand advertising impressions), and that we have to make the business proposition effective for the business to be a business,” says Tim Ruder, an advertising executive with WashingtonPost.com.⁴⁸ “We are always thinking about what can we do to make the business proposition work so that we don't cross the (credibility) line.”

In 1994, when the first banner advertisement was introduced on HotWired.com, click-through rates (CTR) ranged between 15 percent and 50 percent. But CTR, the most common performance metric for online advertisements, took a nosedive from that point on, as the novelty of banner advertising wore off.⁴⁹ In 2001, click-through rates averaged less than one half of one percent, and – not surprisingly – online sites were scrambling for alternative measures of advertising impact.⁵⁰ In July 2001, CBS MarketWatch announced that it would no longer provide click-through data to its advertisers; instead, it was looking at other kinds of performance metrics, including brand or product awareness.⁵¹

Other sites are finding another remedy for the 0.5% click-through rate: intrusion into the editorial space. A report in *The New York Times* in March 2001 suggested that the more annoying the ad, the more responsive the reader: “Iwon.com has found a number of ways to entice users to click on ads. Traditional banners now induce only half a percent of users to click. Larger ads have click rates closer to 2 percent. If the ad includes the user's name – a possibility on sites that encourage registration – the response is 3 percent. If animated elements fly out of the ad and around the page, as the cork does in the ad for “Meet the Parents,” the click rate is 7 percent. And for ads that pop up in separate windows with sound and motion, like a recent ad for Taster's Choice coffee, the response can top 10 percent.”⁵²

Even before the downturn in online advertising sales in early 2001, advertisers were pushing for louder, larger, more intrusive, and occasionally, annoying ads online. The precipitous drop in CTR over time has ignited advertiser pressure to show that Web site visitors are paying attention to their messages.⁵³

“Now, as even the biggest Internet sites struggle with a sharp decline in ad revenue, sites are letting their remaining advertisers occupy a much larger portion of their pages, as well as create ads that move, make noise and otherwise do whatever it takes to attract attention,” reported *The New York Times*.⁵⁴

Media respondents to the Online News Associations Digital Journalism Credibility survey said the advertising-editorial issue is one of the key drivers of news credibility. A sample of relevant verbatim comments:

- *More pressure to make money, compete and survive has pushed many online news sites to do things we would never consider in print. Too many times, editorial and advertising look and are placed in the same positions, misleading readers.*

- *Online news is less credible primarily because of the fuzzying of the line between news and advertising.*

“More pressure to make money, compete and survive has pushed many online news sites to do things we would never consider in print. Too many times, editorial and advertising look and are placed in the same positions, misleading readers.”

— ONA survey media respondent

■ *Online news still has some bugs to work out to gain credibility with newspapers. Blurring of advertising with editorial is the biggest problem.*

Online journalists' perspectives today are informed by five years of experience, experimentation and observation of the activities of their colleagues – in both the digital and traditional media. The *Los Angeles Times* advertising-editorial innovations in general – and an advertising relationship with the Staples Center in particular – raised key questions that triggered widespread debate.⁵⁵

The Los Angeles Times' Experience

In 1995, Mark Willes left his career as a longtime executive at General Mills, accepted the job as publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, and turned tradition on its head. Shortly after his arrival in the newsroom, Willes announced his intention to knock down the wall between the newspaper's editorial and advertising departments – “with a bazooka if necessary.”⁵⁶ Business managers were appointed to work with section editors to increase advertising revenues and circulation; Willes spoke publicly about the newspaper's plans to hold editors accountable for “improvements” in the bottom line: “Not every section must earn a profit — clearly some will not,” he said. “But every section must improve in some measurable way. Business success is required to underwrite journalistic success.”⁵⁷

“We believe that it makes sense to align the business organization with our editorial operations because that would give us the speed and flexibility to better serve our readers as both citizens and consumers.”

— Mark Willes, publisher of the Los Angeles Times (1999)

Worried about editorial integrity in the face of such integration, more than a dozen top editorial executives and managers departed the company shortly thereafter, citing the offending integration as the reason.⁵⁸

Journalists inside and outside the *LA Times* railed against the new organizational practice, arguing against a formalized relationship between the editorial and advertising staffs.⁵⁹ Willes was undeterred:

“Editorial has a long and successful history of being organized by sections—main news, sports, business, entertainment and by geography: Orange County, our Washington Edition, etc.,” he said. “The business-side activities, on the other hand, have always been organized by function—advertising, sales, production and marketing. We believe that it makes sense to align the business organization with our editorial operations because that would give us the speed and flexibility to better serve our readers as both citizens and consumers.”⁶⁰

At least some of today's digital media companies have come down on Willes' side. Even in the throes of the public outcry over the *Los Angeles Times*' Staples Center scandal, for example, a survey by *Editor & Publisher* found that 51 percent of publishers thought the Times/Staples deal – in which the newspaper shared its \$2 million revenue from a special section with the advertiser – was acceptable, and only 19 percent said it was not. In the same survey, 72 percent of editors called for closer cooperation between the news and business departments, while 67 percent conceded that advertising and editorial guidelines are occasionally breached at other papers.⁶¹

But at least some news organizations are trying to take the best of the integration proposition in the name of the flexibility, speed and service to consumers Willes describes even as they recognize that credibility depends at least in part on the care and maintenance of a more traditional church-state relationship.⁶²

Organizational relationships are a case in point: Regular meetings and close proximity between editorial and business executives have been adopted at media companies that include MarketWatch.com, USAToday.com and Wired.com. But they've worked consciously to avoid the “slippery slope” of actual collaboration by keeping the communication flow at the executive level while operating departments remain physically separate. It's the kind of compromise that acknowledges the new operational realities of online organizations even as it strikes a balance between advertising performance and journalistic tradition.⁶³

Sponsorships History

Sponsorships are not a new advertising tactic; traditional media – from newspapers to radio to television – have incorporated advertising messages into their editorial content for decades. Wild Kingdom, one of the most popular television shows of the 1960s and 1970s, made Mutual of Omaha a household brand. Charles Osgood and Paul Harvey sprinkled commercials through their news content during their radio segments, without alerting the audience to the shift. Over time, the television and radio industries have created guidelines to separate advertising and editorial content⁶⁴ in an effort to better delineate what is advertising and what is editorial.

Newspapers and magazines have long relied on sponsorships as a significant revenue source, mostly in the form of “special advertising sections.” In fact, a *Washington Journalism Review* article reported in 1991 that the special section was an increasing popular revenue source for newspapers, and that it was creating tension between editorial and advertising staffs.⁶⁵ *Business Week* published a multi-page section on the Indonesian business climate in 2000, paid for by the Indonesian government. The magazine placed a “Special Advertising Section” label at the top of each page⁶⁶, in accordance with the American Society of Magazine Editors guidelines.⁶⁷ Since 1976, when ASME established guidelines, labeling of sponsored content has become common practice.

“All online pages should clearly distinguish between editorial and advertising or sponsored content. If any content comes from a source other than the editors, it should be clearly labeled...”

— American Society of Magazine Editors guidelines

“All online pages should clearly distinguish between editorial and advertising or sponsored content. If any content comes from a source other than the editors, it should be clearly labeled. A magazine’s name or logo should not be used in a way that suggests editorial endorsement of an advertiser. The site’s sponsorship policies should be clearly noted, either in text accompanying the article or on a disclosure page, to clarify that the sponsor had no input regarding the content...Special advertising or “advertorial” features should be labeled as such...”⁶⁸

Similarly, most newspapers publish many supplementary special sections each year to draw a broad range of advertisers, from the Chamber of Commerce and car dealers to educational institutions and retailers. Most newspapers label each page as a “special advertising section,” although some others leave open the question of the content’s origins.⁶⁹

Advertising labels notwithstanding, the “look and feel” of advertorial –or advertising-sponsored content—is a powerful way to differentiate between or associate advertising and editorial in the readers’ minds.⁷⁰ Visual elements such as brand color, logos, typeface fonts, layout and styling, all contribute to editorial content’s identity.

When advertisers mimic the typefaces, layout and colors used in the editorial sections where their ads appear, they are working deliberately to deceive the reader as to the source of the information.⁷¹ For example, former executive editor for TheStandard.com, Patricia Sullivan, rejected the first pass at a sponsored section for Microsoft Office XP when the “microsite” sponsorship was mocked up for her. “I insisted it looked way too much like an Industry Standard editorial article” because it used the same design format: The site navigation rail was on the left, as it is on all editorial pages, and the middle of the page featured an article about Microsoft Office XP, with the same typeface and the same white background. Sullivan rejected the layout, and insisted on a different-colored background, different colored font and labels across the top and bottom of the advertisement saying, “Microsite for Microsoft and The Standard.” The black-on-white format was replaced by orange on yellow.⁷²

Internet Sponsorships

Across the Internet, sponsors have developed new, integrated approaches to reach the interactive audience. While online news sites have adopted the “special advertising section” metaphor in their portfolio of advertising offerings, new tactics are be-

ing explored and published every day, including sponsored stories, special reports, links, celebrity chats, and product reviews. In 1998, 37 percent of all online ad revenue came from sponsorships.⁷³ Sponsorships generally bring much higher revenues than banner advertising. A single sponsorship could bring in tens of thousands of dollars, depending on the site, the location and labeling of the sponsorship on a site, and the duration of the deal.⁷⁴

That's in part because sponsored content may be the closest advertisers can get to editorial content, and that proximity assigns its messages credibility. A 1999 study by Forrester Research reported that consumers put the greatest trust in ads published in newspapers (35 percent), followed by magazines (30 percent), radio (25 percent), television (24 percent), direct mail (18 percent), and finally, the Internet (14 percent). Despite the Internet's relatively low "trust context" rating, consumers said they assigned the greatest credibility to ads placed on nonprofit sites (36 percent) and on news sites (30 percent).⁷⁵

"More than any other revenue source, online sponsorships seem to come with their own special set of ethical headaches."

— J.D. Lasica, online columnist

If it's clear why advertisers want to be associated closely with editorial content, it may be less clear why content sites – concerned about their journalistic credibility – are willing to allow it. Research in 2001 concluded that readers who are confused about the origin and objectivity of sponsored content are

more likely to lose trust in the news organization that publishes it. "Close (sponsorship) associations are more at risk of blurring editorial and advertising bounds," according to dissertation research by Shelly Rodgers, from the University of Minnesota. "Close" sponsorships are defined as those in which a sponsor's product or service has a close association with the sponsored content; "Home Depot sponsoring Habitat for Humanity" or "Marlboro sponsoring an anti-smoking story" are examples.⁷⁶

"More than any other revenue source, online sponsorships seem to come with their own special set of ethical headaches," says media critic J.D. Lasica. Even so, Lasica argues, sponsorships are among those strategies that strike a reasonable editorial-advertising balance. "There will always be readers who don't trust anything on a site if you sell things (dooming all content sites), just as there are some people who don't trust newspapers or broadcast news because they sell advertising (dooming all media except Ms. magazine and Consumer Reports)," he says. "Like it or not, sponsored content helps keep content sites afloat."⁷⁷

That relationship between a news site and its advertisers can be even more difficult to discern when sponsorships are directly related to editorial content; it's difficult for many readers to determine whether the content is news, advertising, or a hybrid of the two.⁷⁸

One example was the June 2001 sponsorship by Cingular Wireless of "Unwired News," a standing feature about the wireless industry, on Wired.com. While the sponsorship was labeled "sponsored by Cingular Wireless" on the top of the page, the close juxtaposition of the Cingular brand with the site's editorial coverage of the wireless industry raised questions.

"The bottom line, I think, has to do with the nature of the sponsor and content, and the message the combination of those two send to consumers," Rodgers said in an e-mail interview with ONA. "There appears to be a real danger in allowing ANY vested sponsor in the e-newspaper (closely related content like Cingular and Unwired News). That sponsor certainly can, according to my findings, blur the bounds between content and editorial, thereby confusing readers. My findings support the notion that confused readers are unhappy readers (i.e., they simply won't return to the e-newspaper or subscribe to it).

"However, I should add that there appears to be a very 'savvy' group of news consumers (call them 'experts') who don't mind vested sponsors but that WORRY

about ...consumers ...who can't tell the difference between a sponsor and its content or whether the sponsor influenced the news or content.”⁷⁹

Wired.com is owned by Terra Lycos, which has created a common advertising strategy for its network of Web sites, including Lycos.com, Wired.com and Terra.es. That strategy includes the availability of sponsorships on Wired.com's individual sections, such as E-biz, Unwired News, Web Monkey and Where's the Money? sections. Terra Lycos seeks sponsors whose products or services are closely aligned with the focus of the section.

“We try to target companies that are interested in reaching the audience on that part of the site. Advertisers want to reach a certain kind of audience, If it's the Computer Software news part of the site, it could be 'brought to you by Microsoft.' If it's Computer Hardware, it could be 'brought to you by Compaq.’” said Rich Gotham, vice president for advertising at Terra Lycos. Gotham is in charge of advertising for the entire Terra Lycos group of sites.⁸⁰

“We want the advertising on the page to be relevant to the content. We look at news vertically: computer news, hardware news, baseball news, basketball news, celebrity news. We try to match advertisers to these categories. We can get to a level of granularity and target of advertising in those areas.”

While advertising strategy promotes that kind of direct pairing between editorial and advertising content, editorial integrity requires the line between the two to remain clear, according to George Shirk, editor of Wired.com.

“I take a position, in all things of business and editorial, to the reader that it must be absolutely clear what is editorial content and what is business content. I'm very old school in that regard. I don't think there's a place on Wired.com where the line is fudged,” said Shirk. “We have a number of ways to draw revenue, including sponsorships. We clearly label sponsorships about who it is sponsored by. It is always made clear to the advertisers that (sponsorships) don't mean influencing the editorial product.”⁸¹

“We don't see any blurring of advertising and editorial in that respect,” Gotham said. “The product side of the house—the editorial department— wouldn't allow that to happen. The user experience comes first. If the user is confused about what is editorial and what is advertising, that's not right. We want to make a clear distinction between church and state.”

Wired.com's editor is involved in decision-making about advertising after he is alerted to the advertising concept. “(The editor) has editorial standards that he has to maintain, and we can't compromise that. The sales side and (editorial) product side of the house, we have to come together,” Gotham said. “We have a good mutual understanding of product strategy. (The editor) runs a business and part of a business is achieving business goals. To achieve those, he needs me to sell advertising that doesn't harm his product. We have to have a social contract.”

There's a “ blurring of boundaries between search results and banner ads especially since search results are becoming more and more advertising-sponsored. I think the whole ad industry is doing the consumer a disservice by allowing this to continue,” said Tom Barrett, general manager of Namestake.com, which monitors the buying of brand names as key words on search engines.⁸²

Cox's regional portal for Providence and Rhode Island, created a partnership with the state's largest healthcare provider, Lifespan, to create a deep health microsite on OSO.com. While the wide range of content is clearly labeled “sponsored by

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“As an online editor who was asked to doctor stories to gain the sponsor's approval of them, I'd say online news credibility is heading south. Newspapers, magazines, TV and radio have not had to worry about finding a workable business model. They've had one that works — more or less — for years. The struggle for profitability, I believe, is really hurting online news.”

— ONA survey media respondent

Sponsored Links: Some Examples

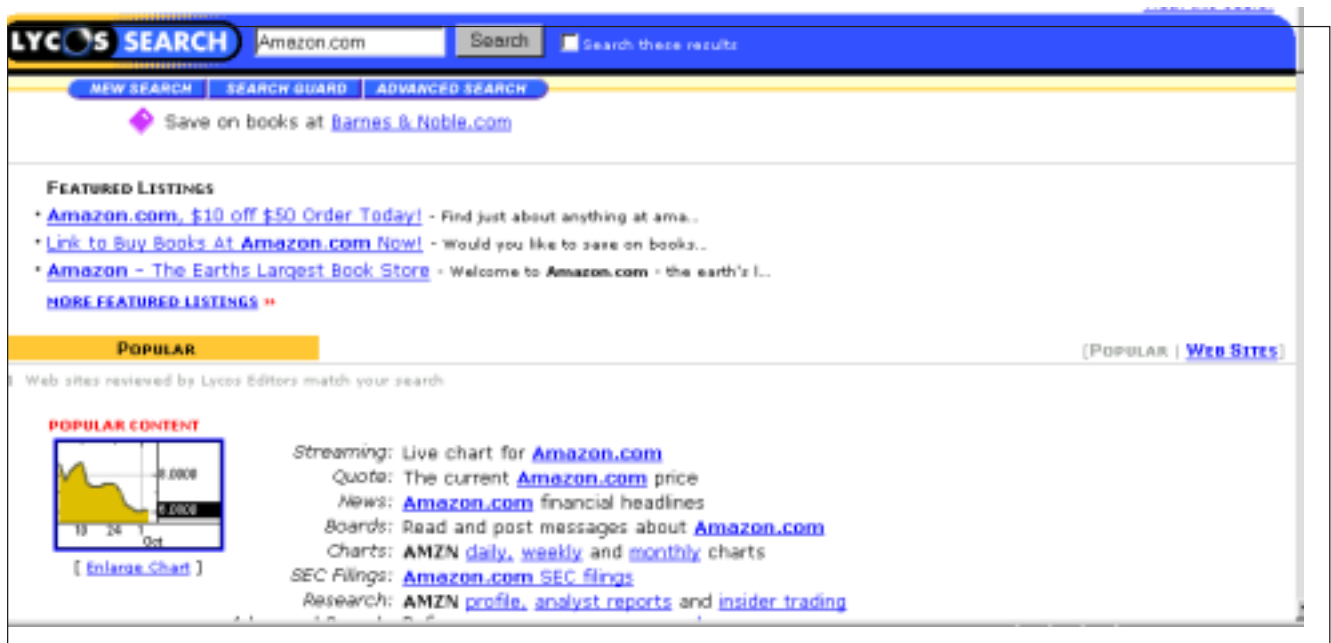
Content sites have adopted varying approaches to the presentation of sponsored links.



MSN's MoneyCentral: Tucked into the center of the MSN MoneyCentral home page is a section called "Highlights from Financial Providers." It looks like the editorial content, but it's a paid placement of an advertising message – without labels alerting readers to the commercial message. Links take readers to one of five rotating sponsored sites, including American Express, Citi, Bank of America, Charles Schwab and Fidelity Investments.

ZDNet.com
ZDNet.com has a notably clear policy about the placement and design of sponsored links. Its tech review page includes a "sponsored links" section at the bottom of the page; the section is screened gray and clearly labeled, making it immediately clear to readers that these are paid links.





Lycos Network. Lycos sells its search-engine keywords to the highest bidder, a common practice among search engines. If, for example, you type Amazon.com into the Lycos search engine, a BarnesandNoble.com banner ad appears at the top of the page because BN.com has bought the word Amazon.com. In addition, a paid link at the top of the page says “Save on Books at BarnesandNoble.com,” a stationary book search engine for BarnesandNoble, and under the “shopping” results, two books about the Amazon empire, with discounted prices from BarnesandNoble.com.



The StarTribune.com right rail is packed with links to various vertical sites, such as Fifty Plus Living, employment and cars. The heading on the entry page gives no indication whether the links are advertising or editorial, and the sites – all of which are paid advertising – open beneath a StarTribune.com header. Fifty Plus Living is clearly labeled as advertising, which the reader discovers only after linking. Tech Careers, a microsite about jobs in the technology field, is not.



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Lifespan” and “Brought to you by Lifespan,” there is no escaping the commercial nature of the content.

For example, featured treatments include expensive CT artery scan under the “Newest, latest, best” treatments category. Choose one of the treatments, click on the link, and it takes you to Lifespan’s Web site. There is no separation between editorial and commercial content. Peter Winter, CEO of Cox Interactive Media, said through a spokeswoman that they did not wish to participate in an interview about the site, saying they are not a news site.

One of the first salvos fired about blurred lines between editorial and advertising was a paid-for link from NYTimes.com to BarnesandNoble.com. The advertising sponsorship, launched in October 1997, ended in early 2001. NYTimes.com received an undis-

In late 2001, the marketing department of The New York Times created a Lord of the Rings movie package from the newspaper’s archives. This mini-site is sponsored by the movie company and is labeled “sponsored feature” on the movie page link, and on the top of the page itself. Some critics argue the page too closely resembles a NYTimes.com editorial content page, and that the sponsorship is not explained to the reader.

closed transaction fee each time a reader clicked on the BN.com link, at the bottom of the book review. This raised the specter of whether or not BN.com had influence over *The New York Times*’ book reviews.

Catherine Levene, vice president for business development and strategy at NYTimes.com, said the site would re-institute the *Book Review* sponsorship if “the right deal came along.” While the BN.com link was labeled, Levene says there is no need for disclosure in an advertising policy or user agreement. “If it’s advertising, users really understand that,” she said.

One of C|Net’s most popular content areas is Product Reviews, which contains thousands of editorial reviews on computers, cameras, scanners, printers and other techie devices. C|Net receives a referral fee of 50 cents from merchants when a specific product review is clicked on, whether the product is bought or not.⁸³ In addition, all merchants in C|Net’s price listings pay to be listed, and some pay a premium for a prominent place on the list.

“We don’t sell the stuff, there’s no sales mechanism. The idea is to give full service, the specs, user opinions, configuration and price, and a link directly to the vendor site,” said Steve Fox, editor-in-chief of C|Net. “My job is to give fair and unbiased reviews of products.”⁸⁴

While editorial and commercial content is co-mingling, the relationship is disclosed on C|Net’s editorial and disclosure policy. Still, the fact remains: C|Net is getting a fee from leads generated from vendors directly from objective reviews.

Benchmarks: How Some Online Organizations Are Dealing With the Issues

More extended discussion of particular situations arising in online news organizations provides insight into the kinds of issues confronting the industry over the past five years – and the creativity, integrity and initiative online news organizations have brought to bear in working through them. The remainder of this chapter presents a variety of church-state challenges news organizations have dealt with in recent years and describes their efforts to maintain and protect that balance:

- CBS MarketWatch faced criticism in early 2001 when it used a Budweiser “wallpaper” advertisement behind its stock-quote statistics. Critics complained the advertising logo’s placement behind the site’s editorial content was too tight an integration.

- USAToday.com retracted its policy accepting “Beyond the Banner” ads on its home page. BTBs, the highly integrated, clever and often cartoonish ads that frequently take over editorial and nameplate space, were spiked from the home page and news front because of credibility concerns. Meanwhile, the USAToday.com executive team made other far-reaching advertising policy changes to limit credibility slippage because of integration of advertising-editorial content.

- Wired.com has made it a policy to sell sponsorships to advertisers with strong ties to the content it is sponsoring. As already discussed, one example is Cingular Wireless sponsoring Wired’s “Unwired” section for all content about wireless devices and service. Journalists have complained about the too-close-for-comfort relationship between advertising and editorial; Wired executives say the advertisers don’t get special treatment in the site’s news coverage.

When Does ‘Data’ Become ‘Content’ – and Does It Matter?

In February 2000, CBSMarketWatch.com launched a new kind of highly integrated advertising on its stock quotes pages. Using “wallpaper sponsorship,” CBSMarketWatch.com in February 2001 posted the name of its sponsor, Budweiser, in a repeating pattern of opaque diagonal logos across each of its thousands of “Research & Tools” pages, superimposing the stock quotes and related financial headlines over the Budweiser background.

Second only to the main news section, Research & Tools is among the most frequently visited sections on CBSMarketWatch.com. Visitors use a search box called “Quotes & News” on the upper left-hand corner of the home page to type the ticker name of any stock trading on the New York Stock Exchange or the NASDAQ. The link takes the user to a database-driven page created automatically for the specified stock. Stock quotes and performance charts are followed by headlines about the stock. The quotes, charts and headlines are “dynamically” delivered from a database of statistics and news, aggregated from several key sources by the site.⁸⁵

Type in Microsoft’s ticker symbol, MSFT, in the “Quotes & News” ticker window, for example, and you’re taken to the Research & Tools page where you can choose from a “basic” or “detailed” Microsoft statistical stock analysis. Below the stock quotes is a listing of headlines under the header “News for Microsoft Corporation” and a second listing under the header “Company releases for Microsoft Corporation.” Those headlines are automatically delivered feeds from MarketWatch’s database. Among the companies providing feeds to the database include CBSMarketWatch, *The New York Times*, UPI, AP, Reuters, BusinessWire and PRNewsWire.⁸⁶

All of the feeds arrive on the pages directly from the database, without human intervention. The feeds are programmed to be delivered to pre-determined spaces on the page template, with the most recent feed appearing at the top of the list with a time stamp. Theoretically, if a user typed in a ticker symbol into the Stocks & News

window every minute of the day, she would be returned new, up-to-date stock performance statistics, and new headlines from the database, each time. ⁸⁷

The Budweiser Advertising Campaign

The Budweiser arrangement, introduced in February 2001, was not the first “wallpaper” advertising campaign for CBSMarketWatch. A year earlier, MarketWatch executives had approved the wallpaper concept and signed up the first sponsors, Compaq and Nortel. ⁸⁸

The Budweiser ads were splashier by comparison, and were introduced as part of a high-profile integrated campaign including banners, buttons and right-rail rich media ads. Every Friday at the end of the work day in each time zone, for example, a Budweiser bottle would pour beer from the banner ad at the top of the page into a tall glass of beer on the right-rail ad.

The process of approving the new wallpaper advertising concept was not unlike approving any other new advertising tactic at MarketWatch, executive editor David Callaway said.

“A year ago, when we first did this wallpaper, we first asked, ‘Is there a conflict?’ There’s data and there’s white space. Where’s the problem? We came up with the analogy of a scoreboard. This was not a tough issue. It wasn’t a very long discussion,” said MarketWatch CEO Larry Kramer.

The scoreboard metaphor describes how stocks statistics (scores) are posted on the scoreboard (wallpaper). “There’s no changing the score, no description and no journalism involved in the stats,” Kramer said.

“What I ask myself in every one of these situations is ‘could a reader be led to conclude that there is a conflict of interest between the journalist and the advertisers by looking at this Web page?’ If the answer is yes, then it doesn’t pass the smell test. It is not the conflict, it’s the appearance of conflict which is the most important,” Callaway said.

Callaway doesn’t believe a disclaimer or an explanation is needed to detail the church- and-state boundaries for the wallpaper ad. “I

don’t see a reason for a disclaimer. You don’t want to be too inside-baseball, but disclaimers are necessary when there is a reasonable appearance of conflict. For instance, when we do a story on Viacom, we always put a disclaimer on the story saying that Viacom is a significant investor in the publisher of this report,” Callaway said.

The Gatekeeping Process

At MarketWatch, Kramer ultimately makes decisions about which advertisements are approved and not approved. He also approves any ads that appear on the home



page of the site, and must sign off on any advertising that has been flagged as unusual by Scott McLernon, MarketWatch's executive vice president of sales. Unusual ads are also shown to Callaway, who can exercise his right of rejection if he deems the advertising inappropriate. Unusual campaigns are discussed by Kramer, Callaway and McLernon, and then the campaigns are dropped, or polished and re-pitched by McLernon.

As many as a third of the proposed campaigns are spiked, Callaway said. "There are many ideas that get knocked back for being too much over the line. When that happens, (the rejection) is done at the conceptual stage, long before anything is officially produced. Sometimes, a mockup is done, but that's about as far as it goes before we make a decision," Callaway said.

"We work well off each other," Callaway said. "McLernon pitches the advertising idea, I am the guy who says no, and Larry is a great mediator because he is on the business side, but he has an editorial background. We will have a full and frank discussion in Larry's office," Callaway said.

Callaway looks for key traits before he makes a decision to accept or reject new advertising concepts.

"A tech company, which I will not name, wanted its name to appear where our MarketWatch banner appears every other time you refreshed the page," he said. "I had a good laugh before I said 'no.' Our banner goes to the heart of who we are. It's our brand."

"I turn down anything that blocks, or impedes, our stories," he said. By contrast, Callaway said, MSNBC.com places advertising right in the middle of the editorial content. "On MSNBC, you read the lead, and then you have to go through an ad to get to the second paragraph of the story," Callaway said.

Like the staff of other online news operations, MarketWatch employees communicate by e-mail all day, every work day. The wallpaper idea came up first by an e-mail from McLernon to Kramer and Callaway. At that time, the wallpaper idea wasn't pitched for just stock quote pages, and could have conceivably landed on pages with full-text news stories. Initially, Callaway said, he rejected the notion because of the potential church-and-state conflict it posed.

"My feeling initially that it wouldn't work if (the wallpaper) was behind a story or column. My initial feeling was that this isn't going to work. God forbid we'd do a story on Anheuser Busch. Then it was pitched that (the wallpaper) would be on the quote pages. My feeling was that (it) would work. On quote pages, there isn't any journalistic creativity. There's not content other than background," Callaway said.

But the headlines superimposed on the Budweiser wallpaper do link to legitimate news stories, from both CBS MarketWatch and from wire services. Callaway explained that the headlines are automatically generated from MarketWatch's database, without journalistic news judgment or human intervention – a factor he says eliminates the appearance of advertising-editorial blurring.

"I feel that as long as the sponsorship is not on columns and stories where it might appear there is a conflict, then that is enough. But as for the quote pages, or even the advertising pages for that matter, readers will always be of many minds on the subject. Some think just having any ads on the site at all is a conflict. Not much we can do about that," Callaway said.

The process of negotiating the wallpaper sponsorship started with e-mail communication. After a series of e-mail exchanges, the advertising department produced a mock-up. That was followed by a series of impromptu visits to Kramer's office for discussion. On average, meetings with the committee of three occur about once a week. Sometimes advertising ideas are easily approved, and sometimes ideas that have never been tested before are argued and considered.⁸⁹

"We struggle because the medium is new and the medium is evolving. You want to maintain any tried-and-true journalistic rules, but we want to make sure we're pushing the edge of advertising." Journalistic credibility and being seen as a news site

that understands the medium is a combination that Callaway says helps MarketWatch be embraced by users and advertisers.⁹⁰

The Budweiser campaign presents significant business-side advantages to MarketWatch: The logos don't take up extra "real estate" on the page, leaving more room for other advertisements, and the tactic fetches significantly more revenue than banner advertisements.⁹¹

Despite Callaway's enthusiasm for the concept, MarketWatch's Budweiser campaign was roundly criticized in the press.

A dozen e-mail complaints were filed by MarketWatch users, according to one of two MarketWatch clerks who fielded them. By comparison, a pop-up advertisement will get scores, if not hundreds, of e-mail complaints.⁹² No e-mail complaints were available for viewing by ONA researchers. "No e-mails are left regarding the wallpaper. We generally have to clean out our e-mail boxes once a month or so because they get too full," Callaway said.

Journalists and readers had different ideas about what was wrong with the Budweiser campaign, Kramer said. While journalists questioned Kramer about the use of the advertisement and how it appears to be connected or affiliated with the advertiser⁹³, consumers complained that the advertising was "intrusive," Kramer said.

Kramer read "intrusive" as the logos on the wallpaper were too dark and overpowering, so the logo color was softened significantly. "Once we lightened it up, we stopped getting the complaints. It was not the content, but the execution that caused the complaints, in my view," Kramer said.

"Nobody is thinking that Budweiser is trying to influence the stock quotes. 'What are (the advertisers) buying?' I told them this is an appropriate sell, with no conflict of interest. It's not journalism, it's data," Kramer said.

In 1997, Randy Kilgore, advertising director for WSJ.com, wrote one of the industry's seminal essays about the disturbing trend of blurring of the lines between editorial and advertising. Kilgore agrees with Kramer's distinction between editorial writing and editorial "data." "If there's a favorable story on the wallpaper, it's one thing. If it's stocks listings, which are unchangeable facts, it's another," Kilgore said. "I don't blame the advertiser for trying. They are doing what they are supposed to do: trying to make their message break through."⁹⁴

But such tight integration of ads and editorial doesn't sit well with some observers. Pete Deemer, director of outbound media for *ZDNet.com*, says the advertising and editorial on the wallpaper are too closely integrated. "I have a problem with the wallpaper because ... not only is there not a (line) between the ad and edit, but the ads are right behind the editorial."⁹⁵

Drawing the Line

Where does MarketWatch draw the line between journalism and data?

"It's a good question," Callaway says. "I draw the line if it is a Web page with a story written by a journalist, or headlines written by journalists or market briefs written by journalists—then it is journalism. If it is a market page not (produced) by a journalist, and a page put together with technology, it is data. It must be data information (to use the wallpaper ad)."

Callaway describes the quote page as a set of links, untouched by journalists and generated automatically – unaffected by advertising influences or editorial issues. "There was no news judgment involved, and no news judgment to buy," he says.

Callaway likens the Internet to television rather than newspapers; advertisers sponsor scoreboards at sporting events and tickers on CNBC, and they should have the same opportunity to sponsor quote pages on the Web. "It's a fascinating phenomenon and one that is in the early stages of development. Should be fun going forward," he says.

The Budweiser campaign wasn't MarketWatch's only foray into uncharted advertising waters. In September, 2000, on the day that the Avaya Corporation went

public, the site tried a new form of advertising: it placed the firm's ticker symbol, AV, as the default in the Quotes & News search window, which is normally blank.

"We approved it. It was a data thing," Callaway said. "We got several messages from several dozens of journalists, none from readers, saying 'the ad was impacting our journalistic credibility.'" The ad was taken down by the end of the first day of trading Avaya, Callaway said.

"When there are things that happen that the journalists disagree with, believe me, I hear about it," Callaway said. "There was a real feeling among people we work with that there was a credibility issue with (Avaya). As journalists bring a problem to my attention, I listen."

USAToday.com: When Does Clever and Entertaining Become Intrusive and Unethical?

In 1996, USA Today.com made advertising history. When readers pulled up the site's home page, they watched in awe as an animated Honda "drove" under the left-hand rail navigation panel, looking as if a cat was wriggling under a rug. "It stunned everybody because it worked on all browsers, it was very playful, and broke the boundaries of static Web advertisers," says Kinsey Wilson, vice president and editor-in-chief of USA Today.com.⁹⁶

Media ethicists and journalists howled about the latest breach in the church-and-state wall between advertising and editorial space. Readers raved, and USA Today.com decisionmakers were encouraged. The "Beyond the Banner" (BTB) advertisement had arrived.

In 1998, cartoon character Homer Simpson, in an Intel ad, chased a doughnut across the top of USA Today.com home page, through a door, behind the nameplate and into the editorial space. In 1999, an animated pitcher filled the USA Today.com nameplate with milk for a "Got Milk?" advertising campaign. Later that year, color drained from a Hewlett Packard ad at the top of the home page. When readers clicked on the ad, color streamed back into the advertisement. And until mid-2000, the site's "Today's Best Bets" feature on the home page mixed headline links to editorial and to Marketplace—the e-commerce portion of USA Today.com—without distinguishing ads from editorial content.

While many readers loved the BTB ads, journalists at USA Today.com were outraged.

"We were horrified," says a former high-ranking editor. "You don't play with your logo. You don't play around with your brand."

But for even the most journalistically pure, pragmatics won out.

"As horrified as we were, we realized that (former USA Today.com general manager) Lorraine (Cichowski's) pragmatic approach was the only way we were going to survive. So, we collectively sold our souls," the editor said.

In 1996, it seemed a reasonable response. Two years earlier, when the first banner advertisement was introduced on HotWired.com, click-through rates ranged between 15 percent and 50 percent. But CTR, the performance metric for online advertisements, took a nosedive from that point on, as the novelty of banner advertising wore off. On average, today's banner advertisements get at 0.05% CTR.

As click-through rates fell, online publishers were scrambling to find compelling advertising genres that readers would notice and respond to. USA Today.com's "Beyond the Banner" advertisements were its creative, home-grown answer to "banner blindness," Wilson says.

By mid-2000, USA Today.com was increasingly aware of the BTB's impact on its most valuable asset: its brand. When the site's management shifted in the summer of 2000, so did its advertising policies.

"We talked about the appropriateness of 'beyond the banners.' There was talk about whether BTBs were appropriate on our site at all because it detracts from our brand," says Lorraine Ross, vice president for sales at USA Today.com.⁹⁷

“It was our goal to restore a clear separation between editorial and commercial content,” editor Wilson says.

The Got Milk? campaign was a case in point. “It was one of the best BTB executions ever, one of the most clever. (But) you look at it, and if there’s catastrophe on the (news) pages, the advertiser could look foolish,” Ross says.

“The brand issue—that was the central focus of our discussions, the impact (of BTBs) on our brand. We didn’t want the brand to be dumbed down,” she says. “It is about the credibility and reputation of USAToday.com. We are an objective news site that the reader can trust.”

Wilson concurred. “We decided there would be a clear separation between editorial and advertising. It was difficult because the ventures that we got involved in over the years, including e-commerce and ads, eroded the clear separation.”

Although no policy could anticipate every advertising issue with church-and-state implications, Ross, Wilson and publisher Jeff Webber hammered out guidelines to focus their goals and to keep the approval process from being overly subjective. They wanted to insure that advertising didn’t interfere with the site’s brand or with its users’ experience. Those guidelines included:

- Avoid any perception by the reader that the advertisers could impact news judgment.
- Ensure transparency, or full disclosure, about the site’s relationships with advertisers.
- Try to differentiate between what is advertising, what is editorial and what is in the middle. “Every day, I’m confronted with issues that are in the gray area,” Wilson said.
- BTB ads can move across the USAToday.com nameplate, but not across editorial space.
- Manipulation of the USAToday.com nameplate is not allowed, as occurred in the “Got Milk?” campaign.
- The animation must not repeat its sequence, and must come to rest in a standard advertising space at the top or side of the page.
- Advertisers must disclose the company’s name on the ad. “To the greatest extent possible, people should know what they’re getting when they click on an ad or a link. Surprise is probably only good when it’s brief. There’s a concern whether you’re taken off the site. That gradually chips away at the confidence in the site,” Wilson said.
- BTB ads will not be sold on the home page or the news front, but are acceptable for Sports, Life and Money fronts. “We don’t want to take away from news credibility,” Ross said.
- Webber and Wilson must approve each BTB advertisement before it runs.

USAToday.com’s recommitment to the church-and-state model hasn’t precluded it from testing new advertising approaches. In 1999, it discontinued the use of pop-up ads because of reader complaints. In June, it introduced pop-under ads, which open under the page the reader has requested. When the reader closes the page, the pop-under appears.

Four users complained about the pop-under in an X-10 camera campaign. That was enough for Ross.

“There might be a factor of 100 (for each complaint). If the (pop-up) practice continues, in a few months, there might be thousands of complaints....Drop-off is insidious. You won’t be hearing from everybody. The multiplication factor rises exponentially the longer the complaints go. It’s harder to retain old customer and attract new ones if you’ve made them angry.”

USAToday.com ended the pop-under campaign in July.

“(Pop-under) bug people. If the reader is left with the feeling that we pulled a fast one on them, that hurts us, just as if we have a factual error on the site,” Wilson said.

The Process of Communication

In many of the traditional organizations of print or broadcast, the culture of communication between editorial and advertising departments is strained, or nonexistent. Walls between the departments are the norm. Workers in each department are often discouraged or even barred from communicating with one another.

The Internet has changed the communication culture between editorial and advertising, and many online news operations, including USA Today.com, are pioneering a movement to break down the walls, while gingerly avoiding any advertiser influence over editorial content.

“To me, what’s been very gratifying is to communicate with advertising. Where some may see a risk to communicate between editorial and advertising, with fear of a slippery slope, my experience here is that Lorraine (Ross) is 100 percent behind credibility, and therefore very open to discussing the ramifications of the way ads are handled. She’s taken a long view,” Wilson said. He explained that the “short view” would be to accept any advertising for the revenue, without thinking about the long-term credibility implications that could erode reader trust.

Wilson’s and Ross’ offices are on the same floor and easily accessible when there’s a need to communicate. A more formal meeting takes place twice per month in publisher Webber’s office.

“Here, it’s a dynamic environment, what’s the advertising standard today isn’t the standard tomorrow,” Ross said. The ever-changing industry has required Ross and Wilson to communicate regularly.

“It’s necessary to communicate between editorial and advertising for a couple of reasons: It’s a brand new medium, and it’s a high functioning interactive medium. We’re figuring out how to honor the basic compact with the reader and how to serve the needs of the advertiser,” Wilson says. “It’s an evolving art. It’s not easy to graft the standards of TV or print onto this medium.”

“What users want out of a site runs the gamut from news to commercial information. If I wall-off news about markets from tools that allow readers to maintain a stock portfolio, from functions that allow them to buy and sell stocks, essentially creating silos where each of these live, then people won’t come back to my site. These artificial barriers aren’t appropriate for this medium.”

Advertising and editorial staffs share responsibility for flagging questionable ads, Wilson said. Where there are debates about a particular presentation, Ross may go to the “Think Tank,” or USA Today.com’s design department, to come up with prototypes to present to Kinsey, and then the management team.

“Credibility is the bedrock. Without credibility, we really don’t have anything as a news organization. Credibility is absolutely essential,” Wilson said.

“... it’s a dynamic environment, what’s the advertising standard today isn’t the standard tomorrow.”

— Lorraine Ross, vice president for sales, USA Today.com

When News Is Immediate and Interactive

The Web’s defining characteristics – immediacy and interactivity – present new kinds of credibility challenges to online news. While immediacy has long been an important component of some forms of media — including news radio, the wire services, and cable television — it is perceived, at least by the media itself, as a core characteristic of information delivered digitally. Major news sites report that daily breaking news is one of their most popular features.⁹⁸

Even so, online readers in the ONA Digital Journalism Credibility survey said they’re less worried about immediacy than about accuracy. In fact, less than half of

the online public (47.1 percent) is convinced that online news is more immediate or up-to-date than other news sources, while two-thirds (66.7 percent) of media respondents in the survey said that was the case. A full third (33.7 percent) of online readers say they don't know whether online news is more current, and a fifth (19.2 percent) say it isn't.

Additionally, online readers ranked “the story is up to date” fifth among 11 variables impacting news credibility, after accuracy, completeness, fairness and the credibility of the news source. Clearly online readers would agree with *WashingtonPost.com* editor Doug Feaver's motto: “I would rather be right than first.”

Timeliness and immediacy do become more important to online readers as they select which particular news site they visit most often. In fact, “Information on the site is constantly updated” is the most significant driver of Web traffic; both the online public (26 percent) and media respondents (26.8 percent) said immediacy of information is the most important reason they choose one news site over another. (A close second for online readers, at 24 percent, was accuracy of information).

The bottom line? The online public wants accurate, complete and fair information from a trusted source – and they want it now.

“The problem with all forms of ‘temporary’ or ‘immediately updatable’ sources is that they don’t have to be as careful and complete when they ‘publish.’ If it’s wrong, they simply update a few minutes or a few hours later and nobody is the wiser (or remembers).”

—ONA survey media respondent

Online news sources have gone to great lengths to deliver that kind of quality as efficiently and quickly as possible, using a variety of media presentations and forms. For example:

- The ChicagoTribune.com has created an e-mail newsletter delivered by 8 a.m. each morning to more than 20,000 subscribers, distilling and updating top breaking stories, and adding links to the full stories online. The *Tribune's* Daywatch newsletter has become one of the top drivers of traffic to the ChicagoTribune.com site, with 40 to 50 percent of all subscribers clicking through. Some post-Sept. 11

newsletter issues garnered 80 percent clickthrough; a Sept. 12 e-mail announcement on the identification of the White House as an attack target drew 4,328 page views.⁹⁹

- In Europe and Asia, where SMS (short text messages via wireless) outnumber phone calls twenty-to-one,¹⁰⁰ SMS news alerts have become widespread. Thousands of Europeans and Asians got their first information about the World Trade Center attacks through SMS messages on their mobile phones.¹⁰¹

While the technologies, both Web and wireless, can distribute news faster than ever before, that immediacy has real implications for the three attributes the public says it values most when assigning credibility to the stories it reads: accuracy, fairness and completeness.

Immediacy – At What Price?

In 1998, the mainstream media was outraged when Internet publisher Matt Drudge pilfered *Newsweek* reporter Michael Isikoff's scoop about the Monica Lewinsky affair. Drudge was quick to admit that he had published one of the major stories of the decade based on an unverified news tip – without a moment's consideration of journalistic standards of accuracy or ethics. That kind of behavior is cavalier at best and reckless at worst, critics say.

“(Drudge) is a menace to honest, responsible journalism,” Isikoff has since declared. “He's clearly willing to go with anything, whether he's got any legitimate sourcing, anything approaching legitimate verification. He doesn't conform to any journalistic standard or convention that I'm aware of. And to the extent that he's read and people believe what they read, he's dangerous.”¹⁰² (This study's repeated e-mails to Drudge have gone unanswered.)

In a February essay in *The New York Times*, James Naughton, a widely respected former journalist and current president of The Poynter Institute, expanded the Drudge discussion to explore the digital age's impact upon the standards and traditions of journalism.

"The digital age does not respect contemplation...Now there are no cycles, only Now. ...," Naughton wrote. "... We need to elevate, not debase, news judgment. Sound judgment pays homage to speed but reveres accuracy. News judgment can abet courage or invoke caution. News judgment is conscious and conscientious. It is authoritative but not judgmental. It relates the new to the known."¹⁰³

The digital medium does allow faster delivery of more information, but Naughton's not alone in his concern about the impact of that immediacy on the credibility and accuracy of online news. Bob Giles, curator of Harvard University's Nieman Foundation, says the Web re-enforces a professional emphasis introduced by the wire services.

"The Web reinvented the AP vs. UPI syndrome of 'we got it first' and 'we moved the story three minutes before the competition,'" Giles said. "That is the wrong mindset. That leads to mistakes. Users don't care or don't usually know that they beat the competition by a minute. It's an ego thing for journalists.... Those of us in the print newsroom win because what goes up on the Web doesn't have the same editing standards being applied to the newspapers."

"Users don't care or don't usually know that they beat the competition by a minute. It's an ego thing for journalists... Those of us in the print newsroom win because what goes up on the Web doesn't have the same editing standards being applied to the newspapers."

--Bob Giles, Nieman Foundation

But many news sites say they've struck the right balance between immediacy and accuracy by tempering their "thirst to be first" with the fundamental journalistic responsibilities to be accurate and accountable.

"It's great to be first and be right, but if you don't know, you don't want to ever want to put the credibility and accountability of *The New York Times* or any other news organization at risk. So the goal is really whatever story you're faced with, that you feel comfortable and put it up as soon as we can to tell the story and exploit the medium," said Meredith Artley, associate editor of NYTimes.com.¹⁰⁴

Even so, at least some journalists acknowledge, scooping the competition remains a powerful incentive to publish. "I still think journalists still revel in beating the competition," says Ron DuPont, general manager of TampaBay.com, the online site of the *St. Petersburg Times*. "When we put something here, one of the first things we do is we see if the (Tampa) *Tribune* or the other Florida papers have it online.

"I think competition will remain in the blood of journalists. Our first gut reaction is to get it up as soon as we can," DuPont said. "We also have that nagging voice is, can we make one more phone call, do we have it right?"¹⁰⁵

Gary Kebbel, editorial director for America Online and a former editor with USA Today.com and WashingtonPost.com, says he works hard to balance that competitive spirit with appropriate caution.

"I think we're still very competitive, and definitely checking other sites to see who has what up. We're gauging our competitors—we check to see if they have something we don't have, where they're playing it and what news they're going with. In that sense, they are creating a pack mentality."

AOL doesn't produce its own editorial content but combines reports from its news providers, including media powerhouses CNN, CBS, and Time magazine. Kebbel says he evaluates all of AOL's news sources before making his own editorial decisions.¹⁰⁶

"We err on the side of being conservative," Kebbel said. "We look at contributions on the part of providers. We look at what AP and Reuters have. We look at if they have reporters (in the place that the story is being reported), and who has a better track record in that part of the country. We take into account if there are

discrepancies in the reporting. We listen to MSNBC and CNN. If all of them disagree, we must be careful and wait for more information.”

The need for news judgment doesn't go away, even when you're not creating original content, Kebbel said. “We make it clear that we are not interested in being first if we're not going to be right,” he said. “We don't lose anything if we're five minutes late. If we're wrong, we lose so much credibility.”

Kebbel says Web news has an advantage over other media because it's quick and easy to update information and correct mistakes. “One of the differences between (online news) and newspapers is that at midnight, we can change the news right away, and their presses have rolled already,” Kebbel said.

Accuracy vs. Speed: A Trade-off the Online Public is Willing to Make?

Online readers in the ONA Digital Journalism Credibility survey said accuracy is the most important attribute in determining the credibility of a story, and the second most important reason they go to a particular news site. But several experts interviewed for this study suggested that consumers have come to expect inaccuracies in such a fast-paced media environment, especially during breaking news stories such as the World Trade Center/Pentagon attacks.

“We worry readers don't have a tolerance for inaccuracy. What is first reported on CNN is likely to be inaccurate. We all expect that,” said Dave Morgan, former CEO, Real Media advertising network, and a former media lawyer. “Now with online, front-line journalism, we will have more factual in-

accuracy. We just have to live with that.”¹⁰⁷

Other journalists are not so sure. Michael Fitzgerald, editor-at-large at RedHerring.com, says he left a daily-news-cycle environment at ZDNet.com for the relative calm of a magazine. “I don't think the online daily news cycle lets us get at the truth,” Fitzgerald said. “I really feel that in order to get at the truth, it's hard to do unless you have a longer cycle.

“You need to be able to be contextual to get to truth with a lowercase ‘t’. You must be objective, be fair. But that doesn't mesh well with a being-first mentality. We need to move away from that mentality. That's why I've moved to another cycle, a monthly cycle (from *ZDNet.com*). So we can get to the truth.”

Corrections Online

Frank Sennett wants online news sites to come clean. The owner of slipup.com, a Web site devoted to online news corrections policies, wants to see a more widespread and careful approach to online corrections to build credibility in the medium.

“It's kind of irritating if your readers can't find where the paper is coming clean, if you're the media and you are going to cast those stones, you have to stand up when you make a mistake,” said Sennett, who is also the editor at NewCity.net, an alternative newspaper portal. “It is a fundamental underpinning for journalism credibility. We're going to make mistakes—it's part of making the sausage. We have to come clean about it if we want people to make people believe us.”¹⁰⁸

There are documented reasons to run corrections. According to a survey by the American Society of Newspaper Editors study in 1998, 63 percent of the respondents said that corrections made them “feel better...about the quality of news coverage.”¹⁰⁹

“If your readers are fairly knowledgeable, every person who reads the newspaper will come across stories where they are going to see a mistake. If we continue to have readers seeing these mistakes, they are going to extrapolate that these people don't know what they are talking about all of the time, and they are also not willing to own up to their mistakes,” Sennett said.

“An important factor of online news is the ability for constant updates and immediate coverage. However, this often times jeopardizes the quality and accuracy of reporting.”

—ONA survey media respondent

Bonnie Bressers, a visiting professor of journalism at Kansas State University, conducted an extensive study of the corrections policies of online media. The immediacy of online news makes it easy to correct – but not acknowledge – mistakes, she says. “Because you can change content quickly, there’s a feeling that online news is more fleeting,” Bresser said. “You don’t have to live with your mistake, you can go online and change it, that’s a good thing and a bad thing.”

Bressers said that the essence of a good corrections policy is full disclosure. “Tell the people what you know,” she said.¹¹⁰

Sennett has provided dozens of links to news sites’ corrections policies at his SlipUp.com, including the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, *Portland Oregonian*, Reuters, ZDNet, Salon, WiredNews, *The Washington Post*, the Associated Press, and the *Houston Chronicle*. Some, including Salon and C|Net, include links to their corrections policies on the home pages; many others do not. And at least some Web sites say they’re still working on developing a corrections policy.

“I have a corrections policy that I’m working toward, but it’s not fully implemented,” said Kinsey Wilson, editor of USAToday.com, in July 2001. Wilson chalks up the delay partly to technical reasons, in that the site’s content management system needs to be able to handle the process.

Once the policy is in place, Wilson said, corrections will be placed in a dedicated area where users can find them easily. Corrections of facts and typos will be noted in the story, both when it’s live and when it’s archived.

Sennett said large online newspapers – like ChicagoTribune.com and WashingtonPost.com – may do a better job with corrections because they have a stronger tradition of print corrections. But broadcast sites do a poor job at online corrections in general, he said.

Sennett said he doesn’t buy the “limited resources” argument. “This whole movement should be to decriminalize corrections. Calling attention to mistakes may make (the offenders) think it may adversely affect them or their careers,” Sennett said. “To me, to hide the mistakes is the crime.”

Interactivity

Interactivity is another hallmark of the digital medium. More than is the case with any other medium, online readers can interact in real time – with reporters, with editors, and with one another. They can respond immediately to a story that outrages or exhilarates them, express their opinions in interactive polls, and share their perspectives with other readers on bulletin boards and in chat rooms. That kind of ongoing, immediate give-and-take is brand new in the relationship between the media and its audiences, and research suggests online readers – particularly those who spend a lot of time on the Web – find it valuable.¹¹¹ While many media organizations have concluded their reporters don’t have time to engage in direct digital interaction with their readers, at least some media critics argue that they need to take the time.

“Isolation impairs accountability,” says Philip Seib, author of *Going Live: Getting the News Right in a Real-Time, Online World*. Television and newspaper organizations should be more receptive to a two-way dialogue with their users, opening the door to e-mail messages from readers and viewers, links to reporters’ e-mail boxes, and online corrections.

News organizations that fail to exploit the Web’s interactivity, Seib argues, “will almost certainly be relegated to second-tier status in terms of use and trust.... (Interactivity) is something of a cultural shift for an institution that has traditionally dictated its own terms for its contacts with the public. But aloofness will not sit well with a cyber-audience that expects to use the Internet for true back-and-forth communication, not merely one-way transmitting or receiving.”¹¹²

Byline Links to E-mail

Interactivity is a benefit of the online environment readers have come to expect, says Patricia Sullivan, former executive editor of *The Industry Standard*, which folded during the summer of 2001. “People on this medium have the right to expect a two-way or three-way discourse,” Sullivan said.

Prior to joining *TheStandard.com.*, Sullivan was a columnist for *San Jose Mercury News’ Mercury Center*, which is now part of Knight Ridder’s *BayArea.com*. Starting in the mid-1990s the staff battled linking reporters’ bylines to e-mail. “They were worried about the fact that interacting would cut time from their jobs. Some reporters were fearful of losing control of the discussion, and spending 2-3 hours a day on e-mail. Eventually we won the battle. I think linking reporters’ bylines to e-mail definitely positively affects credibility.”¹¹³

Jon Katz, a prolific writer for *SlashDot.org* and *HotWired.com*, and a critic of traditional media brands off- and online, says he had an epiphany when he started writing for online publications in the mid-1990s. For the first time, he had a direct connection with his readers. For the first time, he got instant feedback — and some of it was not good.

“When I first wrote a column for HotWired, it was very exciting,” he recalled. “There were hundreds of responses [to stories] - people taking me apart, really challenging my ideas. If you want to work in this environment, you’re opening yourself up for criticism and praise.”

— Jon Katz, online writer

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Katz blasts news sites that don’t provide links from reporters’ bylines to their e-mail. That simple service to readers makes each reporter more accountable and creates a new pipeline for valuable sources and information, he says. The argument that answering reader e-mail is too time-consuming is a weak rationalization for journalists’ unwillingness to give up some of their power.

“It’s about changing the relationship between the dispensers of information and the consumers of information,” said Katz. “It’s about changing the power balance.”

Bernard Gwertzman, editor of *NYTimes.com*, said he discourages his staff from interacting with readers through e-mail. “The *NYTimes.com* does not have links to reporter’s bylines to e-mail. We don’t encourage news personnel to answer e-mails unless it’s an urgent message,” he said.¹¹⁵

It’s a question of time and energy, explained Christine Mohan, a *NYTimes.com* spokeswoman. “The main reason is volume — reporters would have a difficult time replying to the many e-mails they would receive,” she said. “In addition, readers often send requests for archived articles or complaints that are better handled by customer service or other departments, so we have those e-mail addresses available in a number of places on the Web site.”

While sites such as *Salon.com*, *SeattleTimes.com*, the *ChicagoTribune.com*, and *C|Net.com* do offer byline links or staff e-mail directories, many news sites – including *NYTimes.com*, *USAToday.com*, *CNN.com*, *MSNBC.com* and the *WashingtonPost.com* — do not. Some critics argue those sites are ducking their responsibilities to readers.

“Allowing mail to come to reporters puts a high premium on accuracy, and knowing what the hell we’re talking about. If you’re blowing smoke, you’re going to hear about it. Reporters shouldn’t be blowing smoke. They should know what they are talking about,” said Bob Giles, curator of Harvard University’s Nieman Foundation. “There’s a burden here. If you get overwhelmed by e-mail, there is someone who needs to be in place to write a response or to correct something. The lack of linking to reporter’s e-mail shows the public that we are out of touch with what they want.”

“I think everybody should be going to interactivity with consumers through by-lines. If you want to know a community, you have to be there. How can you cover a community when you’re not there?” asked Jai Singh, editor of C|Net’s News.com.¹¹⁶

Chat Rooms and Message Boards

America Online is the reigning monarch of Web chat and messaging boards, hosting millions of steady participants each year and throngs of new users when big stories break and people need a place to talk about them.

“Chats and message boards are the essence of this medium: community,” said Gary Kebbel, editorial director for AOL. “Do they de-legitimize a news story or cause it to lose credibility? My answer to that now (after the World Trade Center attack) is an even more emphatic ‘no’ than before.”¹¹⁷

Kebbel reported that the WTC attacks triggered record visits to AOL’s chat rooms—20 times higher than the closest competitor, the release of the Lewinsky-Tripp tapes. He refused to give specifics but said visitors numbered in the millions.

“We use the chat room as a supplement to help the news organization. When news breaks, we automatically put a chat room on the story. Literally within minutes, we have hundreds of people there. People want information, they ask people what they have.”

While AOL uses the chat rooms to drive traffic to its site, it also makes use of the immediate feedback to shape and focus its editorial content.

“At AOL we use our message boards as a reporter uses sources. We mine the boards to see what themes are emerging, then we respond to those themes by adding new elements to our story and by adding new message boards or chats around the emerging topics,” he said. “Our paying attention to our communities allows us to keep our stories dynamic, interesting and relevant to our users. And that easily could mean that the story goes in directions the editor would not have anticipated.”

Its chat rooms give AOL an editorial edge, says Kebbel, allowing it to distinguish its coverage from the “run-of-the-mill, milquetoast content that wire services” provide and thousands of competing news organizations post.

“Our biggest concern should be that since every online news site has the same wire-service stories, and since every major online news site often leads with the same wire stories, every major site is equally undistinguished in the extent of their coverage,” he said. “What only some sites then do to distinguish themselves is aggregate other content, whether it be sidebar stories, multimedia, interactivity or community. I believe that community is one of the most important elements to add to a story. Other media can’t do that the way we can.”

While AOL has had major success with chat rooms and bulletin boards, some news organizations have not. LATimes.com closed down their boards because of hecklers and low quality of discussion. DallasNews.com and DenverPost.com have discussed shutting down their sports forums because of the insulting remarks and low quality of discussion.¹¹⁸ And the WashingtonPost.com has shifted from live chats to moderated bulletin boards; in a FAQ on its “Live Online” page, it explains why:

Q: I’ve noticed that the word “chat” doesn’t appear on your site. Yet isn’t Live Online clearly computer-mediated chat?

A: “Chat” has negative associations for many people—for good reason—conjuring up visions of unruly chat rooms and hostile situations. We’ll leave “chatting” to other Web sites. Live Online is intelligent and lively moderated discussion—just what you’d expect from *The Washington Post*.

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— Bob Giles, curator of Harvard University’s Nieman Foundation

Like the WashingtonPost.com, ZDNet.com has adopted a different – and somewhat less spontaneous – approach to reader interaction. It pioneered the concept of “TalkBack,” the posting of reader comments on selected stories. Readers are invited to comment on the story, and an editor checks the reply before posting it.

“Readers are the experts. I find TalkBack to be an invaluable way to learn about the subject, an invaluable way to improve what I do...That raises the question, it’s not a message board, it’s not part and parcel of the fabric of the story. It raises the question, ‘does it begin to affect the reporter?’” said Pat Houston, editor at ZDNet.com.¹¹⁹

A Case in Point: The World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks

Online coverage of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001 represented the coming-of-age of online news, according to *The Washington Post* media critic Howard Kurtz.¹²⁰ The Web’s largest news sites reported record traffic and, importantly, a constant flow of traffic for several weeks following the attack. In an online interview, author Philip Seib suggested that the online media’s response to the attacks revealed both its strengths and its weaknesses:

“The biggest challenge facing online news, in light of the September 11th coverage, is the classic one: balancing the desire for speed with a commitment to accuracy....Online news products did an excellent job of covering the developments of this breaking story, and the reports I saw generally provided corroborated information. There were mistakes, of course. WashingtonPost.com was among those reporting an explosion near the State Department, which didn’t happen. They were too quick to go with that....Because of the vast amount of information an online news product can post and leave up, it offers a valuable combination of speed and depth. (Using tools such as maps to supplement the story made the online product particularly useful, I imagine, to people living in NY and Washington.) On the other hand, the lessons of live TV are pertinent in terms of not overvaluing speed in and of itself. Another point about the credibility of online news on September 11th: one reason that many more people turned to TV rather than the Web is the reassurance provided by real people, principally the network anchors, at such a time. The Web is largely impersonal; television is (or appears to be) people talking to people.”¹²¹

If online news appears impersonal, as Seib suggests, the Web’s capacity for interactivity makes it anything but. Scores of news sites opened chat rooms and bulletin board discussions immediately to allow readers to respond to events as they developed. And it was in the context of those online community spaces that a wide variety of urban myths and inaccuracies emerged and, in some cases, took on a life of their own.

Stephen O’Leary, associate professor at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California, says urban legends and false stories “proliferated at an astounding rate” via e-mail during the first few weeks after the attacks, and that some actually made their way into the public’s collective assumptions about what had occurred. Among them:

- a Nostradamus prophecy anticipated the attack on the World Trade Center;
- a coded message predicting the attack can be found in a Microsoft “Wingdings” graphics font designed long before the recent events;
- 4000 Jews were warned against going to the World Trade Center on the day of the attack;
- photos of the burning buildings reveal the face of Satan in clouds of smoke;
- another wave of terrorist attacks was planned for September 22;
- a man caught in the explosion of one of the WTC towers rode bits of the falling building down to safety; and
- an unburned Bible was found in the smoldering wreckage of the Pentagon.¹²²

O’Leary surmised reasons for the phenomenon of Internet rumor, and the speed by which they proliferate: “What may be hard for mainstream journalists to understand is that, in crisis situations, the social functions of rumor are virtually indistinguishable from the social functions of “real news.” People spread rumors via the Net for the same reason that they read their papers or tune into CNN: they are trying to make sense of their world,” he said.

In one instance, myth became news – over the protests and disclaimers of its author. According to a Sept. 23 story in *The New York Times*, a Brazilian graduate student named Marcio A. V. Carvalho sent an e-mail on Sept. 12 to a group of his colleagues, claiming that CNN had recycled 1991 footage and presented it as images of Palestinians celebrating the terrorist attacks. The film’s authenticity was verified by both CNN and Reuters, whose photographers took the footage in East Jerusalem. But the story had taken on a life of its own; it was forwarded to tens of thousands of people on a list run by David Farber, a computer science professor at the University of Pennsylvania. Nigel Pritchard, a spokesman for *CNN* International, began to get inquiries from around the world. And even a statement by Carvalho wasn’t enough to kill the rumor; within days, the statement was circulating over the name of Russell Grossman, the head of Internal Communication at the BBC in London.¹²³

While the online public gathered in chat rooms and on bulletin boards, online journalists were working furiously to figure out what had happened and to get the news out to their readers.

“We rushed into work, the whole newsroom was gathered around the TV, everyone was up here, we hadn’t heard anything when I was down on the subway (on the way to work), the story started to move so quickly...we divvied up the logistics about who was going to do what, we knew we had multimedia on its way, we wanted to get up a graphic and a map,” said Meredith Artley, associate editor of *NYTimes.com*. “It was hard to post news because it was unclear what was happening.”

As the facts came in and it appeared they were accurate and trustworthy, *NYTimes.com* editors and those at other online news publication started posting multimedia packages to reflect the complexity and horror of the news.

“We worked with the continuous news desk—they basically filed for us all day long and pulled in other people from the paper so we could get stories, good Times quality stories,” Artley said. “We were getting those stories fast and frequently.”

Artley said *NYTimes.com* has no breaking-news policy but competitiveness is not lost on the newsroom. “I still get a kick out of being first and so does the rest of the newsroom, but maybe it’s about the industry getting more mature. It’s more about doing this and doing it right,” she said.



Strategies for Enhancing the Credibility of Online News

Hire journalists. Train them. Establish policies based on the highest journalistic ideals, and implement them. Interact with your readers. Open your editorial processes and policies to their scrutiny. And when it's an ad, say it's an ad.

That's the kind of clear, specific, commonsensical advice offered to the Online News Association over the past 10 months as it worked with more than 2,300 survey respondents and more than 50 of the nation's best and most talented digital journalists to figure out the issues and challenges of digital news credibility. At the end of the day, the study's most important contribution may not be its conclusion – surprising though it is – that the public trusts online news more so than does the media itself. More valuable may be its presentation of the 'best practices' of many of the industry's most experienced and talented journalists, professionals who on occasion disagree about strategy and approach, but who are unequivocal in their commitment to the highest journalistic standards in the best – and most ethical – traditions of the craft.

“The willingness to take away from work to talk about standards and credibility is hopefully a demonstration of how serious we are about this.”

–Merrill Brown, MSNBC.com

Strategies

Hire Journalists.

Online news organizations early in their development often looked for technical skills in their new employees. Journalists in the ONA Credibility Study say it's a trend that didn't last. As content management software improved, it was no longer necessary that newsroom staffers could write HTML code. And editors recognized that it was easier to teach a journalist to tweak a Web page than it was to train a technician to write an accurate, complete and substantive news story.

“I think when newspaper’s first started building Web sites, a lot of more technical people were hired, but editors realized that journalism skills and news judgment were more important than HTML skills,” said Alexandra Egan, editor of Omaha.com. “In fact, as a late-bloomer in the industry, Omaha.com benefited from that experience. The one piece of advice I heard over and over from my more experienced online news colleagues around the country was: Hire journalists.”

The study’s interviews with journalists, as well as an informal ONA review of 56 online newspapers and 16 online television stations, suggest that the vast majority of workers in online newsrooms today do have journalistic backgrounds. But comments from respondents to the ONA’s national survey suggest that there may be widespread misperceptions about the nature and professionalism of digital news staffs. Online news organizations need to worry less about increasing their commitment to hiring journalists – something they’re already doing – and more about letting readers know that the people writing and producing the news online are trained, experienced, professional and committed journalists. It’s a branding issue, one that may serve to distinguish professional news sites from other sources of information online.

Training Matters.

Given the professionalism of online news staffs, many organizations may not feel the need to provide journalistic ‘boot camp’ to their newsroom employees. But many of the industry’s biggest and best news organizations are recommitting their energies to new and better staff training programs:

The NYTimes.com now requires five three-hour training sessions of all new hires, covering New York Times standards, Internet skills, time management, headline and caption writing, multimedia presentations, video archiving, and the Times’ digital system.

MSNBC.com has developed “a big, fat notebook” covering everything from sourcing, to how to handle message boards and chat, to financial disclosures for reporters and editors. MSNBC.com Editor-in-Chief Merrill Brown said he also brought in representatives of the Committee for Concerned Journalists (CCJ) to present a series of seminars on standards and practices. All editorial employees were required to attend the 1.5 day seminars at their East Coast and West Coast offices in June and July 2001.

The seminars drew on CCJ’s Tom Rosenstiel and Bill Kovac’s book *The Elements of Journalism*, including topics like the pressure of 24-hour news cycle, making decisions on the run, the challenges of combining MSNBC’s own original journalism with that of their partners, how the site treats content over which it doesn’t have control, and the technological opportunities of multimedia.

“The willingness to take away from work to talk about standards and credibility is hopefully a demonstration of how serious we are about this,” Brown said.

Standards and Policies

Establish Standards and Policies Based on the Highest Journalistic Ideals. Then Implement Them.

Standards, rules, codes, guidelines. Many journalists hate them; the media’s disdain for generalizations and zeal for independence have made it difficult to write – much less enforce – policies and standards. Some editors are trying, though, to build policies and procedures for ethical decision-making in their newsrooms.¹²⁴

Those policies should be clear, detailed, and newsroom-specific. Mark Thalimer, director of the Radio Television News Directors Foundation (RTNDF) Future of News Project, says the issues in online broadcast newsrooms are unique to the television industry. Thalimer helped produce a collection of standards and case studies of broadcast online news organizations. “There was a common theme: we don’t have

the resources in our industry for online,” Thalimer said. “Comparatively, newspapers are extremely well staffed, broadcast directors are overworked.”

In addition to nine in-depth case studies, the RTNDF’s 56-page booklet offered tips about how to create standards for features like chat rooms and journalism values. “The first thing we do at a news station, we get staff to recommit to spelling names correctly, because spelling is a must on the Web, not on-air pronunciation,” Thalimer suggested.

Some media leaders argue that the industry needs both general and specific kinds of standards.

“We need general industry standards to start a dialog—to create a common shared macro-view in terms of conflict of interest, journalists holding stock on companies they cover, and also to give the public a sense of what the governing mores are... There are new people to the business, advertisers, all kinds of constituencies, who need a roadmap—a mechanism, to understand what the state of thinking is,” said MSNBC.com’s Merrill Brown. “Standards (also) should be generated company by company. We have our own and they should have their own.”

Despite some opposition to fixed standards and guidelines, observers argue that policy makers have persevered because they know that such standards build credibility.

“I think news sites that want to capitalize on their credibility will tell their news consumers what they stand for,” said Aly Colón, a member of the ethics faculty at the Poynter Institute, in an online discussion about online news ethics. “One reason some news organizations don’t do so today is because they fear that making their standards public will come back to haunt them in an lawsuit, which can use their standards against them. But I believe the more honest, fair, complete, truthful you try to be, and state your goals as such, and act upon them as well, the better off you are.”

“Online news standards are essential, frankly,” said Colón in an ONA interview. “Fundamentally, we need standards because it is a brand new world out there.”

Jay Black, ethics professor at the University of South Florida and a key participant in the development of the Society for Professional Journalists’ Code of Ethics in the mid-1990s, said that online journalists’ technologies and practices are different enough from those of other journalists that specific standards for online journalism make sense.

“It would be a healthy exercise to develop a set of at least the ideal expectations and standards by which you want to hold online journalists. Not the scolding, negative stuff, but the statement of principles that you want people to believe in.”

Black suggested that building credibility occurs inside and outside the newsroom. Editorial guidelines inform journalists – particularly inexperienced journalists – about their organization’s and their industry’s ethical expectations. At the same time, readers benefit from understanding the rules of the game, the processes by which news is gathered and reported.

And while journalism already has a wide array of codes of ethics, the online medium is unique enough that it merits standards of its own, Black and Colon suggest. Some of the issues that could be addressed in online standards policies include:

- Advertising technology issues that impact credibility, such as pop-up and pop-under ads, and the ability to serve ads to be adjacent or not adjacent to specific types of editorial content;
- Conflict-of-interest issues with editorial product reviews and links to purchasing the products;
- Interactivity issues like chat, journalists’ bylines linked to e-mail, bulletin boards, instant polls, readers’ feedback on articles as with ZDNet’s TalkBack;
- The balance of accuracy and immediacy;
- Corrections policies and corrections policies’ enforcement;

- Accuracy of news partners' content, and the ability to correct partner's content;
- Disclosure of relationships with news partners and advertisers, and the explanation of journalistic practices, processes and beliefs of the online news organization.

At least some of the online professionals interviewed by the ONA have developed and adopted policies and guidelines in recent months. While most still say they have no written online news policies of their own, some sites – including WSJ.com, USAToday.com, NYTimes.com and ChicagoTribune.com – have adopted the ethics codes and guidelines of their parent news organizations. And in some organizations, digital news has been “brought back into the fold” in order to maintain its parent company's journalistic traditions, standards, and brand value. The ChicagoTribune.com, originally a self-contained unit of the Tribune Company, is one example. In 2000, former newspaper Assistant Managing Editor Mark Hinojosa was named AME for digital news and it was moved back into the news operation.

Interact With Your Readers.

Interactivity is a hallmark of online news. More than is the case with any other medium, online readers can interact in real time – with reporters, with editors, and with one another. That kind of ongoing, immediate give-and-take is brand new in the relationship between the media and its audiences, and research suggests online readers – particularly those who spend a lot of time on the Web – find it valuable.¹²⁵ While many media organizations have concluded their reporters don't have time to engage in direct digital interaction with their readers, at least some media critics argue that they need to make the time.

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“I think everybody should be going to interactivity with consumers through bylines. If you want to know a community, you have to be there. How can you cover a community when you're not there?,” asked Jai Singh, editor of C|Net's News.com.¹²⁶

Newsrooms who say such interaction is too costly in terms of journalists' time and energy have developed alternatives to byline e-mail. WashingtonPost.com, for example, has established moderated chats with its journalists and columnists so readers can talk directly to writers in a particular forum at a particular time.

And MSNBC.com has appointed the first – and to date, the only – online news ombudsman.¹²⁷ Dan Fischer took the job early in 2001 and now serves as the newsroom's direct connection to its readers. Fischer writes two or three columns about the inner workings of MSNBC.com from his Seattle home, including well-placed criticism about the news site's processes and content. He also participates in online chats with readers; most recently, he fielded questions about the Chandra Levy case and issues of journalistic balance.

Fischer scans most of the letters to the editor, sometimes 300-400 e-mails per day, and forwards some to editors and reporters. Some letters are published on the site. Comment complaints? “You're a tool of corporate structure of America,” Fischer reports. “Or you are part of liberal media conspiracy. This is the top complaint.”¹²⁸

Despite some readers' perceptions, Fischer says, he doesn't see vestiges of liberal media conspiracy practices among journalists at the company. And public complaints

about corporate bias – most often a charge that MSNBC.com is biased in its coverage of its parent company, Microsoft – is unwarranted, he says.

“People question media sources covering their own owners in which they have a stake. But I think MSNBC does a fair and balanced job in covering Microsoft.”

A more pressing problem is the site’s lack of control over content posted by its partners, Fischer says.

“A big issue is that MSNBC has a news portal, and has all of these content partners, all of which have their own guidelines, their own styles, their own perceptions of ethics and responsibilities and all of the rest. Contractually, there are different arrangements and terms. MSNBC, for example, is the Newsweek site. We are prohibited from changing the text. The same is true with Wall Street Journal material. All of these content partnerships operate under different rules of the road and it gets very complicated. The users look at the site and really don’t differentiate between a WashingtonPost.com article or a *Newsweek* article or something on MSNBC.com. It all looks like MSNBC to the reader.”

“As I see it, I really have a first obligation to the reader. First, to monitor the journalism on MSNBC. I try the best I can with my background to say this is good journalism, this is bad journalism. The input from readers is important in all of that,” Fischer said.

“It’s also important to have this back channel to the editors. It’s important that I’m independent of MSNBC. MSNBC can refuse to publish. We’ve not gotten there. I’m fully responsible for that column. Nobody is putting words in my mouth. I have got a certain moral authority within the organization, at the same time I’m independent of them. I don’t carry a big stick. I can’t punish people. What I say doesn’t affect their reviews. I can’t beat them into submission but I can gum them into submission.”

“I don’t think the editors are always right, I don’t think the readers are always right.”

Admit It.

If online news is immediate, it’s also easily corrected. Frank Sennett, owner of Slipup.com, which tracks online news sites’ corrections policies, said digital news editors should come clean with their readers. “It is a fundamental underpinning for journalism credibility,” says Sennett. “We’re going to make mistakes—it’s part of making the sausage. We have to come clean about it if we want people to make people believe us.”

Sennett’s site provides dozens of links to news sites’ corrections policies at his SlipUp.com, including the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, *Portland Oregonian*, Reuters, ZDNet, Salon, WiredNews, *The Washington Post*, the Associated Press, and the *Houston Chronicle*. Some, including Salon and *C/Net*, include links to their corrections policies on the home pages; many others do not. And at least some Web sites say they’re still working on developing a corrections policy.

Bonnie Bressers, journalism professor at the University of Kansas, has written about online news policies for journalism trade publications. The essence of a good corrections policy is full disclosure, she says. “Tell the people what you know,” she says.

Sennett suggests that online news sites should:

- Make the correction in a timely manner;
- Include a prominent link to the corrections area;
- Don’t whitewash the mistake because it is easy to do online. Maintain the public record of the story with the mistake;
- Run the correction at the top or bottom, and explain the error. The top is preferable because not everyone reads to the bottom.

One site with a correction policy that meets Sennett's standards is Salon.com. The 'corrections' link is easily identifiable on the entry page and leads to the following statement:

Salon strives to publish accurate information at all times. Minor errors of spelling, punctuation and the like will be corrected on our Web site without notice. When we correct significant errors of fact or substance, we will note the correction on this page and also on the page containing the corrected version of the original article. If you think Salon has published something in error, please e-mail us.

A typical correction on Salon.com includes a live link to the article, the original date of publication, the nature of the error, the correction information, and the date on which the correction was originally posted:

"The Enemy With a Thousand Faces," published Sept 13, 2001, originally stated that the Taliban received \$43 million from the United States to reward it for condemning opium growing as anti-Islamic. In fact, the United States aid did not go to the Taliban but to international aid organizations and NGOs.

[Correction made 10/03/01]

When It's An Ad, Say It's An Ad.

The church-state divide remains among the most contentious and difficult challenges confronting the digital news industry. Journalists interviewed by the ONA say they make case-by-case decisions about the ethics and appropriateness of various presentations and advertising messages, always working to protect their credibility and integrity. "We're always thinking what we can do to make the business proposition work so that we don't cross the (credibility) line," says Tim Ruder, an advertising executive with WashingtonPost.com. It's a challenging proposition, one that online journalists are meeting with professionalism, creativity, and a fundamental understanding of the importance of objectivity.

But that doesn't mean they're all making the same calls or decisions. In fact, ONA's interviews suggest that online journalists — experienced, ethical and talented professionals — don't necessarily agree on where the line is and what it takes to cross it. A few examples:

- Wired.com promotes "vertical advertising," which pairs editorial and advertising content. But editor George Shirk says he's "old school" about the church-state issue: "I don't think there's a place on Wired.com where the line is fudged," he says.¹²⁹

- MSN's MoneyCentral accepts paid placements of advertising messages integrated into its MSN MoneyCentral home page.

- ZDNet's tech review page includes a "sponsored links" section at the bottom of the page; the section is screened gray and clearly labeled, making it immediately clear to readers that these are paid links.

- The StarTribune.com's right rail is packed with links to various vertical sites, such as Fifty Plus Living, employment and cars. No heading signals the reader whether the links are advertising or editorial, and the sites — all of which are paid advertising — open beneath a StarTribune.com header.

- One of the first salvos fired about blurred lines between editorial and advertising was a paid-for link from NYTimes.com to BarnesandNoble.com. The advertising sponsorship, launched in October 1997, ended in early 2001. NYTimes.com received an undisclosed transaction fee each time a reader clicked on the BN.com link, at the bottom of the book review. This raised the specter of whether or not BN.com had influence over *The New York Times Book Review*.

- Catherine Levene, vice president for business development and strategy at NYTimes.com, said the site would re-institute the *Book Review* sponsorship if “the right deal came along.”

- C|Net co-mingles editorial and advertising content, but reveals it in its editorial and disclosure policies.

- Patricia Sullivan, former executive editor for TheStandard.com, was insistent that an advertisement did not mimic her site’s design. Advertising on the TheStandard.com should be as different from editorial in form as it is in content.¹³⁰

- Editors at USAToday.com developed a series of guidelines around advertising to protect credibility in the face of advertising pressures. Those guidelines included:

- Avoid any perception by the reader that the advertisers could impact news judgment.
- Ensure transparency, or full disclosure, about the site’s relationships with advertisers.
- Try to differentiate between what is advertising, what is editorial and what is in the middle. “Every day, I’m confronted with issues that are in the gray area,” Wilson said.
- BTB ads can move across the USAToday.com nameplate, but not across editorial space.
- Manipulation of the USAToday.com nameplate is not allowed, as occurred in the “Got Milk?” campaign.
- The animation must not repeat its sequence, and must come to rest in a standard advertising space at the top or side of the page.
- Advertisers must disclose the company’s name on the ad. “To the greatest extent possible, people should know what they’re getting when they click on an ad or a link. Surprise is probably only good when it’s brief. There’s a concern whether you’re taken off the site. That gradually chips away at the confidence in the site,” Wilson said.
- BTB ads will not be sold on the home page or the news front, but are acceptable for Sports, Life and Money fronts. “We don’t want to take away from news credibility,” Ross said.

Editors clearly disagree on what constitutes crossing the line. What they do agree on is a simple statement made by Kinsey Wilson, vice president and editor-in-chief of USAToday.com:¹³¹ “Credibility is the bedrock. Without credibility, we really don’t have anything as a news organization. Credibility is absolutely essential.”

Conclusion

When the ONA undertook its Digital Journalism Credibility Study in January 2001, it did so not to make judgments or issue proclamations, but to initiate and promote discussion about issues critical to the online news industry and its audience. In an environment in which so many highly skilled, experienced journalists were making such a wide variety of decisions about what constituted credible, ethical journalism online, it seemed a good idea to take a careful look at the issues, the environment, and at least some of the solutions. This study presents a discussion of all three. To the degree that it generates discussion, reflection and innovation, it will have achieved its goals.

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²³ When dividing the sample, NFO and ONA combined reporters, writers, artists, designers, producers, online content producers, copy editors, section editors, on-air talent, anchors, photographers and camera operators into a group of 712 staff. The group of 685 editors was made by combining editors, managing editors, senior editors, online senior editors, news directors, CEO's, general executives, vice-presidents, general managers, senior online management, and new media managers.

²⁴ It's important to note that there is no statistical significance to the differences between how the public ranked accuracy and timeliness in terms of the reasons it goes to a particular Web site. The gap is 2.4 percent in a survey with a sampling error of ± 3 percent.

²⁵ Sampling error ± 2.5 percentage points.

²⁶ We asked the public if online news sites that require payment for access are more credible than online news sites. Only 5.4 percent of consumers agree, about one-third (32.4 percent) are neutral and slightly more than six-in-ten (62.2 percent) disagree.

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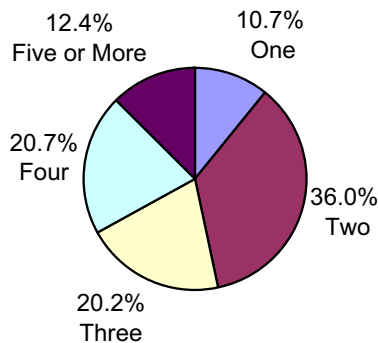
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Appendix A

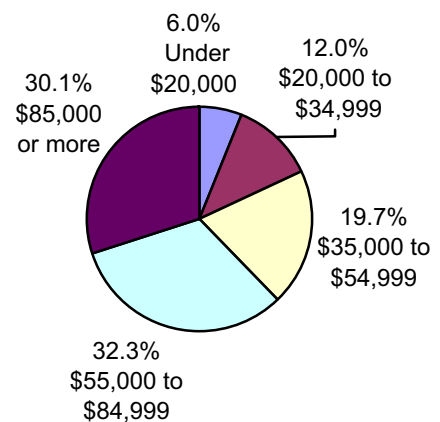
Respondent Demographic Characteristics

Household Size and Income of Survey Participants

Online Public Household Size (Members)



Online Households in Income Groups



The Online Public

The online public sample and data were balanced and weighted on age, gender, household size, household income, and geographic location in order to ensure a representative sample of the U.S. online population was examined. As such, 9.8 percent of respondents were under 26 years of age, 25.1 percent were ages 26 to 35, 25.6 percent were ages 36 to 45, 23.5 percent were ages 46 to 55, 11.1 percent were ages 56 to 65 and the remaining 5 percent were over 65 years old. In terms of gender, 53.5 percent of respondents were female while 46.5 percent were male.

The sample of the online public was balanced along these household income categories across the United States. It is important to note that not all respondents have household data on file.

The NFO sample was also balanced and weighted to accurately reflect the geographic dispersion of the online public in the nine regions shown on the map.

The Public's Access Points

Sixty (58.5) percent of online news viewers connect from home. Close to three-in-ten (29.9 percent) connect from their office or workplace. One-in-ten (10.3 percent) connect from their home office. The remaining 2 percent connect from a college or university or "other" location.

Of those who connect from home or home office, 62.8 percent report using a 56K modem or slower, while 28.9 percent use ISDN, cable modem, digital subscriber line (DSL), or T1 connection. Of those who connect at their office or workplace, only 23.8 percent connect using a 56K modem or slower. Six-in-ten (61.6 percent) report using a

Geographic Location of Survey Participants



| Region | | Percent Public | Percent Media |
|--------|--------------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1 | New England | 5.6 | 3.9 |
| 2 | Middle Atlantic | 13.0 | 15.8 |
| 3 | East North Central | 16.0 | 15.0 |
| 4 | West North Central | 7.2 | 7.2 |
| 5 | South Atlantic | 18.5 | 22.0 |
| 6 | East South Central | 5.7 | 3.8 |
| 7 | West South Central | 10.3 | 8.7 |
| 8 | Mountain | 6.4 | 4.9 |
| 9 | Pacific | 17.2 | 14.4 |
| | Other | | 4.0 |

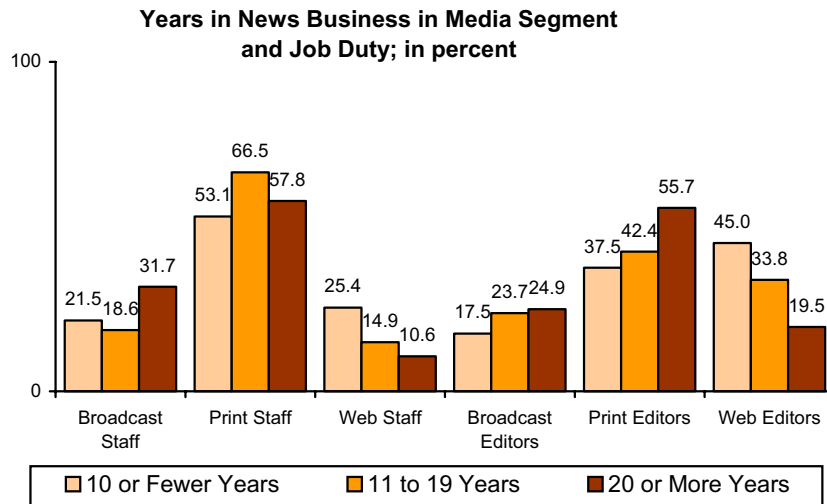
faster connection. Not surprisingly, a large percentage (14.7 percent) did not know their connection speed at work.

Media Access Points

Nearly eight-in-ten (79.3 percent) of those who report working for a media company said they access online news most often from their office or workplace. Another 18.8 percent said they connect from their home or home office. The remaining 1 percent said they connect from a college or university or other location. It follows that members of the media who access news online have faster connections at work than the bulk of the online public who use 56K modems from home.

Media Employment

More detailed information about employment and demographic characteristics of the media is available in Appendix B. However, the graph below shows job duties segmented by the length of time a member of the media reported being employed in the news business. Of particular interest may be the fact that the bulk of Web staff and editors are relatively new to the news business compared to the staff and editors of print and broadcast news. One hypothesis might be that the media’s scrutiny of online news may be more about age or tenure of the people producing the news than about the actual credibility of online news itself.



Appendix B

Survey Methodology by NFO WorldGroup

Interviews for this study were conducted via an interactive survey instrument utilizing NFO WorldGroup's proprietary Survey System II. To achieve the objectives for this research effort, two groups were surveyed: the U.S. general public online population and members of several Journalist trade associations.

General Population

The sample for the general population survey was drawn from the NFO WorldGroup Interactive Panel. NFO's online panel is currently comprised of 1.1 million households and 2.7 million individuals. The sample for this research effort was stratified to ensure that it was balanced on geographic region, market size, age, income, household size and gender of the U.S. online population in the contiguous 48 states. Within each household, one individual was randomly invited via email to participate in the survey. Weights were also applied to the results to ensure the final data match the U.S. online population as a whole on these key demographic variables. Respondents were screened on the following criteria:

- Did not work, or live with a household member who works, for a news organization or market research company,
- Had viewed an online news source (e.g., Yahoo news, AOL News, a newspaper Web site, CNN.com or a TV station Web site, etc..) in the past thirty days, and
- Had used a traditional news source (print newspaper, magazine, broadcast television or radio, etc.) in the past thirty days.

Interviews with the general online population were conducted between July 3rd and July 16th 2001. A total of 1,027 interviews were completed with a median interview length of 14.28 minutes and a response rate of 26%. The sampling error associated with a sample of this size is $\pm 3\%$ at the 95% level of confidence. This means that there is less than one chance in twenty that the results of a survey of this size and nature would differ by more than three percent in either direction from the results that would be obtained if all individuals in the contiguous online U.S. population had been interviewed. Sampling error for subgroups (e.g., men, women, age groups, etc...) will be larger. NFO WorldGroup also attempted to minimize other possible sources of error in this survey.

The size of sampling errors depends largely on the number of interviews. The accompanying table may be used in estimating the sampling error of any percentage in the report. The computed allowances have taken into account the effect of the sample design upon sampling error. They may be interpreted as indicating the range (plus or minus the figure shown) within the results of repeated sampling in the same time period that could be expected to vary 95% of the time, assuming the same sampling procedure, the same interviewers and the same questionnaire were used.

Sample Size Error Table

| Percentages Near: | Sample Size | | | | | |
|----------------------|-------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | 1000 | 750 | 600 | 400 | 200 | 100 |
| 10 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 7 |
| 20 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 9 |
| 30 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 10 |
| 40 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 11 |
| 50 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 11 |
| 60 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 11 |
| 70 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 10 |
| 80 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 9 |
| 90 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 7 |

The table is used in the following manner: If a reported percentage is 33% for a group that included 1000 respondents, we would first go to the row headed “percentages near thirty” and go across to the column headed “1000”. The number at this point is four. This means that the 33 percent obtained in the sample are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus four points. Another way of saying it is that very likely (ninety-five times out of one-hundred) the average of repeated sampling would be somewhere between twenty-nine and thirty-seven percent, with the most likely figure being thirty-three.

Media Population

NFO teamed with the Online News Association (ONA) to determine a sampling methodology that would allow us to best reach a representative sample of the news media population given the time and budgetary constraints associated with this project. The sample for the journalist population (herein referred to as “news media”) was drawn from membership lists of several journalism associations. ONA was responsible for obtaining, managing, and disseminating the news media sample. Email invitations were sent to various news media members via ONA or directly by a journalism organization. In cases where an association was unable, or declined to provide specific email addresses for its members, a link to the survey was provided to members via the association’s listserv. Both email invitations and postings on associations’ listservs provided a direct hyperlink that brought individuals

Survey Invitation Methods to Media Participants

| Journalist Trade Association | Form of Invitation |
|--|--------------------|
| American Society of Magazine Editors [ASME] | E-mail |
| Associated Press Managing Editors [APME] | Listserv |
| New Media Federation of Newspaper Assn. of America [NAA] | Listserv |
| Online News Association [ONA] | E-mail |
| Public Radio News Directors, Inc. [PRNDI] | E-mail |
| Radio Television News Directors Association [RTNDA] | E-mail |
| Society for News Design [SND] | E-mail |
| Society of Professional Journalists [SPJ] | Listserv |
| Investigative Reporters and Editors [IRE] | Listserv |
| National Association of Minority Media Executives | E-mail |
| News Media Interactive e-mail Editors, AMEs, e-mail | E-mail |
| Other listserv notifications | Listserv |

directly to the survey housed on NFO’s secure proprietary Interactive Survey System II. Once people entered the survey, further screening was done to ensure their qualification for participation in the study.

Interviews with the online media population were conducted between July 3rd and August 6th 2001. A total of 1,397 interviews were completed with a median interview length of 20.54 minutes. The sampling error associated with a sample of this size is $\pm 2.6\%$ at the 95% level of confidence. Again, this means that there is less than one chance in twenty that the results of a survey of this size and nature would differ by more than 2.6% in either direction from the results that would be obtained if all individuals in the contiguous online U.S. population of the news media workforce had been interviewed.

In total, approximately 10,400 email invitations were sent out, with approxi-

mately 10% of email addresses that were bounced back as undeliverable—this left a total of 9,375 deliverable emails. As for the journalism groups that posted the invitation on their listserv, there were a total of 7,000 possible members who could have responded. At most, ONA and NFO WorldGroup estimate 16,400 members of the media may have come in contact with the invitation to participate in this research investigation, which would give us an overall 17% response rate for the media portion of the study.

The accompanying chart lists the associations that were surveyed.

In addition to the sampling methodology outlined above, NFO WorldGroup conducted a thorough examination of the available secondary research on news media in hopes of identifying a previous study that effectively profiled the general make-up of the U.S. news media environment. This, in effect, would serve as a benchmark to validate how representative the final sample of news media respondents is in the ONA initiative.

Following this review, David Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit’s 1992 research in *The American Journalist in the 1990s* (Erlbaum Associates, 1996) emerged as the research investigation that offered the most comprehensive and accurate overall profile of the U.S. news media environment across key demographic variables. In sum, the current study’s sample of respondents, to a large degree, closely resembles Wilhoit’s profile of U.S. news media, in general, suggesting that the present investigation offers a very strong representation of the true news media environment. Hence, one should feel confident about drawing general conclusions regarding the U.S. news media from the data presented in this study.

The accompanying charts illustrate how the two studies closely resemble one another across key demographic variables:

In looking at these charts, the proportion of different mediums surveyed for the ONA/NFO WorldGroup online survey closely mirrors Wilhoit’s estimates of the full-time news media workforce in the U.S. regarding total print media and television media. However, there are notable differences in Wilhoit’s estimations of the radio media versus the proportion of that population that actually participated in the current online study. Assuming that Wilhoit’s estimations are still close to the current workforce, this would indicate that the current survey might underestimate the opinions of the radio news media workforce. Furthermore, we must note that Wilhoit’s projections were based on full-time news media workers whereas this current initiative did not narrow its focus to the full-time workforce.

Additionally, in order to compare the two studies, we included the online counterpart of a news source to be part of the traditional news source it was related to (e.g., local newspaper Web sites were grouped with local newspapers and therefore fell under the “Print” category).

Due to the lack of comprehensive data available from other research initiatives regarding members of the online news media, we were not able to compare the specific breakdown of the online news media workforce in our study to any other research initiative. Of course, further investigation is needed in order to effectively profile the online news media. This study may serve as a first step in achieving this goal.

Comparing Demographics of Media Participants

| News Medium | 1992 Estimate | 2001 ONA Study Composition |
|-------------------|---------------|----------------------------|
| Total Print Media | 69.8% | 65.2% |
| Television Media | 14.6% | 12.7% |
| Radio Media | 14.5% | 4.3% |
| News Services | 1.1% | 2.1% |

| Gender | 1992 Estimate | 2001 ONA Study Composition |
|--------|---------------|----------------------------|
| Male | 66.0% | 61.6% |
| Female | 34.0% | 38.4% |

| Region | 1992 Estimate | 2001 ONA Study Composition |
|-----------|---------------|----------------------------|
| Northeast | 19.8 | 19.8 |
| Midwest | 24.8 | 22.3 |
| South | 38.1 | 34.4 |
| West | 17.2 | 19.3 |

Appendix C

Survey Questionnaire With Results

Do you work for a news organization?

| | %Yes | %No |
|--------|------|-----|
| Public | 0 | 100 |
| Media | 100 | 0 |

Do you work for a market research company or does another member of your household work for a news organization?

| | %Yes | %No |
|--------|------|-----|
| Public | 0 | 100 |
| Media | NA | NA |

Have you visited an online news source (Yahoo News, AOL News, a newspaper website, or a TV station website, etc.) in the past month?

| | %Yes | %No |
|--------|------|-----|
| Public | 100 | 0 |
| Media | NA | NA |

Have you used a traditional news source (print newspaper, magazine, broadcast television or radio, etc.) in the past month?

| | %Yes | %No |
|--------|------|-----|
| Public | 100 | 0 |
| Media | NA | NA |

Please select the news sources you have personally used in the past week. Of the sources you have used in the past week, how many times have you used that source?

| | | % who have used source | Mean number of times |
|---|---|------------------------|----------------------|
| Cable Television News Station (CNN, etc.) | P | 68.5 | 5.37 |
| | M | 70.4 | 6.98 |
| Local Print Newspaper | P | 85.4 | 4.79 |
| | M | 91.6 | 8.81 |
| Local Radio Station | P | 72.4 | 6.58 |
| | M | 63.4 | 16.23 |
| Local Broadcast Television News | P | 86.3 | 6.11 |
| | M | 72.4 | 5.42 |
| Local Newspaper website | P | 23.6 | 7.17 |
| | M | 68.0 | 8.79 |
| Local Radio Station Website | P | 7.6 | 2.51 |
| | M | 8.8 | 3.69 |
| Local TV Station Website | P | 22.7 | 7.14 |
| | M | 19.7 | 4.59 |
| National Newspaper Website | P | 26.6 | 3.61 |
| | M | 67.0 | 7.31 |
| News Magazine Website or e-zine | P | 9.6 | 13.6 |
| | M | 31.9 | 4.74 |
| Other News Website | P | 57.2 | 5.09 |
| | M | 44.5 | 6.37 |
| National Print News Magazine | P | 26.2 | 1.97 |
| | M | 42.8 | 2.25 |
| National Network News | P | 66.3 | 5.12 |
| | M | 59.9 | 4.79 |
| National Print Newspaper | P | 26.2 | 3.49 |
| | M | 64.4 | 6.48 |
| National Radio Broadcast | P | 25.9 | 4.91 |
| | M | 54.6 | 5.88 |

Please take a moment to think about the credibility of each of the following kinds of news sources. To the best of your ability, rate each kind on the following scale:

| | | Not Credible at All | | Neutral/ Unsure | | Extremely Credible |
|---|---|---------------------|------|-----------------|------|--------------------|
| Cable Television News Station (CNN, etc.) | P | 1.7 | 3.7 | 12.2 | 47.9 | 34.6 |
| | M | 0.5 | 4.1 | 15.8 | 53.2 | 26.5 |
| Local Print Newspaper | P | 2.5 | 9.6 | 20.3 | 53.4 | 14.2 |
| | M | 0.4 | 4.7 | 12.5 | 48.4 | 34.0 |
| Local Radio Station | P | 2.0 | 9.7 | 31.4 | 45.8 | 11.1 |
| | M | 6.8 | 28.7 | 34.7 | 24.4 | 5.4 |
| Local Broadcast Television News | P | 1.8 | 7.1 | 20.4 | 53.7 | 17.1 |
| | M | 5.7 | 26.2 | 30.1 | 30.9 | 7.1 |
| Local Newspaper Website | P | 2.0 | 7.1 | 33.1 | 47.0 | 10.7 |
| | M | 1.0 | 5.7 | 18.3 | 49.9 | 25.1 |
| Local Radio Station Website | P | 1.7 | 9.7 | 47.0 | 35.1 | 6.5 |
| | M | 10.8 | 29.0 | 42.6 | 13.9 | 3.7 |
| Local TV Station Website | P | 1.3 | 6.8 | 32.3 | 48.2 | 11.4 |
| | M | 6.7 | 25.5 | 39.1 | 23.2 | 5.5 |
| National Newspaper Website | P | 1.3 | 3.7 | 28.0 | 49.1 | 17.9 |
| | M | 0.4 | 1.3 | 7.7 | 44.7 | 46.0 |
| News Magazine Website or e-zine | P | 1.3 | 6.1 | 41.0 | 40.7 | 10.9 |
| | M | 0.7 | 7.9 | 32.8 | 44.9 | 13.7 |
| Other News Website | P | 0.5 | 4.0 | 32.8 | 52.6 | 10.1 |
| | M | 3.1 | 22.5 | 45.3 | 25.6 | 3.5 |
| National Print News Magazine | P | 1.6 | 6.5 | 21.8 | 47.6 | 22.5 |
| | M | 0.5 | 3.1 | 11.5 | 50.7 | 34.2 |
| National Network News | P | 2.5 | 6.0 | 13.6 | 49.3 | 28.5 |
| | M | 0.8 | 6.7 | 17.7 | 51.0 | 23.8 |
| National Print Newspaper | P | 0.9 | 4.0 | 15.3 | 48.3 | 31.5 |
| | M | 0.3 | 1.2 | 3.3 | 35.3 | 59.9 |
| National Radio Broadcast | P | 2.1 | 4.2 | 21.6 | 46.9 | 25.1 |
| | M | 0.7 | 2.5 | 11.3 | 44.4 | 41.2 |
| National Broadcast Television Website | P | 2.4 | 5.3 | 24.6 | 48.3 | 19.4 |
| | M | 0.5 | 6.2 | 27.8 | 48.9 | 16.5 |
| Cable Television Website | P | 1.4 | 4.3 | 16.0 | 48.0 | 30.4 |
| | M | 0.6 | 5.2 | 19.5 | 52.1 | 22.6 |

| Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement below | | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Neutral | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | | | | | | |
| Online news is more up-to-date than other news sources | P | 10.0 | 37.1 | 33.7 | 16.7 | 2.5 |
| | M | 21.8 | 44.8 | 15.8 | 14.0 | 3.6 |
| Online news is the most convenient source for news | P | 13.9 | 35.0 | 30.0 | 17.4 | 3.7 |
| | M | 16.6 | 27.0 | 18.5 | 26.5 | 11.5 |
| My confidence in the media, as a whole, has increased in the last year | P | 1.9 | 10.2 | 41.9 | 31.3 | 14.8 |
| The public's confidence in the media, as a whole has increased in the past year | M | 0.7 | 8.0 | 28.1 | 44.9 | 18.3 |
| Local Television news is more credible than online news | P | 3.7 | 20.7 | 42.4 | 27 | 6.2 |
| | M | 4.6 | 18.4 | 28.6 | 30.3 | 18.1 |
| The race to be first to report a story often results in inaccurate reporting | P | 30.5 | 45.2 | 17.8 | 5.6 | 1.0 |
| | M | 35.6 | 44.3 | 9.5 | 8.7 | 1.9 |
| There is too much news on the Internet for me to sort through and make sense of it all | P | 3.8 | 24.1 | 31.5 | 29.5 | 11.1 |
| There is too much news on the Internet for the public to sort through and make sense of it all | M | 14.6 | 35.8 | 15.5 | 22.6 | 11.5 |
| I am more comfortable with the reliability of news I read in a newspaper than news from online sources | P | 4.6 | 23.6 | 37.6 | 27.4 | 6.9 |
| Consumers are more comfortable with the reliability of news from the newspaper than news from online sources | M | 29.9 | 47.8 | 13.7 | 6.2 | 2.4 |
| Online news sites provide the most complete picture of the news | P | 2.1 | 15.8 | 47.9 | 29.9 | 4.3 |
| | M | 2.8 | 10.2 | 20.2 | 38.6 | 28.3 |
| Accurate reporting is more important than fast reporting | P | 60.8 | 28.3 | 7.6 | 1.7 | 1.7 |
| The best thing about online news is my ability to customize the type of news I receive | P | 22.5 | 45.7 | 24.7 | 5.5 | 1.7 |
| The ability of consumers to customize online news content is a positive development | M | 19.5 | 41.7 | 20.3 | 14.4 | 4.2 |
| Advertisers and business interests influence how news is reported | P | 20.5 | 45.1 | 24.6 | 6.8 | 2.9 |
| | M | 14.6 | 37.1 | 15.5 | 20.8 | 11.9 |
| Online news sites are the least likely to be influenced by advertisers and business interests | P | 2.6 | 13.1 | 36.3 | 35.6 | 12.3 |
| | M | 1.5 | 5.1 | 17.3 | 38.6 | 37.5 |
| It is more important that I receive accurate detail rather than a fast overview of a news story | P | 36.9 | 39.4 | 15.6 | 6.2 | 1.9 |
| It is more important to consumers to receive accurate detail rather than a fast overview of a breaking news story | M | 22.3 | 32.5 | 19.3 | 22.8 | 3.2 |
| Online News sites are my most trusted sources for news | P | 2.3 | 10.6 | 44.3 | 32.2 | 10.5 |
| Online news sites are consumers' most trusted sources for news | M | 0.6 | 3.2 | 17.7 | 40.2 | 38.3 |

| | | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Neutral | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Stories that I can relate to on a personal level are most often from online sources | P | 3.8 | 15.8 | 45.5 | 28.3 | 6.6 |
| The stories that the public relates to on a personal level are most often from online sources | M | 0.7 | 4.6 | 26.0 | 42.3 | 26.5 |
| I am more comfortable with the reliability of news on radio broadcasts than news from online sources | P | 3.5 | 19.8 | 40.9 | 28.6 | 7.2 |
| Consumers are more comfortable with the reliability of news from radio broadcasts than news from online sources | M | 6.3 | 31.2 | 34.5 | 22.2 | 5.9 |
| I am more comfortable with the reliability of news on cable television than news from online sources | P | 6.1 | 27.3 | 39.5 | 22.8 | 4.3 |
| Consumers are more comfortable with the reliability of news on national television than news from online sources | M | 14.3 | 52.4 | 19.7 | 11.4 | 2.2 |
| The first report of a news story is often less credible than a later report | P | 11.8 | 44.2 | 25.9 | 15.3 | 2.8 |
| Printed newspapers are more credible than online news sources | P | 3.6 | 19.4 | 41.7 | 27.5 | 7.9 |
| I am more comfortable with the reliability of news from broadcast television sources than news from online sources | P | 6.7 | 27.6 | 35.8 | 22.7 | 7.2 |
| Consumers are more comfortable with the reliability of news from local television sources than news from online sources | M | 8.6 | 39.2 | 27.5 | 19.4 | 5.3 |
| It is easy to separate what is news and what is advertising on online news sites | P | 7.9 | 34.7 | 32.9 | 22.0 | 2.5 |
| It is easy for consumers to separate what is news and what is advertising on online news sites | M | 3.8 | 20.6 | 18.3 | 41.4 | 15.9 |
| Online news sites that require payment for access are more credible than online news sites | P | 1.2 | 4.2 | 32.4 | 29.4 | 32.8 |
| Radio broadcast news is more credible than online news | P | 2.3 | 14.5 | 48.3 | 28.7 | 6.1 |
| If a source is credible offline it is likely to be credible online | P | 19.6 | 52.7 | 19.8 | 6.8 | 1.2 |

| | | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Neutral | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|---|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Links to commercial sites or advertisements on online news sites are sometimes disguised as news stories | P | 9.2 | 38.6 | 40.4 | 9.6 | 2.2 |
| Online news sites sometimes have advertisements that are disguised as real news stories | P | 8.5 | 38.3 | 40.6 | 10.1 | 2.5 |
| Journalists who publish online news produce less credible news than journalists from traditional media | P | 1.1 | 7.6 | 45.9 | 34.9 | 10.6 |
| Online sources are more focused on speed of reporting than accuracy of facts | P | 4.1 | 21.4 | 49.5 | 21.7 | 3.3 |
| Having a story first makes a news organization more credible | P | 2.5 | 9.3 | 23.7 | 41.3 | 23.2 |
| | M | 3.8 | 28.2 | 15.8 | 31.7 | 20.6 |
| Online consumers of news closely resemble traditional news consumers | M | 3.9 | 21.2 | 20.3 | 42.4 | 12.3 |
| I trust what I read at online news sites | P | 4.5 | 33.7 | 46.3 | 13.6 | 1.9 |
| | M | 5.1 | 38.9 | 33.4 | 18.8 | 3.8 |

Now we would like to ask you about which characteristics of a news story have the most to do with making a credible story. Please rank the attributes in order of importance from most important (1) to least important (11).

| | | Mean |
|--|---|------|
| Completeness of a story (whole story is reported) | P | 3.46 |
| | M | 3.88 |
| Fairness of reporting | P | 4.42 |
| | M | 3.54 |
| Accuracy of the information in the story | P | 2.32 |
| | M | 1.98 |
| Story is enjoyable and entertaining | P | 8.45 |
| | M | 9.08 |
| Story has a good audio/visual presentation | P | 8.37 |
| | M | 9.16 |
| News source is a trusted one | P | 4.79 |
| | M | 5.14 |
| Error-free reporting | P | 7.63 |
| | M | 6.63 |
| Sources for the story are specific and detailed | P | 6.00 |
| | M | 5.35 |
| Story is up-to-date | P | 5.37 |
| | M | 6.35 |
| Clear separation between advertisements and news stories | P | 7.98 |
| | M | 6.99 |
| Presentation of the story is professional | P | 7.17 |
| | M | 7.85 |

From your point of view, what is the most important function of a journalist?

| | %Public | %Media |
|--|---------|--------|
| To research stories | 7.1 | 1.8 |
| To report on significant events | 16.4 | 27.6 |
| To uncover wrong-doing by public officials | 1.3 | 2.7 |
| To educate members of the public about their communities | 4.6 | 30.6 |
| To make sure to provide a thorough presentation of the facts | 70.7 | 37.3 |

When viewing an online news site, how important is it to you that the site comes from a news organization that you respect outside of the Internet?

| | %Public |
|----------------------|---------|
| Extremely important | 23.3 |
| Very Important | 39.5 |
| Somewhat important | 28.7 |
| Not very important | 6.9 |
| Not important at all | 1.6 |

Do you think that online news sites currently meet the same standards as other more traditional sources?

| | %Media |
|-----|--------|
| Yes | 31.2 |
| No | 68.8 |

When thinking about an online news site’s credibility, how important is it that there is a clear separation between advertisement and news content?

| | %Public | %Media |
|----------------------|---------|--------|
| Extremely important | 32.4 | 63.4 |
| Very Important | 40.0 | 22.8 |
| Somewhat important | 23.5 | 10.6 |
| Not very important | 3.2 | 2.6 |
| Not important at all | 0.9 | 0.7 |

When thinking about an online news site, how much of the content would you consider “opinion” or “gossip” and how much content would you consider “news”?

| Mean | | |
|---------|---|-------|
| Opinion | P | 34.04 |
| | M | 28.85 |
| News | P | 65.96 |
| | M | 71.15 |

When thinking about traditional print news source (print version of a local or national newspaper or magazine), how much of the content would you consider “opinion” or “gossip” and how much content would you consider “news”?

| Mean | | |
|---------|---|-------|
| Opinion | P | 33.15 |
| News | P | 66.85 |

Please select up to five of the following issues that are of most concern to you regarding the credibility of online news.

| | % Media Selecting |
|---|-------------------|
| Inaccurate information | 54.8 |
| Lack of in-depth reporting to get the whole story | 54.7 |
| Sources for the story are not cited | 42.7 |
| Online journalists lack the training and experience of other journalists in other media types | 41.4 |
| There is not a clear separation between advertisements and news stories | 40.2 |
| News source is not a trusted one | 34.9 |
| Lack of fairness in reporting | 31.5 |
| Spelling and/or grammar mistakes | 25.5 |
| The story is not up-to-date | 19.4 |
| Stories are not newsworthy | 14.0 |
| Lack of good audio/visual presentation | 10.2 |
| None of these issues are of concern to me regarding the credibility of online news | 6.0 |
| Other | 5.7 |

Please select up to five of the following issues that are of most concern to you with the introduction of the Internet for research, communication, and reporting into your organization.

| | % Media Selecting |
|---|-------------------|
| No clear vision for the website | 44.2 |
| Little time to do quality work | 41.4 |
| Lack of training | 40.8 |
| Not understanding the purpose of the website | 35.0 |
| Advertising has too much influence | 23.7 |
| Little recognition for successes | 20.8 |
| Too much time answering email | 20.3 |
| Newsroom has lost control of content | 19.4 |
| Public does not understand our business | 16.7 |
| None of the above issues are of concern to me regarding the introduction of the Internet into my organization | 15.7 |
| Other | 7.5 |
| Too much focus on revenue | 0.0 |

Since the introduction of the Internet into the news cycle, would you say that the overall credibility of the news in your organization has:

| | %Media |
|-----------------------|--------|
| Improved a lot | 9.8 |
| Improved some | 35.8 |
| Stayed about the same | 49.3 |
| Gotten a little worse | 4.4 |
| Gotten much worse | 0.7 |

Of the online news sites you visit most often, please select the one attribute that best describes why you use that site:

| | %Public | %Media |
|--|---------|--------|
| Information on the site is constantly updated | 26.5 | 27.2 |
| Accuracy of information | 24.1 | 14.1 |
| Site is from an organization I recognize | 16.4 | 25.0 |
| Ease of navigation | 13.1 | 4.4 |
| Content is fair and balanced | 9.7 | 5.5 |
| Other | 7.1 | 5.3 |
| Speed of download | 2.2 | 0.7 |
| Articles have citations | 0.6 | 0.6 |
| Site won an award | 0.3 | 0.1 |
| I work for the organization that sponsors the site | 0.0 | 15.2 |

Please select the five story attributes that are most important to consumers in determining a story's credibility

| | % Selecting |
|---|--------------------|
| Accuracy of the information in the story | 83.7 |
| Fairness of reporting | 66.7 |
| News source is a trusted one | 62.7 |
| Completeness of the story | 57.2 |
| Story is up-to-date | 46.6 |
| Error-free reporting (no spelling or grammar mistakes) | 37.7 |
| The presentation of the story is professional | 26.1 |
| There is a clear separation between advertisements and news stories | 21.3 |
| Story is enjoyable and entertaining | 19.9 |
| Story has a good audio/visual presentation | 14.4 |
| Other | 0.9 |
| I do not think any of these issues are of concern to consumers | 0.0 |

When thinking about an online news site's credibility, how important do you think it is in the consumer's mind that there is a clear separation between advertisement and news content at an online news site?

| | %Media |
|----------------------|---------------|
| Extremely important | 32.6 |
| Very important | 21.8 |
| Somewhat important | 31.5 |
| Not very important | 12.7 |
| Not important at all | 1.5 |

Do you feel that you are fully informed of all the advertising and business relationships at your company as they relate to the online segment?

| | %Media |
|-----|---------------|
| Yes | 43.4 |
| No | 56.6 |

How concerned do you think consumers are about news website credibility?

| | %Media |
|----------------------|---------------|
| Very concerned | 2.8 |
| Somewhat concerned | 20.7 |
| A little concerned | 30.3 |
| Not very concerned | 33.0 |
| Not concerned at all | 13.1 |

How concerned are you that the relationships between advertising and editorial jeopardize online news' credibility?

| | %Media |
|----------------------|---------------|
| Very concerned | 30.6 |
| Somewhat concerned | 29.6 |
| A little concerned | 21.9 |
| Not very concerned | 12.9 |
| Not concerned at all | 5.0 |

What is your primary area of responsibility within your news organization?

| | %Media |
|---|---------------|
| Reporter / Writer | 21.2 |
| Senior Editor (Editor, Managing Editor, AME, DME) | 19.4 |
| Online Senior Editor | 6.6 |
| Artist / Designer | 6.5 |
| News Director | 6.5 |
| Section Editor | 5.2 |
| Other | 5.1 |
| CEO, General Executive, or VP | 4.4 |
| Producer (Executive, Associate) | 4.4 |
| General Management | 4.1 |
| Online Content Producer | 3.9 |
| Copy Editor | 3.2 |
| Senior Online Management | 2.1 |
| Advertising/Sales | 1.9 |
| New Media Manager | 2.0 |
| On-Air Talent / Anchor | 1.9 |
| Photographer / Camera Operator | 0.8 |
| Analyst | 0.4 |
| Market Representative / Executive | 0.3 |
| Online Business Manager | 0.2 |
| Audio Technician | 0.0 |
| Classified Business Developer | 0.0 |

In which of the following industry associations do you currently hold membership?

| | %Media |
|--|---------------|
| IRE – Investigative Reporters and Writers | 21.8 |
| SPJ – Society of Professional Journalists | 20.0 |
| SND – Society for News Design | 14.6 |
| RTNDA – Radio and Television News Directors' Association | 14.1 |
| NAA – Newspaper Association of America | 11.5 |
| ONA – Online News Association | 6.8 |
| APME – Associated Press Managing Editors | 6.0 |
| ASNE – American Society of Newspaper Editors | 4.7 |
| NAHJ – National Association of Hispanic Journalists | 2.2 |
| ASME – American Society of Magazine Editors | 2.1 |
| ACES – American Copy Editor Society | 2.0 |
| NABJ – National Association of Black Journalists | 1.6 |
| AAJA – Asian American Journalists' Association | 1.3 |
| ASBPE – American Society of Business Publication Editors | 1.1 |
| I do not belong to any of the associations listed | 25.4 |

How many times do you use the Internet in the typical day?

| | Mean number of times | Median number of times | Mode |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| P | 7.15 | 4 | 2 |
| M | 38.17 | 15 | 10 |

How do you use the Internet in your job?

| | %Media |
|---|---------------|
| Research story ideas | 77.8 |
| Communicate with colleagues | 88.9 |
| Get more detail for a story | 73.0 |
| Stay current with industry trends | 71.9 |
| Read competitors' stories | 70.8 |
| Communicate with consumers | 58.1 |
| Use to do paperwork/complete forms associated with my job | 44.0 |
| Confirm sources | 41.2 |
| Other | 27.3 |
| I do not use the Internet in my job | 0.1 |

Where do you most often view online news?

| | %Public | %Media |
|---------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Home | 58.5 | 10.3 |
| Home Office | 10.3 | 8.2 |
| Office/Workplace | 29.9 | 79.6 |
| College/University | 0.7 | 0.7 |
| Other | 0.6 | 0.3 |
| I do not view news online | N/A | 1.0 |

How fast is the Internet connection you usually use to access news online?

| | %Public | %Media |
|-------------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| 19.2 Modem or slower | 0.1 | 0.1 |
| 28.8 Modem | 4.2 | 1.4 |
| 56K Modem | 46.3 | 12.5 |
| ISDN Line | 1.9 | 6.7 |
| Cable Modem/ Cable Connection | 15.6 | 7.0 |
| DSL (Digital Subscriber Line) | 10.7 | 9.4 |
| T1 or faster | 10.9 | 52.7 |
| I don't know | 10.3 | 10.4 |

How many times would you say you went to an online news site in the last week?

| | Mean number of times | Median number of times | Mode |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| P | 10.60 | 5 | 5 |
| M | 56.35 | 20 | 20 |

On average, how many hours a week would you say you spend online?

| | Mean number of times | Median number of times | Mode |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| P | 19.50 | 15 | 20 |
| M | 21.68 | 15 | 10 |

If you are not part of an Internet division/unit, how many times a week do you work with people in the Internet division/unit?

| Mean number of times |
|-----------------------------|
| 81.42 |

How many years have you been in the news business?

| Mean number of times | Median number of times | Mode |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| 16.02 | 15 | 20 |

What type of media do you currently work for?

| | Media |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| Local Newspaper | 46.5 |
| Local Television News | 9.3 |
| Local Newspaper website | 6.9 |
| Other News Website | 5.7 |
| National News Magazine | 3.6 |
| National Print News Magazine | 3.6 |
| News Magazine Website or e-zine | 3.5 |
| Local Radio Station | 3.4 |
| National Newspaper Website | 2.8 |
| National Print Newspaper | 2.8 |
| Free Lance | 2.0 |
| Wire Service | 1.9 |
| Cable Television News | 1.4 |
| Local TV Station Website | 0.9 |
| National Network News | 0.8 |
| National Radio Broadcast | 0.7 |
| Local Radio Station Website | 0.1 |
| Other | 7.8 |

What is your gender?

| | %Public | %Media |
|--------|---------|--------|
| Male | 46.5 | 60.5 |
| Female | 53.5 | 39.5 |

What age group do you fall in?

| | %Public | %Media |
|----------|---------|--------|
| Under 18 | 1.1 | 0.2 |
| 18-25 | 8.7 | 8.6 |
| 26-35 | 25.1 | 26.1 |
| 36-45 | 25.6 | 32.8 |
| 46-55 | 23.5 | 26.3 |
| 56-65 | 11.1 | 5.3 |
| 66-75 | 4.0 | 0.6 |
| 75 + | 1.0 | 0.1 |

Where do you live?

| | %Public | %Media |
|---------------|---------|--------|
| North-East | 18.9 | 19.3 |
| North-Central | 22.0 | 19.6 |
| South | 32.3 | 35.2 |
| West | 26.8 | 22.0 |
| Canada | NA | 1.4 |
| Other | NA | 2.5 |

Appendix D

Public Verbatim Responses

Cable Television News Station is Extremely Credible

“I have usually found the reporting to be crisp, accurate, and to the point (Wolf Blitzer hiding under a table in Dhahran in 1991 notwithstanding). It has proven as or more accurate than other sources in all the time I have observed its function.

•

“CNN’s coverage is very complete. After having someone there to cover the news, they always have insightful thought provoking discussions with well known experts afterwards.

•

“I think they would try to be extremely accurate in their news reporting because they have a lot at stake.

•

“Seems like the news they report never/seldom ever gets retracted.

•

“CNN’s whole purpose is news with very little of the extraneous topics (sports, entertainment)

•

“Because they did such a good job during Desert Storm... I really don’t have cable in my home, so I rarely rely on them. I am impressed by their coverage when I do see them.

•

“I feel all they concentrate on is reporting news immediately and completely

•

“Because, they seem very close to their sources and I’ve never heard of them being dishonest

•

“I watched CNN constantly during the gulf war and was very impressed with the coverage. I have watched it “ since.

•

“Reporting is more detailed and credible.

•

“Because of the resources that a news station like CNN has, they are better able to give, in my opinion, credible news. Resources such as foreign contacts and broadcasters help keep us up on foreign news as well as local.

•

“It is a national thing.

•

“Stories are checked out before airing, no apologies for jumping the gun on bad information.

“

I feel I get more in depth information. To me it’s like a knowledge surge.

“

They seem to be right on top of developing stories that affect us as a country, in a quick and accurate way.

“

I believe their stories are less swayed by advertisers and programming, and that they tend to check their facts more thoroughly before running with a “sensational” story.

•
•
“They seem to have reliable and up to date information, more so than local networks.

•
“They report the news as it’s happening and can quickly change their report to be more accurate if need be.

•
•
“They seemed very unbiased when reporting the news.

•
“CNN is straightforward news that covers US news as well as over seas news; they are on the scene to get the information in its truest form (right out of the horse mouth).

•
“I feel that CNN is one of the best news sources on TV and feel that their reputation speaks for itself.

•
“I watch CNN Headline News because they only lightly touch on the most important stories of the hour. They only spend a minute or two on each story, therefore there is little opportunity for opinion to be inserted into the reporting.

•
“They have good access to worldwide events and good interviewers that usually ask the right questions

•
“In general, I feel that these national news sources are very professional. In addition, they are under a lot of scrutiny due to their sheer reach and also competition from other news sources. This helps to “keep them honest”.

•
•
“Because of the fact that it’s live and they can update you as everything happens.

•
“CNN is a station that is dedicated to reporting news and non-fictional programs. In other words, CNN has informative programming not entertaining programming.

•
“I have not ever found any errors

•
“Specifically, CNN seems to be the most unbiased and willing to tackle any type of story, even a controversial one. MSNBC is almost as good. FOX News is good for science, etc., but their political reporting is conservatively biased.

•
“I really don’t think any of them are 100% credible, but there was no 4.5 score. All media sources make major mistakes from time to time, but personally when a major news story breaks I turn to MSNBC or CNN to bring me the most up to date and live reports. They always get a local affiliate to the scene the quickest and stay with the story, though sometimes annoying (as in the JFK Jr. situation) as we watched people standing around for days, doing nothing as their “Breaking News” flashed at us for days. I also like the personalities of both stations news anchors, and their unbiased opinion. Tonight they pulled no punches in the Conduit story and seem as always that they will be on the story to the bitter end. It also seems if they have made a mistake they are the first to retract the story and/or correct it.

•
“I have always found the information to be accurate and detailed.

•
“Up to date coverage on all breaking and pertinent news stories.

•
“Comes straight from the source; good reputation

•
“It has the most up to date news. It will go live if there was something that happened in the world.

“

It is my understanding that the national cable news programs are watched and regulated more closely, the information and sources are checked and double checked, and I enjoy them more because they are presented in a more direct and concise fashion.

“They seem more interested in reporting the facts rather than their own personal opinion. (Mike Wallace comes to mind as an example of an extremely opinionated reporter so consequently you can’t fully trust his assessment of a news item especially if it is pertaining to politics)

•
“Only the facts of the situation are reported from various other sources

•
“Their reporting tends to be from a different viewpoint than the pabulum offered on traditional network news.

•
“It is my perception that the information provided seems to be more objective, and it is more inclusive of world reporting.

•
“Despite it being a little slanted towards the liberal side of things because of Ted Turner owning it, they try to be as credible as possible, and I trust what is said on CNN.

•
“Being national, they have many different sources and are more likely to verify their sources than local stations.

•
“Every piece of news I ever hear first is on CNN before my local affiliates

•
“CNN makes me feel confident that the news they provide is real and actually occurring. Also, CNN’s news is national, and is reported from all around the world vs. local unimportant news.

•
“By watching frequently and being aware of any retractions/corrections and utilizing other sources.

•
“It is reliable, fast with news and known world wide for it’s reliability.

•
“CNN I believe receive prescreen news from sources around the world. So far they hadn’t retracted any news broadcasted.

•
“I believe they have incredible talent and the ability to ferret out the truth in most stories.

•
“They are right there with the news

•
“I have always relied on them for solid info—they don’t seem to be sensational, as some other stations can be. I don’t think they report things without solid backup.

•
“Proven reputation for accuracy

•
“They have demonstrated past commitment to responsible journalism, and their reports are up to the minute.

•
“They are current on the news and present it in a logical, clear manner. I believe that they have a good backup team that feeds them the latest news as accurately as possible.

•
“Past reputation proved trustworthy.

•
“They get accurate information.

•
“Because they give you up to date information.
•

“

Appear to have proven themselves over time as credible, no outstanding scandals involving their journalism.

“

Good reporting up to date coverage of world and national events

“

I believe they get their information from credible sources and they take the time to make sure it's accurate before reporting it.

“I like the way CNN is presented. I believe that CNN is more independent than other stations.

•
“You can trust that they are as accurate as they know and if a change or error comes up they let you know.

•
“The name CNN implies to me that it is a reliable source.

•
“I guess mainly because they always are updating the stories, so when you hear something of big importance, and keep following the story, they are willing to say, “hey-we just found out more, what we first reported may not have been what was first thought to be correct” But, who REALLY knows what the truth is in all cases-sometimes I’m not sure we ever get the full story no matter where or what you listen to or read. Actually, I really try to stay away from newspapers and such, because it really can be a negative influence. Mainly, if I read anything or listen, I scan for anything that could affect me or my family and look for anything of interest in our state/city, and don’t get in-depth with any stories.

•
“I watch Fox News and feel that they don’t think anything one political party or the other does is fine, no matter what and vice versa.

•
“Good reporting up to date coverage of world and national events

•
“On most stories they don’t carry the burden of being familiar with the story prior to reporting it. Also, their business is news, if they ever became something less than credible, they would have nothing.

Cable Television News Station is Not Credible at all

“They are bias toward special interest and do not give both sides of a story.

•
“They have shown a lack of responsibility in assuring the information they provide to the public is correct and accurate before broadcasting.

•
“To far Left wing

•
“CNN is far too left, reporting biased news

•
“I believe that CNN is way to liberal for my taste.

Cable Television News Web Site is Extremely Credible

“If it is a breaking story they usually have someone on site and conduct on site interviews. If it’s an older story they have documented coverage, interviews, etc.

•
“CNN seems to have the most up-to-date news without all the hype and sensationalism of local news. Also, I respect the talent of the news anchors and reports.

•
“I believe this because several times I have heard misreported news by local stations and CNN has always been correct.

•
“Because they use the same sources as their respective television stations and I find them extremely credible.

•
“They have reliable sources.

•
“The information always appears the most timely with regular updates.

“

The news organizations themselves are credible and their Web sites reflect the same credible reporting.

“I think the news on cable does not run on rumors like local papers or TV stations. I am talking local rumors on businesses such as Steel or Automobile companies or other things just to sell the time for ads.

•

“I feel they have broader responsibility to a greater number of viewers; objectivity is better

•

“Because I have been shown by history in reporting that these sites have been accurate and reasonably unbiased

•

“The information I have gathered there has been confirmed by other sources on many occasions.

•

“These Web sites are very extensive.

•

“Because they specialize in news and headlines not like local news where entertainment is the most important thing.

•

“The information proves to be accurate most of the time.

•

“Cause they are updated so quickly and so frequently that the data is rarely ever stale.

•

“It appears that most of their news stories are true.

•

“Seems to be credible based on experience

•

“I feel I can trust them because they are up to date with their information and yes, they have reported falsities in the past but they have corrected themselves very quickly.

•

“They don’t twist stories like the local news

•

“They quite often are reporting directly from the site of the news source. Certainly one of the most impressive examples was the gulf war reporting.

•

“Their reporters seem to be articulate, and very well read, as well as being able to use logic to enhance their reports. In other words, their not “news readers”.

•

“Because of the reputation

•

“I have a sense they provide more detailed unbiased information than other news reporting services.

•

“They continuously work the news items for accuracy and updates, correcting as necessary, and thereby increasing the credibility of the stories they report.

•

“I think the news source is CNN or NBC, which are credible.

•

“They’re well known.

•

“They seem to have the most details on breaking news much quicker than other news sites. They also carry international as well as national news and encompass many different types of news including headlines, sports, entertainment and health.

•

“These Web sites have enough time to make sure news related stories are correct. Broadcasting news too quickly can cause errors. Remember the president election.

“

We are fortunate to live in a fairly rural area. Most of the news here is of less significant importance as compared to National News. We have a great news team, they do a lot of on the scene reports that add much credibility to their reports.

•
“This is there primary focus and they have the resources to verify what they report.

•
“CNN.com seems to be very professional and accurate.

•
“I believe that they really do their research before running a story, and when they have been wrong in the past, they immediately announce it and apologize for it.

•
“I believe it be credible because I think those cable TV stations are generally credible.

•
“I see them having more time to prepare.

•
“Reputation and reviews

•
“It seems that they tend to be the first to report national news. For local news they are not very good at getting the news.

•
“I have never found a reason not to believe what I had heard on Cable Television News Web site.

•
“Reputation and history - awards within the industry

•
“I think they have the best sources.

•
“I feel that on the Web site they can add additional facts as they happen. A newspaper has to wait for the next edition the following day.

Cable Television News Web Site is Not Credible at all

“I feel that CNN and MSNBC have a very left wing liberal agenda. They don't report the news they create the news. The ONLY credible news source I have found is FOX NEWS. I resent the liberal media acting like I am some kind of idiot who needs to be told HOW to think. I rarely give any credibility to any of them. Also, how many news people actually research their stories? It is incredible to me that they just take it off the wire. Plus, they makes a HUGE paycheck and then think that the citizens of this country who make 60,000 or more are selfish for wanting to keep a little more of what they worked so hard for.

•
“I believe they are very liberal in their politics and very one-sided with their news stories.

Local Broadcast Television News is Extremely Credible

“The news they reported was the same as in the local paper.

•
“They are very visible in the community and their reputation is at stake if they are not.

•
“I can really trust what they say. my local TV new really cares about their community and it shows.

•
“News happening in your town

•
“The anchors on our local channels report the facts; the anchors on (most) national broad-casts (i.e. CBS, ABC, NBC) always insert or insinuate their opinions (which are usually lib-eral). I find that the exception to this is FOX news network.

•
“As far as I can tell they always report the news as it happens without adding to it.
•

“
I can go to that Web site and follow-up on a story I read in the paper

“I trust my local news. They have been reliable in the past; they cover breaking stories accurately.

•

“They know what is going on locally. They are right on top of things and I watch them to see what is happening.

•

“It is the actual and in-depth new cast that I watch.

•

“I feel they are very accurate with their information, and are on top of the news. They send you the information as quick as they get it.

•

“I like to hear the local news, and they get their info from larger sites

•

“Because the news correlates with other news stations that I trust such as CNN, and I have not yet found discrepancies

•

“Because they usually send out reporters to the actual spot of news being reported on.

•

“I feel I get more accurate local news from our local stations.

•

“Because they are local and I have seen most of them and know through previous experience they are often right.

•

“Because they thoroughly find the facts and have wider range of coverage...and have follow-ups to previous stories

•

“Enough stations to have watchdogs, also newspaper affiliated.

•

“They are usually live on the scene and know what is happening real-time

Local Broadcast Television News is Not Credible at All

“I live in a very small community. The local paper and radio station are managed very unprofessionally

•

“They’re trying to sell products through advertising, therefore they do not broadcast stories, or details of stories, that might cause offense.

•

“They are corporate owned and just are too one sided.

•

“Too often, local broadcasts are caught in mistakes glaring enough to have to make retractions when caught by the public. I’m sure others make mistakes, too, but getting caught by the Average Joe means your credibility is really Low.

Local Newspaper Web Site is Extremely Credible

“They seem to have the same stories as my local newspaper, and it is usually right on the money.

•

“I feel very comfortable with my local newspaper

•

“I trust legitimate (non-tabloid) newspapers as objective sources with professional journalistic standards.

•

“They tell the truth and won’t go around the facts or make up things to make the story better..they just stick with what happens

“

Most newscast whether it be radio /TV/ news print seems extremely bias. I can compare local stations to draw my own conclusion

“

They do not interview subjects accurately

•
“It just seems credible

•
“I feel that Boston.com is a reliable source.

•
“I use the NYTimes Web site. Everything is almost instantly up to date and seems to be as unbiased as possible.

•
“Because the sources for the local news is the same as for the national news sites.

•
“AP listings, I find are usually credible.

Local Newspaper Web Site is Not Credible at All

•
“It is not updated frequently enough

•
“Because the local newspaper is a rag.

•
“In print and on the Web, the “Philadelphia Inquirer” has demonstrated ultra-left-wing liberal bias.

Local Print Newspaper is Extremely Credible

•
“I trust my local authorities to provide correct information

•
“I should be able to trust my local newspaper to give me the truth about what’s going on locally and around the world

•
“They always supply us with local happenings and worldwide events on the first few pages.

•
“Because I have found out that they do not print anything that they do not know for sure about it being true. They are there or get the report from the person that it has happened to.

•
“I believe daily newspapers are credible because they come out daily and have established themselves.

•
“They are usually extremely accurate on what goes on.

•
“This is because I can verify the news stories easier.

•
“It usually is credible. They try very hard to get the facts before they go to print. Sometimes, they make a mistake and have to print a retraction. But, if they didn’t make mistakes, they wouldn’t be human.

•
“They seem to be very candid in their reporting, and although some articles are somewhat biased, they still report the facts accurately.

•
“I trust local newspapers... I just think of them as hard hitting, go out and get the news kind of reporters.

•
“The Des Moines Register is known nationally and lauded as a top newspaper for its quality and scope.

•
“Because they are telling what is happening in your area locally. It is not a newspaper that acts like a tabloid. It directly lets you know pertinent information concerning your city, city hall news, etc.

“

Live in little hick town and newspaper comes out twice a week. It’s full of typos, incorrect information, and tells nothing beyond the local scene.

“

Nothing I can put into words, just the way I feel!

•
 “Our local paper, the News & Observer has a long history of responsible and committed journalism. Its reporters frequently win national awards for excellence in journalism. The N&O gives an accurate, reasoned account of the day’s news.

•
 “I believe they have credible resources.

•
 “I’ve followed some of the stories and they are very thorough and accurate...

Local Print Newspaper is Not Credible at All

“Monopoly

•
 “The Local Print Newspaper is very biased, based upon their own political views and do not report the news as it really happens.

•
 “Believe they are very biased on most subjects

•
 “Extreme left-wing bias, “news” presented with only perspective with additional opinions and propagandizing presented as fact, while real, verifiable facts not supporting their view omitted.

•
 “They never have the stories correct even down to the name

•
 “The local newspaper seems to be a collection of the opinions of the leaders within the organizations that run them. There is no longer even a pretense to relay accurate, credible information.

•
 “It has a very liberal take on things. It was not interested when it was informed about how a local school went up in flames, it just swept it under the rug.

•
 “From time to time there have been things in print that aren’t the truth or are only part of the truth.

•
 “Material is usually biased and not impartial. I believe they slant the news and select what is important to their cause. I would prefer simple known facts and truths and let me have my own opinion based on unbiased reporting. Both local newspapers are extremely liberal and seem to be more interested in promoting their position.

Local Radio Station is Extremely Credible

•
 “In comparison with the other news heard, they may expand on the news in comparison with the short sound bites of the national news stations.

•
 “The particular station I listen to is geared for news and traffic, sports, etc. It is solely in the business of bringing the news and information as it happens.

•
 “I feel they tell the story complete

•
 “The local radio stations get their information from local people as it is happening as well as from other sources.

•
 “I listen to the radio more than watch TV or check the news on the Web. I commute to work for an hour total every day (m-f).

•
 “Has been very credible in its reporting of local news and weather.

“

I am very confident in their news

“

I think their reports are snoopy enough to find out things that maybe people should not know but they report them anyway. So I think they are up to date on ALL the news...Both good and bad!

•
“The personnel seem to be very knowledgeable and what they say seems credible. They substantiate what they tell by giving details and interviews. If they don’t know they will say details are sketchy and they will follow up with details later.

•
“It always give the most up to date news

•
“Covers in depth stories that are only briefly reported, or not reported at all in the main-stream news media.

•
“The station provides in depth information and just headlines

“
Big names=extremely credible

•
“I trust local radio news sources because the topics often reported can be directly verified by area listeners. I trust radio newscasts much more than print and TV newscasts; radio reports are generally more factual, succinct, and subject to far less sensationalizing (no visual emotions evoked). Also, fewer advertisers potentially altering the flavors of their market image.

•
“They report the news from other printed sources.

•
“It focuses on my community, so it’s easier to confirm the news

Local Radio Station Web Site is Extremely Credible

“It has a lot of the local news on it. I like to listen to what is local and national and it has both

•
“I trust WIN

•
“I know the personalities at the station from listening for a long time and they seem to be consistent in their views and consistent with mine

“
I’ve just learned to rely on them for news everyday.You tend to feel like you have a trusting relationship with the news anchor after many years.

•
“I’m more familiar with the subjects and they have proven to be more believable.

•
“Local news or sports event covered in detail I am looking for.

•
“They have an accurate account of news items, unlike our local newspaper

Local Radio Station Web Site is Not Credible at All

“They sensationalize the news. They take anything and everything out of context to make a nothing situation seem like earth shaking news.

•
“That is not their primary business

•
“They are not a news gathering organization but merely repeat wire service stories that they have re-written and I have found them to be less than accurate at that.

•
“Not available as far as I know. Local radio is not good about up to date news and always gives conflicting reports.

•
“Not updated as often as TV newscasts. Seems they do not break in as often with urgent or emergency news.

Local Radio Station is Not Credible at All

“Because they seem to make little things into big things. Seem to be making news rather than reporting it, it’s all about ratings

“Make fun of the news. Never sure what is real.

Local Television Station Web Site is Extremely Credible

“They have quite a bit of information, it’s user friendly, and I trust the content because “they” are local.

•

“I trust the particular station and its anchors. I feel that they report news accurately, even when it’s controversial.

•

“They seem to be up to date with what I am hearing everywhere else

•

“They (all three) seem to tell the facts about a story and not to tell you what they want to hear. I have yet to catch them in a lie.

•

“The reporters are usually reporting live from a scene and will state that they will report more later if they don’t have more info. I have not heard of any incidents where they did not tell the truth.

•

“The stories are well researched and seldom have any retractions been needed. The personal opinions expressed (slant) of the author are kept to a minimum.

•

“It is as credible as the TV site itself because they have the same news.

•

“I trust the stories they run—a lot of them are run on numerous stations, newspaper, etc., so that confirms to me that they have gotten their story from a legitimate source.

•

“Why not? They’re affiliated with local and national TV stations. It’s the same news only on the computer.

•

“I completely rely on KOMOTV4 news reports from Seattle and their Web site has the same information that they report on during their news broadcasts. I have watched their reports for years on the television and have complete confidence in their reporting.

Local Television Station Web Site is Not Credible at All

“I think local stations don’t have the talent pool that national ones do. The people are more inexperienced.

•

“Because it doesn’t have enough information

•

“They are biased and liberal and do not report the full truth of most national stories.

•

“Poorly written, incomplete small town newspaper, and the Web site is worse

National Broadcast Television Web site is Extremely Credible

“ABC News is the best

•

“Projected reliability, Confidence, in-depth, display relevant news affecting day to day life

•

“I think National Broadcast Television is very credible and I think Web sites created by the same news producing agencies are equally credible.

•

“It’s a reputable source.

•

“They seem to be right on the spot at the time of breaking news.



“

Seems like they don’t report anymore, they editorialize

•
“I feel the broadcast and network is trustworthy and reputable whereas they have more on the line if there accuracy was questioned. Further I haven’t recently heard the need to rescind information from a previous date due to an error.

•
“I just believe it is

•
“The connection with ABC, a company that I feel is conscientious about accurate reporting.

•
“I think that they would check their stories in greater depth due to the fact that their audience is so large.

•
“They have never steered me wrong in the past

National Broadcast Television Web Site is Not Credible at All

•
“Too far left.

•
“News is very one-sided and brings only a certain kind of news. Not per se the truth.

•
“They report only facts support the side of the story that favors their opinion. They present people who hold opinions similar to theirs in favorable light and different pinions in an unfavorable contrast. They don’t report the facts they embellish them. You have to work extra hard to separate the wheat from the chaff in their stories.

•
“It has a left-wing liberal bias on most if not all news stories.

National Network News is Extremely Credible

•
“Being a popular broadcasting channel, they would have to keep up with their reputation also, they are current with the news

•
“I would think that national network news couldn’t afford to make untrue statements to the public. They can’t loose their audience and rating, which they would by misleading and untrue statements.

•
“Report to the nation-seem to get news first

•
“Reputation

•
“They have to have to correct info because it is going everywhere.

•
“They are vulnerable to law suits/criticism if they are inaccurate, they have a reputation to maintain and advertisers to account to, they are privy to the latest technologies and a world-wide net of sources which lets them in on the latest-breaking news from credible organizations

•
“They seem to get the story right the first time. They get all the facts, and stay with the story till the end.

•
“National news source is more reliable, and draws upon a greater number of sources.

•
“I do believe they are credible, and watch all four daily to get all the facts.

•
“So many people keeping them honest

“
Well they have top-notch writers..and since they are national..they make sure that their information is as accurate as possible so they don’t get sued

“
They seem to get the story right the first time.They get all the facts, and stay with the story till the end.

“They have millions of viewers and would likely be found out if they reported inaccurate news.

•

“Its just that Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw and/or Peter Jennings have been in the biz for too long not to be credible.

•

“I feel that they cover the news in depth

•

“Because it’s national

•

“Because they always give a lot of news about things that are happening in my state.

•

“I trust that they research a story and get all the facts straight before they present it to the general public.

•

“They give more comprehensive coverage of national news than the local stations

•

“With a larger audience, they have greater liability if they’re wrong

•

“I believe that Fox news is credible. It seems to always have the most balanced news reports. You get both sides of the story not just one side.

•

“I feel that the national networks have to uphold their integrity and therefore must get accurate news.

•

“The news seems to be consistent with all of them

•

“They have to be. They research everything before they go out on a limb.

•

“Always on... know what time to expect news... large coverage of events, not like local radio station tidbits of news every so often... always see national news teams traveling to catch the newest news

•

“I believe the reputation of credibility and accuracy has been established over a long period of time. Also, when errors are made, they try to retract or clarify and questionable material. Coverage is (in my opinion) very thorough and usually leaves little questions unanswered.

•

“Because I feel that they being “national network news” that they would have the best access to the news

•

“Too many people watching them to take risks.

•

“They are up to date on the top stories of the day and week, they sometimes overdue the story but if you want to be up to date just watch them for a short period of time

•

“I respect those news organizations and journalists and their research/reporting standards

•

“They have the broadest range of resources to get the story right. Plus, their reputation enables them to get closer to the story/sources than a local news reporter would.

•

“I believe all news reports are credible as they are merely broadcasting the same news from the same few credible news sources.

“

I just feel they have the resources to thoroughly research their stories.

•
“Everyone reports the same thing

•
“I believe they try really hard to get to the truth of each story.

•
“Generally this news services check/confirm the accuracy of their reports before broadcast

•
“I think they do a good job of checking to make sure their news is reliable mainly by spending the money to have lots of sources.

•
“National Network News is an extremely credible source because they are placed under tighter scrutiny and must research their stories and sources more than many other news sources. Also, they have more resources at their disposal.

•
“Mainly because you get bipartisan reporting. Even if they mess up, they admit it and then attempt to give all sides of the news.

“
For me it comes to the point of credibility. They are very thorough in their reports and I find the work worthy.

•
“Those broadcasts seem to have a lot of effort, time, and “credibility” behind them. All these news shows always have lots of information about the topics they present, and it seems that lots of sources have been checked to get accurate information.

•
“they usually report things right away and as they are.

•
“Based on my personal experience of years of watching the Network News - especially ABC News with Peter Jennings.

National Network News is Not Credible at All

“For the most part these Networks have a very Liberal slant on how they present their news and the stories they opt to air. Their bias reports are way off base from the truth. They also seldom report stories or opinion Polls that do not fit their Liberal views. You ask and so I told you.

•
“Their information and their sources are skewed and are very subjective to the lower echelons of society.

•
“They don’t give all sides of the issue and down play conservative facts that support the less liberal view point

•
“I believe that MOST of the national network news is extremely biased to the FAR LEFT and does not treat Conservatives, Republicans, Christians or Pro-Lifers fairly. They have their own agenda and only tell the listeners what they WANT them to hear about the news.

National News Print Magazine is Extremely Credible

•
“I have never heard that it was incorrect and the stories are very well written

•
“I feel that a great amount of time and effort goes into preparing special articles for these type of magazines. Interesting detail, and even trivia. The fact that special pictures and even a special sitting for pictures for certain articles give them credibility.

•
“The fact that other news sources quote them.

•
“I feel Time is a very credible news source. Their articles are very informative.

•
“Good name. Been around a long time

•
 “I feel that those magazines have had a long standing in the community and they have a high standard to make sure of the facts.

•
 “They have been around for a number of years and as far as I can tell report the news accurately.

•
 “I’ve found in the past that these periodicals are extremely reliable as they have a reputation for being thorough when checking facts and sources.

•
 “I have read various articles from these types of magazines and have seen the same story on TV. The authors are very credible

“I think most news magazines check their sources carefully.

•
 “They investigate, require writers to have credible sources, are careful about getting facts correctly stated, their reputations are important to them

•
 “I believe that federal regulations imposed on news sources today, as well as civil liability, go a long way to ensure that only supportable facts are published.

•
 “Good reputation, have the resources to get the info

•
 “Because they always have a story in full with evidence

•
 “Long standing reputation. Need to protect reputation by being a credible source.

•
 “Good reputation

•
 “I tend to believe what I see in print at a national level rather than an online or local paper.

•
 “I believe those companies would only hire top notch reporters

•
 “I feel that they do their research before they print any information.

•
 “I believe that they have more time to research a story before releasing it to the public.

•
 “High quality research and vetting of sources

•
 “Usually the story is somewhat dated which allows for more research into it’s sources credibility.

•
 “Because of the deadlines I believe they would have more time to check informants etc.

•
 “If they were not the public would not support them

•
 “These sources revenue is based on the fact that the news they present is timely and correct....seldom, if ever, have I heard a demand for retraction of information provided by these sources. When in graduate school, I often went to these sources as a ground building/ supportive resource. Today in my research I still look to these sources for the trends that they report

•
 “They just seem very on top of their sources and reliable most of the time.

“

Because the news that they deliver is always accurate and informative. If I want to hear exactly what is going on around the world and at home, I know that I can tune into that station and get the information that I need.

“Detailed stories

•
“They check their facts and generally aren’t biased politically.

•
“They generally have more time than newspapers or broadcasters to verify their stories and correct initial errors.

•
“They seem like a reputable magazine. I don’t believe that they will do anything to get a story.

•
“They take the time to research the situation before printing an article about it.

•
“Since they are national and have a lot of money to lose, I don’t think they’d outright lie or distort

•
“Mainly because I don’t think they would print something that was untrue, like a tabloid newspaper or magazine.

•
“It seems that their primary function is as a news resource. I trust that more than the more commercial media of TV and Internet.

•
“Newsweek gives in-depth coverage of the stories that they cover.

National Newspaper Web Site is Extremely Credible

“I’ve always trusted The New York Times.

•
“Because I trust their print news and so far I have not found any incorrect information on the Web sites

•
“I check USA Today on line all the time and they seem to be more up to date on current events and the most credible paper out there

•
“I have found their articles of interest and well researched

•
“Because the national newspapers are very credible

•
“I think they are credible organizations that review their material before they post it.

•
“I like USA Today. I find a lot of good info there.

•
“I don’t understand why people think that a Web site is any less credible than print. The same source is divulging the same information in 2 different forms. How can I not find it credible?

•
“Because of their print-version reputations.

National Newspaper Web Site is Not Credible at All

“NY Times and USA Today are extremely liberal rags that are basically equipped to do one thing. Use as packing material around my breakables.

•
“New York Times - Their latest survey on the President’s performance used methods criticized as inaccurate by some of the best pollsters in the country. The NYT then used the results of that poll as if they were big news. That is creating news, not reporting news, which is one of the things which make the NYT unreliable for news reporting.

“

Because they seem more interested in reporting the news than in ratings — no plastic looking anchors who banter inanely.

•
 “National Newspapers and their Web sites are biased. They are either very left oriented, conservative or environmental activist. There is no balance.

National Print Newspaper is Extremely Credible

“Their information is the most up-to-date and only reports proven factual material. From a business standpoint and world affairs and even sports they have proven most accurate and detailed. For entertainment I may look elsewhere.

•
 “The information was factual based

•
 “National established periodicals seem to have in place better controls insuring journalistic integrity. This doesn’t necessarily mean personal opinions don’t shade the slant of reporting but at least they are factual.

•
 “The Wall Street Journal handles news items in an every evenhanded manner

•
 “Since they are such widely distributed periodicals they would have a lot of difficulty getting away with inaccuracies; someone would be bound to catch them and make known any mistakes. Also, being larger organizations they should have many sources for accurate news and should have well-established contacts and tipsters.

•
 “I feel that a national newspaper, that is not a tabloid centered, is extremely credible. They tend to have the best writers and resources.

•
 “Because they get their information from good sources, and have proven themselves credible by using more facts than opinion.

•
 “Historic context

•
 “News paper print is how everyone gets their news it has to be credible

•
 “I believe they are written without commercial interference.

•
 “The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal have good reputations.

•
 “The Wall Street Journal is printed (on paper), has been around for a long time and is not liberally biased.

•
 “The scale of the resources available to them, as well as the immense possible loss of credibility makes false stories very unlikely.

•
 “It’s the traditional way that I have received information and have not found them to be erroneous in the past - frequently because they are not forced to get news out as quickly as Web sites are.

•
 “Reputation

•
 “Ethical journalism standards

•
 “They give good info and it is almost always accurate.

•
 “It covers top stories around the nation. all the stories are true to knowledge

“

I’ve never found it to be anything else.

“I feel like a paper like the NYT has high standards of accuracy, and is thus more credible than my local paper.

•
“Their articles seem unbiased, well written, they seem to use good sources, and nothing seems to be taken out of context.

•
“Due to regulation and liability, I believe that they review their news sources carefully.

•
“The stories tend to go into more depth. They are not just reprints off the wire.

•
“Well established. I read The NY Times & the Wall St. Journal. I trust their writers & editors. I have not heard/read derogatory statements about either paper.

•
“I feel that these papers are accredited organizations with an obligation to providing credible and responsible journalism.

•
“I think these sources have more time before print to check their sources than say a local paper.

•
“It seems as though they print less dramatic stories and try to stick to truly “newsworthy” items.

•
“These seem to have a prime reputation for putting the news first.

•
“I feel as if the newspapers just mentioned have more money to use to get the complete story. Also the New York Times has a long history or credible articles and research. I consider it a credible source for news.

•
“Due to the reporter’s accuracy. They seem to dig just a little deeper especially USA Today. They give you “facts” that most others don’t give you until afterwards.

•
“I believe because those papers reach more people the reporting has to be more accurate because of the exposure.

•
“By word of mouth reputation

•
“They print more informative articles with much less objectivity.

•
“There information is consistent with what is happening in the United States and World + the local newspapers and sites quote articles from them.

•
“They have a good reputation.

•
“Found that USA Today and WSJ usually are factual on a regular basis.

•
“They are big time newspapers and they know what they are doing. They got their credibility from being the best.

•
“Basically, they don’t print trash, i.e. National Enquirer, they print credible news and they are not known as a muckraking paper

National Print Newspaper is Not Credible at All

“

“These sources have a long-standing reputation for responsible reporting, and their reports have been verifiable historically.”

“They have their own political agenda and care nothing for the reality of the situation. They are editorializing, (fictionalizing), not presenting the news.

National Radio Broadcast is Extremely Credible

“They tend to present a balanced report neither liberal nor conservative.

•

“Un-biased reporting of the day’s events, non-profit, so not influenced by advertising dollars. I believe it is an unbiased news source.

•

“They have less of an “agenda” and do not rely on sensationalism to get the point across.

•

“I find NPR to have a less biased view on the news. It’s more informative than other news sources.

•

“They keep their politics out of their reporting

•

“World class reporting. Intelligent reporting. I’ve been a listener for 20 years and they haven’t let me down.

•

“There is no “fluff,” just information.

•

“NPR in particular, while coming from a generally liberal philosophical standpoint, takes the time to explore a story or a news happening in real depth. They also present news happenings in foreign countries that our national commercial media will never cover. “Morning Edition” and “All Things Considered” are must-hear programs for my wife and I.

•

“They are publicly funded.

•

“Because it comes from many different sources

•

“Tend to be factual with interviews with extremely well regarded commentators and figures.

•

“They present information in a realistic way. Unlike most news corporations that are trying to sway the consumer for or against something.

•

“This for NPR and Public TV only 1. No sponsors influence 2. reputation for truth 3. reputation for in depth coverage, seriously lacking in others

•

“More immune to ratings influence

•

“Since there are no advertisers to influence the slant of the news, I feel the news that is reported is honestly the truth.

•

“NPR tends to go into a great deal of depth in their interview process

•

“I feel the news they deliver is current, accurate and fairly truthful.

•

“Not funded by government monies....no ratings system, fairly honest and straightforward approach to communication what is important and no fluff!!

•

“They do a lot of research and use many sources from many areas of the world. Also, they do not seem to have to cater to sponsors.

•
“I like the station, and they seem very credible to me.

•
“It is reputable and has had a long history of worthy news items.

•
“No apparent bias or biased in an opposite direction. Leads me to see the “other side”

•
“I trust them more than other sources to be accurate and unbiased.

•
“The reporters and interviewers don’t seem to do articles with fluff. You hear the whole picture and the facts seem to be clear. If they’re not they present their information in a way that you know it’s just opinion and could be different.

•
“I feel that the NPR (as it is funded by viewers) is less biased to corporate sponsorship.

•
“Because they have the same news coverage as CNN

•
“NPR is thorough, unbiased, and focused when reporting. They are also intelligent - which I cannot say for the majority of news venues.

•
“They get their news from the same place...plus it doesn’t hurt they some are affiliated with the big networks

•
“I trust the BBC news to give the news as it happens with out commentary which shades most other news reports.

•
“Feel they go more in depth in their stories. To do so, they need to investigate more thoroughly.

•
“They don’t have to answer to sponsors. They have a more independent focus.

•
“The reporting is more in-depth than is usual in non-print media. NPR in particular has earned my trust over many years of consistently high-quality reportage and commentary.

•
“I listen to “Morning Edition” and “All Things Considered” on NPR almost every day. Even if they have their own slant, they always cover all sides of an issue in much more depth than any of the major networks.

•
“They must maintain credibility and have high standards for their employee professionals.

•
“These types of sources have years of proof behind their performance and I think that adds to the air of credibility they have.

•
“They seem to have the news first and do not report guesses such as the winner of the presidential election.

•
“I have never experienced or been aware of any credibility issues regarding NPR especially as compared to the regular news stations. And we all know about their credibility. It’s very difficult to put into words but I guess the reason I trust NPR over others is that their agenda has always seem to be about ALL NEWS. It doesn’t feel manipulated.

•
“I think that NPR is much more credible because they are not influenced as much by commercial monies.

•
 “I assume that the technology is better and they are better able to have access to the latest news from reliable sources.

•
 “They even do reporting on how credible they aren’t for example a report told how Koki Roberts and her husband took a large sum of money for a talk while being against the minimum wage

•
 “Widely known, reputation for checking sources, professional

•
 “NPR, for example, covers stories I never hear or read anywhere else. They seem to think more “globally” regarding news than other news sources. I enjoy the depth of coverage they give important news items. I’ve learned background information that have contributed to current events, i.e. Kosovo conflict, Israeli-Palestinian violence, recent Presidential election. They also don’t waste time with trash or sensational stories that get far too much time on the local stations. NPR is, in my opinion, far above any other news source.

•
 “I’m not sure I am answering this accurately... I am thinking of NPR and BBC when I answer this question. They are credible because they have to be. Not that they should have any reason to wish to be anything but credible, but even if they should so desire

•
 “I believe that NPR takes more time to verify information and sources. Their news items are less sensational and more in-depth than other local news radio.

National Radio Broadcast is Not Credible at All

“Very small minded opinionated self-righteous broadcasters

•
 “NPR is consistently leftist.

•
 “Their past reporting of social theories as fact not supposition. Poor attention to technology based news in so far that the commentator seemed to impose their feelings not explain facts.

•
 “It depends on the Disc jockey on how and what they decide to say, at times I believe that they leave things out just to make it have a sensational appeal. All about ratings.

•
 “Too liberal

News Magazine Web Site or e-Zine is Extremely Credible

“Well because the Web site is all about the news and nothing else...I mean they don’t have shopping or games just news

•
 “www.disinformation.com, salon.com are credible because they know that AP doesn’t mean always perfect. When every type of media gets their news “facts” from one source, it is no longer credible - it is a disseminated diet of half-truths and editorials, meant for the public to easily digest. These independent online news sources strive to seek out the truth as they find it as journalists, not let someone else do the dirty work for them. Their thinking for themselves allows me to do the same.

•
 “They are a liberal news.

•
 “The information is up to date and fairly complete.

•
 “Because I believe that they are unbiased and credible

“

“I think there is pressure with their exposure to be accurate or they would be exposed quite easily for inaccuracies.

“Their news has proven to be so in my experience.

•

“After using other news methods, the news Web sites, appear to have the latest news and most acute.

•

“Have found nothing that makes me think they are not credible.

News Magazine Web Site or e-zine is Not Credible at All

“Because most media tends to go for sensationalism and not real journalistic integrity.

•

“I am unsure whether the site would be credible, although I suppose it should be as credible as the magazine itself.

•

“Most political reports are slanted to the left. While I am not, by any stretch a right-winger, I would prefer a balanced approach.

Other News Web Site is Extremely Credible

“Whenever I use yahoo and compare to CNN they are very close in what they are saying and in time it comes out true

•

“I have found what I read there to be true and correct.

•

“Fair and balanced

•

“AOL reports known issues that are correct - all to often newspapers - news stations etc.... don't always have the correct info and sometimes fill in blanks - have not seen that with AOL

•

“They list several sources for their info. I read the various reports & try to decide for myself what might true or exaggerated.

•

“No medic company would reach such a vast number of readers unless they were “on the money”

•

“I use yahoo.com every day from work, and I find that it is very up-to-date and accurate. Also the writing style is thorough and informative. Also, new news appears on yahoo.com the moment it arrives instead of waiting for the newspaper the next day.

•

“The information is obtained by national news sources.

•

“My searches

Appendix E

Verbatim Responses of Those Who Work for an Online News Source

“All media have practitioners that range from the highest of integrity to the lowest. Most of the people working in online journalism have received the same training as traditional journalists. Indeed most have worked in both fields. I think it’s not much use at this point in the history of online journalism to try to draw distinctions between it and traditional media.

•

“All the studies I’ve seen suggest that the public is less concerned about online news credibility than the journalists are.

•

“Apples and oranges. “Online news” runs the gamut from the NY Times (excellent) to the National Enquirer (scary.) And you cannot compare the credibility of the Los Angeles Times with a local television news station whose idea of hard news is a tie-in with a Star Trek show.

•

“As a journalist who recently switched from daily metro newspapers to an online news site, I feel I can speak about both groups with some accuracy. I have seen absolutely no conflicts of interest or ethical lapses in the world of online journalism. I can honestly say that I have never been close to crossing the line between editorial and advertising while working as an online journalist. By contrast, local political skirmishes and decades-old business relationships occasionally became an issue at several of the newspapers where I worked previously. The fact that online news organizations have fewer commercial and political ties rooted deeply in one geographic region (for example, ties to certain city council members or political figures, or car dealerships or other large advertisers) actually minimizes the number of ethical gray zones and conflicts of interest for online journalists, in my experience.

•

“As an online editor who was asked to doctor stories to gain the sponsor’s approval of them, I’d say online news credibility is heading south. Newspapers, magazines, TV and radio have not had to worry about finding a workable business model. They’ve had one, that works — more or less — for years. The struggle for profitability, I believe, is really hurting online news.

•

“Because online news is a new medium, people will need time to accept it. It’s odd that if something is in print, people think it’s true, often regardless of the source. But you can have something online from a trusted source, yet folks might have trouble swallowing it. Over time, though, the public will come to trust the right Web sites and learn to roll their eyes at the others. It’s the same thing we do when we go through the line at the grocery store. We stare down and read the first graph on the local paper in the stand but then laugh and roll our eyes at the National Enquirer. This will happen online, too.

•

“Because the Internet allows for continuous, endless updates and corrections of not only current news stories but also those in the archives, I consider online news to be MORE CREDIBLE than print and broadcast stories, in which errors cannot be corrected after the fact and which can become outdated and obsolete within hours, or even minutes.

“

A well-presented and professional online news site is as credible as a good newspaper or magazine. The online news sources use the same sources and the same processes but the way and method of presentation are only different because the two differ in the ways they target their audience.

“

Credibility is more difficult online. TV tells us ten times an hour how wonderful their coverage is. Print has the reputation. We have an uphill battle building credibility with our audience in the online world. We have to earn it over time.

•

“Depends on the online news site. Credibility tends to be associated with the relationship a site has to traditional media - I would trust a national newspaper’s online site (nytimes.com, for instance) considerably more than I would trust a national broadcast television online site (abcnews.com, for instance,) which reflects that I would trust The New York Times newspaper far more than I would trust ABC TV news. So to me, online media trustworthiness relates directly to the non-online media a site is associated with, even though I know that the online news operation is a separate business unit in many cases. NPR, a national radio news program, passes on its credibility to NPR.org.

•

“For online newspapers, the content is generally the same as the paper and credibility is comparable. In general I would trust online news more than TV or radio although all three suffer from the perils of speed versus accuracy.

•

“I am most impressed by the Web sites produced by individual journalists or cooperatives. They may have a specific point of view not found on corporate Web sites that may lack the merits by which we traditionally measure “credibility” — yet in this realm, is where breaking news is found. Good examples (and very different from one another) are Narconews.com and Planeta.com

“I believe online news is generally regarded as less reliable than that found in reputable newspapers and magazines and about on a par with radio and television news.

•

“I believe that in dealing with news-specific sites (News.com, cnn.com, etc.), the credibility is the same as that of news from newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio. The issue, I believe is one of PERCEIVED credibility. Many sites that are not news-specific have damaged the reputation of online news by publishing poorly researched, incorrect, or clearly biased stories as straight-up news. As a result, there is a certain wariness when it comes to online news as a whole—including sites that do a good job of reporting researched facts.

“

I think there is more of a danger of unfiltered “news” with online. As journalists, we have to be just as skeptical of the information we receive online as from any other source, but I doubt the consumer is as skeptical.

•

“I consider online news more credible on the whole than print or broadcast journalism. In many ways, online sites have more going for them than their offline counterparts. The best sites take advantage of the Net’s natural assets: The Internet is nonlinear, letting us call up stories, or drill down to related stories, on our own time frame; it’s instantaneous and convenient, with breaking news only a mouse click away; it offers authentication value, letting reporters point users to source documentation rather than telling them to just trust us; it offers alternative voices (and overlooked stories) not found in the mainstream media; and, most critically, it offers the potential for interactivity and common.

•

“I find news from the on-line versions of established and trustworthy news organizations more credible than print or broadcast because I know that on-line news is more likely to be fresh and up-to-the-minute while print and broadcast are more likely to have been overtaken by events.

•

“I find that the credibility on many online news sites is compromised by “sponsored content” and the heavy hand of advertisers. Some editors who work in on-line sites say they don’t consider their work “journalism.”

•

“I think most of the online news sites with the highest credibility are those that are partnered with print and broadcast outlets that have earned the respect of consumers because of their accuracy, fairness and thoroughness of reporting. It’s not an accident that the sites I turn to most frequently are washingtonpost.com, newyorktimes.com, cnn.com, abcnews.com and time.com. I also enjoy salon.com for its magazine like sassiness—but have less trust in it because it is more opinionated and more of an unknown. Having worked at washingtonpost.com, I have a high opinion of the lengths most Web editors and producers go to to not only get the story up quickly, but to get it up accurately. Editor Doug Feaver’s well-articulated philosophy was that he’d rather we get the news up third and be right than first and be wrong. After a slightly wobbly start and a few missteps in the ’90s, I think most online news sites have proven that they’ve earned our trust.

“I think the biggest problem with the credibility of online news sources exists because there are a great many online content providers that call themselves news sites but that are not, in fact, reporting news. After awhile, some consumers who arrive at a Web site looking for news and not finding it will conclude that all Web sites purporting to carry news are charlatans except, perhaps, known and respected media properties such as the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal. There should be some way to make it easier for consumers to tell whether a Web site is really reporting news, because many of them lack the kind of professional education in the field that would allow them to painlessly and accurately make that judgement.

•

“I think this depends on whether the site is independent (i.e. credibility is an unknown quotient) or is associated with a news organization that is already perceived to be credible. In other words, independent sites have less credibility than those associated with established “brands.

•

“In every form of news media, consumers have questions about the credibility of the organization. Online news faces this same problem.

•

“In general, I think that the longer an organization has to report and present a story, the more credible it is. Newspapers generally have a longer lead time, so they would rank highest, but quality organizations in other media can do just as well if they are given the time needed.

•

“In order for online news organizations to run properly, they need to have a defined goal. Either be a mirror of the paper or become your own medium. And if you are your own medium, you need more staff to service quality journalism.

•

“In the online world, we are asked to help figure out ways they company can make money. In the newspaper world, I never heard a question like that.

•

“It depends on the online news source. I believe that abcnews.com is just as credible as ABC News. And nytimes.com is just as credible as the New York Times. So I think many of your questions are really about physical method of distribution of the same news, rather than content.

•

“It is not the medium that counts, but the brand or organization.

•

“it’s too easy to fix errors in stories posted online. so a mistake in a story might be corrected 10 minutes after it goes live - but not before some readers have already seen the old version and mistaken it for the truth. for the same reason, reporters aren’t as diligent in getting their facts straight because they know a story can be updated anytime.

•

“My experience with online news has been at newspaper Web sites, where the credibility of the news is determined by the newsroom. Newspapers carry greater credibility with me than radio and TV; with magazines, it depends on which one. Lack of credibility doesn’t seem to hurt news consumption. Newspapers and journalists in general get very low marks in terms of public perception, and they’re getting lower. But news continues to make shareholders a lot of money in print and TV, despite the explosion of online news sources. The thing to worry about is, as our credit with the public drops, will opportunistic politicians and lawyers be able to curtail our constitutionally protected liberties? In other words, journalistic credibility (online or otherwise) isn’t a business problem, it’s a civic one.

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“News Web sites often have clear “content areas” of news, whereas the local TV station anchor will go from a news story right into a plug for that night’s television line-up, or present gossip about the network’s stars as “news.” Visually, it is easier to separate ads from news on Web sites. Also, news sites are often just regurgitating text from print publications, so why would credibility be any different?

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“Online news allows more timely reporting than any other medium, like a newspaper that is frequently updated. Besides the immediacy it offers, online news potentially has a greater

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I think there’s a huge difference in the credibility — online sites are very often run or influenced by nonjournalists and marketing people who have little or no regard for editorial integrity and separation between ads and editorial. That’s a scary thing, and affects the credibility of online sites considerably.

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It hasn’t really come under enough fire to be fully tested. In the end, each case and each organization will be judged on its own merits.

reach than TV and radio. As I read in a magazine once, “The anticipated penetration of TV into the workplace is zero.”

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“Online news for the most part is as credible as print (magazine and newspaper) news and more credible than that normally found on TV and radio. The trouble comes in that there are so many different sources, each with their own levels of truth, accuracy and fairness. It takes a lot of work to discern which sources are the best, and I hate to say it but the majority of online news consumers are too busy or too lazy to think about the credibility of their sources, more so than print media consumers. I, as an online journalist, feel sort of like a grammar school teacher: I give my consumers the best I can when they’re at my site, but there’s no telling what they’re getting from other places.

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“Online news has the potential to be just as credible. Issues are: - consumers know and trust the traditional media, even TV, where news simply means good pictures; - online pressures require a story to be up NOW!, not after facts are confirmed, leading to inaccuracies, it is easy to edit an online story, not like a radio broadcast, where much the same time pressures are dealt with differently - for example, a story placed on one of our sites last year was wrong, a writ was served within an hour, and our tech people were able to determine only 17 people had viewed the story, most of those internal or the angry company and their lawyers! - as I said - potential is there, business models and journalistic goals still have some way to go in getting a balance.

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Online news’ credibility is enhanced by clarity and timeliness, the ability to present the story from different angles using multimedia and interactivity, and by providing access to primary source documents. However, coverage often lacks the context and analysis that a newspaper or magazine can provide with less pressing deadlines (like TV, radio and online). Online news is hurt by over commercialization and the intrusion of ad content and, sometimes, less newsworthy content. Also, newspapers have a psychological advantage: people trust better what they can touch.

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“Online news is still in its infancy and therefore is not as credible as print and broadcast. But because experienced journalists are going into online, the credibility gap is bound to close.

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“Online news is still too new to have the same credibility as traditional sources, but in time (within a few years) will become as trusted as the others.

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“Online news sites staffed by professional journalists are just as credible as local and national newspapers. And because online news sites do not have space limitations, they have a better chance to report the whole story—more so than broadcast, radio and even newspaper outlets.

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“Online often has not had time to verify facts,

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“Pompous, over-paid anchors and correspondents who seem more impressed with their own opinions than fair and accurate reporting have harmed credibility of broadcast news, TV in particular. While a number of on-line news sites are slanted, they usually are so in a clear way, with no representation to consumers that they are fair or neutral. Newspaper and on-line retain at least some of the tradition of attempting fair and unbiased reporting, or labeling material that is not neutral.

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“Radio news generally has the lowest credibility for me — I suspect that there’s little original reporting or fact-checking. Radio is basically an audio deliver mechanism for newswires and daily newspaper stories. At a minimum, online news sites provide the same aggregation service but with the added benefit of giving me the original source material. The original-content news sites do their own reporting too, and that lifts them above radio. Local TV news has very little credibility with me. The stories are superficial, so again the online news sites win by dint of having the details. Local and national papers are great, and I check a couple every day. But they never have the depth in areas that interest me, so I turn to specialized news sites for more detailed, focused information. By giving me more of what I want, in the detail I desire, the news sites serve me best. Their credibility is higher, therefore, because their product is relevant to me. Terrific reporting on irrelevant topics doesn’t score any points with anyone, and the papers are (by necessity) covering areas that don’t interest some portion of the audience.

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“The biggest threat to credibility as it relates to papers vs. online is that the line between news and advertising/promotion/fluff is getting thinner all the time and is being crossed with little regard to the ultimate consequences.

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“The key difference is that online, anyone can be a publisher. That’s both good and bad, in terms of quality of information online. I very much like Weblogs; they are some of the best sources around; but there is also a lot of sloppy, meaningless stuff on the ‘Net. But I wouldn’t want it any other way; I don’t want to go back to the days when you had to own the press to get freedom of the press.

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“The speed of the medium (or expectations of speed) that make it necessary to constantly have fresh content mean that each individual story does not get optimal attention to sourcing and in-depth reporting and the editing is often done too quickly, again under time pressure. Also, quantity seems to win over quality in the online news business.

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“The standards at our operation are every bit as high as those at the best newspapers. The same kind of considerations apply regarding accuracy, objectivity, level of detail, quality of grammar and spelling and so on. The public ought to expect the highest possible level of integrity and credibility from online news sources, at least as high as traditional news sources, and we strive to fulfill that. We are also very much aware that as the online version of one of America’s most distinguished newspapers, we must represent that institution with the highest possible standards. Other sources of news that do not have the same high standards, either because they do not care as much about the quality of the content.

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“There is no difference in credibility from one to the other. Online news may just be more complete and uploaded faster.

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“There is so much information on the Internet and there are so many variations. I think this leads people to not trust the Internet as much as traditional sources. Anyone can post on the Web and this may lead people to discredit some sources on-line.

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“Too often, the “news” found on online news sites is simply a regurgitation of news covered in the print, television, or radio publication. Online journalists would be better served to produce original content that capitalizes on the strengths of the online medium: immediacy, interactivity, and flexibility.

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“Two major problems I have with many online news sites is 1) a lack of unique, independent editorial judgment, such that what becomes news and is emphasized does not appear to be based upon what the site and uncovered in it’s own reporting and weighed against other major news of the day, but rather seems guided by the news judgments of other major news sources: CNN, NYTIMES, JOURNAL; 2) reliance on the reporting of other organizations, wires in particular, to fill in gaps in coverage can seem to border on plagiarism, lead to a repetition of mistakes, and can mislead the reader about the originality, and certainness of the news being reported.

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“Unlike print or television news, for which retractions and corrections take much longer to make, online journalists operate with the knowledge that an inaccurate sentence, paragraph or story can be corrected or yanked in an instant. I think this can lead to less concern about accuracy. (“Get it out there. We can always fix it later.”) Other factors that lead me to think less of online news: The emphasis on speed; the inexperience of online editors and writers; and the general suspicion that the audience for online news cares less about grammar and solid reporting than being entertained.

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“You have to be a little more careful trusting an online site. Often news is reported as quickly as possible, so it isn’t always completely accurate. However, the same is true for radio and television (ex. the presidential election reporting). I would say newspapers and magazines are slightly more trustworthy for getting the story right the first time.

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Online news in general is less credible because there is sometimes not a clear separation between editorial and advertising content.

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Since the Internet is a relatively new development, I am concerned that online professionals are not as well-trained in its use and ethics as compared to their traditional newsroom counterparts, where the trade of journalism have been practiced for more than a century.

Appendix F

Verbatim Responses of Those Who Work for a Traditional News Source

“A large problem with online news is the emergence of so many new, untested news organizations, whose credibility (including possible associations with advertisers, special interest groups, etc.) is unknown. Many consumers may simply trust what they’re getting on a so-called “news” Web site, when it’s actually a special interest group reporting “news” with a slant which is intended to persuade, rather than to simply inform. Most print newspapers and magazines (and many broadcast news organizations) have been around long enough for consumers to get a feel for who’s more solid and fair vs. who’s going for flash with little substance and accuracy.

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“An artifact (newspaper, magazine, book) that you can hold in your hands will always be more credible than ever-changing pixels. Longevity will also have to be demonstrated by on-line sources.

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“As a new medium, online must overcome the mistrust of the general public, whereas the other more traditional media are planted firmly in the psyche of the public. The public recognizes that for the most part there is a strict code of ethics and a consistent editing process that goes on in traditional forms of media. With the Internet, I don’t think people have that same level of comfort that what is being published is going through a tough editing process. Sites like the Drudge Report exaggerates that belief.

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“As traditional news organizations have established Web sites, the credibility of online news has increased. My opinion is that newspapers and magazines are more credible because they typically have more space to present a story in its context. In my local area, radio stations rip and read the newspaper I work for. TV stations simply hit and run at the news, without bothering to check facts or run corrections. A state police sergeant mentioned just today that a local TV station had little concern for any semblance of the truth.

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“Because it’s constantly updated, it’s constantly changing...so the story you may read at 9 a.m. is completely different than the one you read at 5 p.m. Being first is important, but being accurate is just as important. Online sites need to learn balance. Also, it seems that online news sites are more likely to reprint press releases without getting at both sides of the story. that’s troublesome.

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“Because reporters at newspapers and magazines are somewhat more removed from the pressures of the 24-hour news cycle, I think they are more credible than online news, television or radio because print reporters have more time to work on stories that won’t appear until the next day or week.

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“Because some sites, such as Drudge, mix news, opinion and gossip, people have a difficult time keeping each separate. Newspaper and magazines do a better job of labeling opinion and gossip. Radio and TV have slipped in recent years, blurring the lines.

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Anyone can create a Web site and put “news” on it. It shouldn’t be trusted unless it’s from affiliated with an established print, television or radio news operation

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More online journalists appear to be less experienced than the so-called mainstream, and inaccuracies can creep in because of inexperience, and I think that diminishes credibility.

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Credibility is something that is earned or lost over time, and while readers and viewers sometimes question the credibility of newspapers, magazines and television, I believe they've come to rely on them (newspapers especially) because of a long track record of trying to get it right. Online journalism is new, and to many unfamiliar. If online sites can show over time they can be reliable, accurate, up-to-date sources for news, then consumers will begin considering

“Better sourcing in newspapers and magazines. Often online news fails to cite sources to help determine the credibility of the report. And if the Web site is wrong, there's never a correction — the story gets pulled or updated, and unless the consumer checks back, he or she never realizes the information was wrong.

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“Both newspapers and online news sites suffer similarly in the credibility department, since both have this drive for reporters to get out the story FAST at the expense of accuracy. But I think the general public still lends more credibility to newspapers...because they feel that if it's printed on paper (especially in a more high profile paper, like the NYT) it MUST be true, whereas online, there is an doubt because, after all, “anyone can build a Web site.”

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“Clearly, the best online news comes from the traditional news players. The New York Times is an outstanding example, as is the Wall Street Journal. Radio and TV feed off of newspapers and breaking news, and get their credibility that way, not often by being great journalists. (NPR, of course, is the exception.) Most online sites that are not affiliated with traditional media players are good mainly for gossip and speculation. But they are doing a better job of engaging online readers by allowing them to be part of the story. But without the subjective editor that a “brick” media publication can bring to bear, the pure online players will continue to have credibility troubles for serious news.

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“Credibility is based in large part on a record of integrity. The oldest news Web sites are a few years old. As time passes, the most credible Web sites — as happened with newspapers, radio and television — will emerge with a record of good work. It is not always a question of the credibility of the medium but of the team behind the medium. When it comes to this issue, sometimes what medium it we're talking about is irrelevant.

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“Credibility of online news is more unstable because there is more chance for error. It could come from being rushed to be the first with the story, or it could come from laziness in knowing that if the information is wrong, it can be removed with little effort.

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“Depends on source — major click-n-mortar sites and some others have same credibility as their print or broadcast counterparts; fledgling news sources may not. I prefer online news in part because I can more easily research the story to determine credibility and accuracy of information. *All* news sources report inaccurate information at times; *all* news sources have their own “slant” on a story. Some, however, are more fair and accurate than others. A few too-obvious distortions will knock a news source off my list.

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“Equal, as long as the site managers acknowledge mistakes, cite sources and faithfully maintain accurate archives. Credibility for any institution depends on its willingness to measure its activity against comparative institutions. In other words, does its record of events match the evidence? In an investigation, does it hold its researchers to professional standards? I find the rules of evidence in a courtroom to be a good measuring stick to judge facts going into a newspaper or Web site.

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“I am an employee in a leading regional newspaper. I am frustrated that the content of our newspaper is reproduced and shared in a Web site that is not controlled directly by my newsroom or the company itself. In this situation, it is very easy for the material to be published incorrectly or with errors that we often fix for the print version, but cannot correct in the Web site because of confusion about the automated copy flow or a lack of control or communication with the online site. This Web site also is ambiguous about stating its ties to the newspaper, using the phrase “In affiliation with BLANK (name of the paper).” I think this can only confuse readers and viewers of both the paper and the site. There is no clear vision about what the Web site is supposed to be, and if there is one, it is not shared with the members of the newsroom. We do not know anything about the habits of the viewers of the Web site. Furthermore, I don't think the line between advertising and editorial is even remotely respected in many online news sites, but I also don't think readers notice or care. Therefore, I would like to think that consumers hold newspapers up to a high standard of credibility, certainly higher than any news Web site, because readers have a longer relationship with newspapers than they do online sites, and that long-term trust counts for something.

“I am concerned about the ability of people to post information online, listed as bonafide news, with little editing or checking, and in some cases, no regard as to its accuracy.

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“I am concerned that there is not enough editing of locally-produced news for online news sites. I see firsthand how there can be little or no line editing and copy editing because of competitive pressure and lack of resources on the Web site; there are so many people writing html they can't afford to actually edit copy before it goes online.

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“I am one who believes getting it first does not equate to getting it right. Online sites are the last place I turn for credible information. And local television stations? Forget it. They're running the same rat race. I prefer to wait for my morning paper.

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“I don't believe credibility is determined by the medium — it is determined by the organization and those working within it. Online journalism is much broader — there's a much lower barrier to entry — so naturally there is statistically more B.S. in online journalism than offline.

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“I don't find online as credible as a newspaper mainly because the stories are incomplete, including the Web site at my paper. I do believe online news as a whole more credible than television news due to the ability to add more detail, but still not as much detail as newspapers, magazines are more credible since they can include more detail. Radio news, for the most part, is a headline service, and not as credible.

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“I feel most credible news sites are backed by brick-and-mortar news organizations like newspapers (Wall Street Journal), Television (CNN) or Radio (NPR). Very few eNews organizations have high credibility ratings from me, the few being Salon, C-Net, etc.

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“I generally give high marks to the credibility of newspapers and national news magazines. Radio is fairly credible, since they tend to “steal” most of their material from newspapers rather than doing any of their own reporting. As for television news, I generally think national news broadcasts are fairly credible, but I don't ascribe much if any credibility to local television news reporters, most of whom are think are lazy and never correct mistakes. In summary, I rank the credibility of online news sources above local television and radio but behind newspapers and national television.

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“I have many friends who work for on-line news services, and they universally complain that the pressure for “immediacy” overwhelms other values like accuracy, completeness and fairness. This is especially true at “niche-market” services dedicated to covering a particular industry. Adding to this problem, on-line reporters tend to be younger, less experienced and much less well paid — and nowhere near as well supervised or edited as journalists working for traditional news outlets. Case in point: a friend of mine who is an “editor” at an on-line news service in Washington,DC oversees about 25 young reporters covering a dozen or so federal regulatory agencies for various industries. His only prior experience for the job was as news editor for his college radio station. He describes his on-line “newsroom” as a “sweat shop” where young reporters work for \$25,000 a year until they burn out and quit. Turnover is a constant problem. In the main, his job consists of reviewing text for spelling and grammatical errors before punching it onto the dozen or so subscriber Web sites he feeds (sometimes updating the same story five or six times a day). He laments that he has virtually no time to exercise even nominal control over factual accuracy, balance, fairness or sourcing. Second case in point: A young reporter I know who recently lost her job at an on-line law enforcement news service when it folded is now shopping her resume around, looking for work in the “real world.” But her on-line “clips” are horrendous — rife with errors of fact and grammar, glaringly one-sided and/or obvious puff pieces designed to promote products or people with “pull” at the defunct news service. Third case in point: Another young reporter I know who recently took a job working for the Web staff of a major national newspaper was shocked to learn how overworked the staff was — while earning about half as much as reporters working for the newspaper. That said, she was pleasantly surprised that the editing was actually better than at the daily newspaper she left in New Jersey. Ultimately, I believe, the credibility of on-line news sources will rise and fall for the same reasons that they do in the traditional media. As consumers continue to develop facility and sophistication with the Web, the “pretenders” - the poorly staffed and managed sites that exist purely I think consumers enjoy getting information

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I believe that consumers would think online news is less credible due to the haste in which it is posted and the notion that not all sites on the Internet should be trusted.

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I feel online news is just as credible as newspapers, magazines and television and radio stations. I say that because I only visit sites from news organizations I'm familiar with, and I consider their online operation to be an extension of their newsroom.

quickly from the Internet, but most consumers would believe information from a print newspaper, broadcast TV or radio story first I think because those sources are more tangible and not just floating out in cyberspace. Most people recognize their local newspaper, some of the reporters, regular sources they use for radio news and their local and national TV journalists that they usually tune into. This gives those sources more credibility on the front end, despite whatever the news content is because they are more familiar sources than internet journalism often times.

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“I think online news’ credibility is lacking. Typos are a big turnoff. Links that don’t work are frustrating. Separate windows that pop up with advertising are annoying. All those little graphics that take forever to download ... it should be easier and faster to get to the news, not harder. I’m not a fan of TV news either, but at least with ABC, CBS, CNN, etc., they’re all competing with each other and mistakes or errors are quickly realized and fixed. There’s too much room for error and misattribution with online news sites.

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“I think online news sites face two dilemmas: One, they are the new kids on the block and have yet to prove themselves in the public’s mind; two, they are greatly under funded for what newspapers expect them to do. I know many online news sites don’t even have their own dedicated reporters, but are expected to live off the dregs of the print or broadcast version of their outlet. Despite this, I think those in the know realize that online news sites have a great talent for doing more with less, and new media editors often provide a better, more accurate, fairer account of current events than their parent outlet through links to authoritative sites and quickly assembled additional research found on the Internet. Where online sites fall down is in the presentation department. Most of them try to look like digital versions of a newspaper or, worse, fall into the generic look of the Microsoft Front Page templates. Online editors will have to pay more attention to unique designs as band-width problems become resolved for the general population. Overall, it will eventually be seen that online news sites have a greater potential for rapid, complete news delivery than any other medium, and they have a WORLD-WIDE AUDIENCE. The local paper or the local news broadcast needs to adjust its ideas of its audience to compete on the Web. Even the Podunk Daily Mail is potentially a global news source through the Internet, but editors have yet to fully realize and deal with that fact.

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“I think the pressure to sell newspapers/magazines and reel in radio spots/advertising pages is comparable to the pressure on Web site managers to get hits/banner advertising, links, etc. Whenever money is being changed hands on some level, the question of credibility is raised, and that goes for all media. Once upon a time, there was some hope that what went up on-line was honest and unanswerable to any advertiser, so therefore true. That’s, of course, not true, and the need to generate interest and generate dollars and generate it fast in a competitive market has left all the media hurting from a credibility problem—for which we have only ourselves to blame for the most part.

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“I’d say they are comparable at many news organizations, but, that said, the need to get things up on the Web quickly can lead to errors. The upside is those errors can be corrected immediately instead of the next day. The problem is really all the pretend news Web sites, as well as some of the TV news sites, which indiscriminately mix news and gossip and opinion and advertising — a deadly mix for credibility.

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“In the urgency to be the first with the story, online news sources make frequent mistakes or requires frequent updating so that the whole story is provided. In some cases I have seen nothing more than a headline come over the wire in an attempt to be first, with an actual story coming hours later. Only the sites of long-standing news agency that give content (including editing of content) control to journalists, not “Web guys,” can be a trusted source. An additional concern for me is not just catering to advertising, but in this day of mega news conglomerates, I worry about the stories that don’t get reported because it will affect the parent company, a subsidiary or an affiliate.

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“In theory, online news should be as credible if not more - in part because one should expect it to be more up to date. Online news should combine the immediacy of television with the depth of print. But much depends on whose news Web site you’re looking at. Some sources are more trustworthy than others, as with any news outlet. It can be hard to figure out the credentials or backing behind a Web site. Even in the case of Web sites run by recognized news

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I’m old fashioned. I trust print above all.

organizations, cutbacks and hesitancy about embracing the technology can mean that the quality of information on those sites isn't what you'd expect

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 “It still has a long way to go. Experienced journalists MUST be in charge of news content!”

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 “It's not uncommon for news and other information to be sponsored online in a way that makes the advertisement indistinguishable from the content. That compromises the integrity of the news provider, because the content is paid for by the advertiser and the advertiser is not clearly marked and separated from the news or information content.

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 “Local online news is the newspaper put on line. It's not faster, more accurate or different from the newspaper. However, fewer stories are posted and they are posted as shortened versions. Corrections need to be added to stories so errors are not repeated.

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 “Lower credibility because of time pressure and lack of distinction between ads and news.

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 “Many credible newspapers post items online with little attribution during breaking or unfolding stories, then those stories simply vanish. I find the newspapers “final” stories that actually appeared in the paper to be credible, but all their other efforts on spot news are shaky.

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 “Mediocre. Main concern is the race to rush information out there before everything is known.

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 “Medium is too new to have achieved the credibility of traditional sources.

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 “Models still emerging. Too much emphasis has been placed thus far on generation of revenues, with less attention paid to content and user's desires and needs.

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 “My main concern is with the rush to be first. Before online, almost every organization, whether print, radio or TV, had several hours to beat the competitor. Now, it's down to several minutes. The rush leads to errors, especially with grammar and spelling, and there seems to be little incentive to revisit copy to make corrections.

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 “Nearly every story in a newspaper and magazine has a byline and most radio and television stories can be traced to a specific reporter (unless they're just reading a story from a newspaper or wire service without saying so — which is another problem). Many online stories come from who knows where? I only read the online services of trusted news organizations (Reuters, AP, CNN). Still, you feel anyone could type in a story and it would be transmitted around the world in a second. Also, the race to post information as soon as possible leads to the reporting of gossip and rumors as news. On the other hand, I have to admit that some online news services — the Drudge Report, for example, have had the guts to go with stories that the mainstream media shied away from. I just fear there's no one looking over the shoulder of folks at online sources to make sure they meet high standards.

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 “Newspapers are the most credible, followed by magazines, television, radio and on-line sources in last place (least credible)

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 “Newspapers are the most credible, followed by news magazines, radio and television.

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 “Newspapers have a strong tradition of being trusted. Its to easy to get news on the Web with no one reviewing for accuracy.

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 “Newspapers have higher standards in terms of accuracy, sourcing, completeness, balance and fairness; Online news sources are more concerned with getting the news posted as quickly as possible; have fewer or less experienced staff and don't have standards that are as stringent.

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 “No comparison. The established media have credibility. Online outlets often do not.

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Judging credibility of online news is the same as that for the traditional media— newspapers, radio and television. The consumer needs to evaluate all phases at all times and story by story and how the news is attributed and by who and their credentials.

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Many online suppliers don't use attribution, and often insert opinion as fact. Many consumers aren't skeptical of the I-net as they are of broadcast media.

“Old, out-of-date pages, poor design, broken links all make many news sites look stupid. Why would I trust them if they can’t get that right? Most newspapers and broadcast outlets are more fully staffed with more professional people. Also most Web sites don’t know what they are trying to do, so much of their content is pointless and useless (community, chats, etc.) and there are too many tie-ins with advertisers that aren’t seen in print or broadcast.

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“Online has younger journalists who lack the perspective of their older colleagues in other media. The ability to publish instantaneously gives some journalists the expectations that they must publish instantaneously — rather than on the merits of a particular story. Profit expectations are completely unrealistic for online. Online is always being compared to mature businesses with regards to profitability.

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“Online is the most fluid source of news which means it lacks credibility b/c of its changing nature. Cable television less so but still quite fluid, network television less so, weekly newsmags less still and daily newspapers are the most credible because they present a snapshot that they can be held responsible for. So much care is taken to insure that the wrong thing is not said. Online can mess something up and just erase any indication of that foul-up, TV can correct itself very quickly, Weekly mags have plenty of time to get things right but a newspaper is under tight deadline pressure and once printed it sits in the rack all day for every one to see. So mistakes are magnified and can’t be corrected in a flash.

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Newspapers have always raced to get information out, but online news makes the race even more cutthroat.

Furthermore, many major cities are now one- or two-newspaper towns, so some reporters have gotten lazy. Online news presents a pace that some reporters are not ready for.

Consequently, online news is often error-filled and incomplete.

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“Online is unpredictable. You’re never sure who’s behind a Web site and why. You know the big names, but who are all the rest of them? When you buy the NY Times, you know you’re getting the NY Times. However, online news can package the news in new ways such as audio, visual, words and interactive choices. I like the direction some news rooms are going in that traditional print journalists are getting online and trying new things. I especially like the idea of virtual newsrooms where print journalists are also online news anchors.

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“Online journalism is as bountiful as media in general. The public doesn’t know the distinction sometimes between “tabloid” journalism and legitimate. So it depends on the online news and its Web site.

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“Online journalism is in its infancy. It will improve. But for now, practitioners too often lack the training and experience — and sometimes the ethics — of established professionals in mainline news organization, especially newspapers. Unless it comes from an established and respected media source, online content is often too trendy, too superficial to be taken seriously. For one thing, there are too few ways to hold online journalism and journalists accountable. To be credible, online journalism must come either from a mainline medium or from a journalist who has already established credentials in other media.

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“Online news appears to be driven more by entertainment value and quick-turn shock value. When the emphasis is on breaking a story first and fastest, it’s going to be wrong or woefully incomplete sometimes and that harms credibility. I personally know of times stories have been rushed onto major sites without any layer of editing past the reporter. Editors have to be there to ask the questions readers are going to ask and ferret out bad information or libel. Another concern I have is that online sites sell ads next to specific content, and even if the content was gathered in a reputable fashion, the juxtapositions often undermine the credibility to readers.

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“Online news coverage is significantly less credible than newspaper because of the rush to publish “something.” Moreover, some of the online reporters are not trained; gatekeeper systems are embryonic and poorly defined; editors are tempted to violate standard rules of confirmation. Radio and TV do not face the same demand for instant deadlines, and have more entrenched systems to prevent errors. However, radio and TV become even less credible than online reporting during live news coverage.

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“Online news does not have the same stringent content editing standards found at most mainstream media companies. That means that inaccurate, unfair and incomplete reporting becomes much more likely online.

“On-line news has a wonderful immediacy, but that’s what makes it dangerous. Too often — particularly on major or breaking stories — accuracy and fairness go by the wayside in the rush to get the scoop. Television, more so on the local level, is guilty of this too.

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“Online news has the pressure of being the most “up-to-date”, and I think this often affects how much fact-checking is done. There is too much rushing to make sure everything is correct and accurate. This, to me, lowers the credibility of the on-line version of news on any level.

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“Online news has too little attribution, and too little fact checking. Because the ability to put news “on the site” immediately pushes the “rush to publish” to a higher level than normal media, no real managerial oversight of editorial content occurs as is the case with the traditional media. Even though traditional media has problems with editorial oversight, online media has little or none.

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“Online news is all over the map — some sites have wonderful articles but a few glaring gaffes that make you distrust them (i.e.. Salon). Some are obviously partisan. Others try to emulate newspapers and fail. Because online news is so new, and so relatively easy to do for anyone, it’s natural to see different styles we’re not necessarily used to, such as very partisan sites.

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“Online news is as credible as the organization sponsoring it, because the credibility comes from the source, not the medium. The credibility also varies according to the localness of the news. A local community newspaper is going to have more credibility covering a local event than an online news source; but the difference shifts as the event moves beyond the local community.

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“Online news is faster, but less credible. It uses its speed to convince people that it is important and necessary; it is not. Television and radio essentially do the same thing. But the most credible, thorough work is done in print.

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“Online news is less credible because it is still too new in the minds of consumers. Online news will have to break some really important stories in a high-profile way before it is seen as credible compared with more traditional news outlets.

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“Online news is not a good, credible source in most instances, unless it is the Web site of a newspaper of the stature of the NY Times, Wash Post, LA Times. There may be one or two other newspaper Web sites whose credibility is sound.

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“Online news is not as credible for several reasons: it’s a new medium, stories can be hacked by outsiders and God only knows who’s running some of them. Consumers’ fear of the unknown hurts their credibility.

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“On-line news is not as credible. Anybody can put up a Web site, without care for accuracy or balance. With newspapers, there is an expectation of fairness and balance, and usually some sort of complaint mechanism or redress if a reader does not believe a story to be accurate and fair.

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“Online news is not something that can be trusted; there is little history of the organization that lends to credibility, because online news is so new. You have no clue who is writing the stuff, and where it came from, let alone the ulterior motives behind it.

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“Online news is often comparable to newspapers in regard to credibility, but content is incomparable. Online news at my organization is limited and only a few stories are bill boarded...far fewer than in a newspaper.

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“Online news is probably close to as credible as TV, especially the 24-hour news networks, because the focus is not necessarily on in-depth reporting, but on being first with a story. Newspapers are more credible, because they can tell more of the story and go more in-depth because there’s more time before the story runs, so they give analysis (though the 24-hour networks do a good job of beating a story to death). The blur between news and advertising

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Online news credibility reflects the standards of the site’s operator. Very high credibility is it is a newspaper site. Lower credibility if the site is run by a TV or radio station. Magazine-run sites vary too much to be rated on credibility

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Online news is less credible because it is sometimes hard to tell the difference between reliable reporting and gossip. Because users are unfamiliar with the territory, I fear they can be easily confused. Online news probably has no more crap than regular news sources. It's just not as easy to tell the difference.

and gossip online is also a concern. It's hard to tell sometimes which category a story fall into, and it takes a discriminating palate to digest all the stuff that's out there on the Internet, something that not all consumers care to acquire. Example: At the newspaper where I work, a consumer who was upset with the "Harry Potter" craze because he thought it promoted witchcraft, actually quoted "The Onion," a satirical online paper, as an actual source. Though funny, it's a sobering thought.

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"Online news is probably less credible than that which is found in newspapers. Web publication is an emerging field in which the it isn't always easy to peg the mindset of the players, and, therefore, their credibility. Newspapers (and by extension TV, radio and news magazines) may very well be stricter in their adherence to sound principles of reporting and editing. Newspaper-sponsored Web sites, in my estimation, are more believable than those without a recognizable affiliation.

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"Online news is so quick to go to "press" - and is always updated. But if you read one version and not the next one with more accurate facts, then you can walk away not knowing the "right" version. In newspapers and magazines, there seems to be a more strict editing procedure. I think the constant updates of facts leave room to chastise online news' credibility more than print news. I can't speak for TV, which I think is more about entertainment than news.

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"Online news is still a new medium and has yet to establish itself as a highly credible source. Given time, it can do so however, especially when the site is operated by a credible news source already.

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"Online news is still fairly new and has not earned as trusted a relationship with consumers as local newspapers, magazines and local TV news. They are still a more credible source for news that directly affects peoples day-to-day life.

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"Online news is still in its infancy, it's too early to tell.

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"Online news lacks street reporting. Most news-organization Web sites depend on newspaper or TV reporters for street reporting. Otherwise, those sites just use research materials from other sources and even other Web sites. They have not directly interviewed credible sources or the people the story is about.

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"Online news linked to a respected print product carries credibility. TV and radio traditionally have not held the same standards and consumers are aware of that

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"Online news often follows the local broadcasting model of getting the story out as quickly as possible and correcting any errors "on the fly."

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"Online news related to another news media reflects its accuracy and may be more up-to-date. Online news sites that function independently of other news media are less likely to maintain journalistic standards.

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"Online news seems less credible than news found in other mediums. This partly is because the other mediums have been around for a much longer time than online news sources. People tend to lend more trust to news sources they have known for a long time and that have built a reputation for themselves.

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"Online news seems more concerned with jumping the gun on stories and information than newspapers or broadcast journalism. There are often retractions in online news stories because the facts were not correctly gathered the first time because one news source was trying to beat the other. The one huge convenience of online news is availability and easy access. We are a more informed society because we can constantly check on news with the Internet at work (versus passing around a newspaper or going home for lunch to watch the news) and that is a good thing, but credibility is a problem. I think it is hard sometimes for people to know the difference between Web sites that are creditable news sources and Web sites that exist for entertainment purposes and feature satire, gossip, rumours, etc. The Web market is so flooded with different news outlets and many Web sites look similar. Generally I think people have a tendency to think anything they read is true and with Web sites, it seems like there are many

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Online news is often more derivative, with less fact-checking and real-world reporting behind it.

more opportunities for good journalistic standards to fall short (i.e. - a lack of editing, hasty writing, and sensationalism in story selection). Since Web sites appear to be anonymous, there doesn't appear to be a person or persons to hold credible for poor journalism whereas a paper has a publisher and a broadcast outlets have station managers. It seems like the Internet can easily go unchecked and I think more and more that is the case.

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“Online news sites are at an early stage of development and they have not built up the trust that newspapers have yet.

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“Online news sites are often overloaded with lots of visually “busy” stuff, and can be confusing to the visitor, or distracting from the consumer’s goal. The basic creditability seems comparable to traditional news sources.

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“Online news sites have a bit of a reputation as “fly-by-night.” And as more sites go offline due to lack of funding, it becomes more obvious how important ad revenue is, making it more likely that news could be “bought and sold.” Newspapers must be seen as credible to have survived the other media’s challenges. Newspapers are seen first and almost exclusively as a form of journalistic communication, whereas TV, radio and the Net have endless other uses. TV news is seen as lightweight, over hyped and “fluffy” while radio doesn’t devote enough resources to be seen as a serious medium for news. It’s more about sound bytes.

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“Online news that has appeared or will appear in print or broadcast can most often be trusted to be credible. But the drive for content on news Web sites often pushes “breaking” news to the forefront, many times giving it an appearance of importance it does not deserve. Newspapers, magazines, radio and television almost always strive to live within professional and ethical guidelines that give them a credibility most Web sites have yet to attain. News Web sites often are run by people who have no news background. Technical skills are more important than journalistic skills. As long as “Webmasters” are simply posting news stories prepared by credible journalists there is no problem. But when they are making judgment calls on breaking stories there can be serious problems.

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“Online news will never be as trusted as other forms of media until the powers-that-be decide if they’re in it for the money or for the credibility. As it is now, the sites — for the most part — are free, which means that little or no effort is put into training true journalists to do online news. And without training, the gossip-as-news rule will apply, and grammatical and accuracy errors will continue to taint online’s credibility.

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“Online sites can be influenced by advertisers or by someone hacking into the site. I suppose hackers are my gravest concern, because even if it is obvious editorial content has been altered by someone outside the organization, the paper still may be held liable. Furthermore, newsrooms are stripped of responsibility for the online site.

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“The biggest problem with online news is that the consumer does not always really know who is putting the information out there. With, I suppose, recognized national news sites (such as from cable or network television, national newspapers, local newspapers) at least the consumer knows the information is being put out there by a neutral party û or at least the content is as neutral as that submitted by the organization for consumption via its traditional medium. More than editorial departments’ desire to boost site hits û which I’m not very familiar with but I believe to be not much different from what would go on with advertising sales in the traditional medium û I think the biggest problem with news sites is that the information is often biased, incomplete, inaccurate or consists of misleading statistics intended to push a particular group’s agenda. As a rule, I don’t trust them nor do I use them in my reporting.

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“The issues are the same, however, with online news, it is much less clear who is acting as editor of content. Also, the Internet, even more so than television, can be exploited for entertainment purposes and therefore the lines are prone to blur without the presence of an editor who’s strong, wise, and above reproach.

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Online news setups still have to develop standards to ensure credibility and a clear separation of news from advertising

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Online news sites gain credibility by being allied with a trusted traditional product. Otherwise, you don’t know what you’re getting. Overtime, that could change; but we aren’t there yet

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The big concern about online news vs. print/broadcast news to me is that breaking news may not be verified before it's posted. Also, whether print, broadcast or online, news organizations seem to have a big problem accurately and completely reporting on communities of color.

“The model is similar to radio, yet with the Internet you can check the information against other sources.

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“The online news sites I visit are mostly those from major news or media companies (cnn, msnbc, slate). These are generally credible, and by offering lots of media commentary, also provide an opportunity for errors or distortions in the general media's coverage of an issue to be noticed and discussed. (Your survey asks how much of a site is news vs. “opinion or gossip”—a sloppy way to describe the huge amount of media analysis on line—slate, salon, Jim romeneski—that provides a vital new mechanism to rectify bias, inaccuracy, or ethical lapses in journalism in general.) The real credibility problems online don't come from major news orgs, but from commercial sites that disguise marketing as editorial.

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“The paper I work for, along with the Washington Post, New York Times, LA Times and others are the most credible both in print and on-line. I think they are better in print because more care is exercised. Mistakes get made in the rush to post news first on the Web. The TV Web sites, when it comes to their own reporting, are pretty dismal

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“The problem occurs when people who have no background in journalism, or even lack training in news gathering, trying to research and report stories. Those Web sites that depend on established, credible news sources such as the AP, Reuters, CNN, The New York Times news services, etc., are usually the most accurate and reliable.

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“The problem often lies in perception and reputation. Automatically the online publication is at a disadvantage because he is the “new guy” on the block. The perception is that new means inexperienced. That's not always the case.

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“There's a general perception that on-line journalists are less qualified than print/broadcast journalists, which leaves a question in my mind (and probably in the minds of many others) about the accuracy of information on Web sites. For major Web sites (linked to national newspapers, news magazines, etc.), I feel more comfortable with the news I'm getting than the information I get from news sites not linked to such publications.

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“There's only one difference: Whereas the potential to mix advertising and news exists in traditional media (newspapers, magazines TV, radio), and indeed there is some “adversarial” and some “infomercials,” many online news sites have blurred the distinction entirely, and others have blurred it to a degree that would be unacceptable in traditional media. So, while it would be wrong to say traditional media is pure, it's far, far better than online. And this, in my opinion, is the worst part: The failure of online news sites to distinguish between news and advertising makes them unimportant and even dangerous, but it also jeopardizes the credibility of the traditional news organizations with which they are affiliated. In some cases, million-dollar Web sites are threatening the credibility of billion-dollar newspapers. This is morally wrong. This is bad business.

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“Too often, the story is incomplete on the Web site. It seems like the reporter is concerned that people won't read a “long” story. But if a reader goes to the story, that mean's they are interested in what it has to say. I'm very concerned about this “bottom-line” mentality that's affecting newsrooms everywhere.

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“Traditional media has in some cases had hundreds of years to establish a news gathering/distributing, professional infrastructure. However most of those traditional sources are biased, as their own research shows. Some online sources also suffer from bias, and most from inexperience. They also lack the support of the large infrastructure traditional media have. Their advantage is that some online sources shun the traditional media's biases. It is up to the consumer to make the differentiation and select the appropriate media.

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“Traditional media maintain gatekeepers to keep inaccurate stuff out. too many online news sites don't, or don't have enough.

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“Traditional reporters (radio, TV, newspapers, magazines) have a foundation in the reporting world, and in employment security. On-line reporters are beginning to question their

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There is no valid comparison. The credibility of mainstream media is vastly superior to purely online news reporting.

ability to sell tickets, and therefore, their jobs are more on the line. Fewer traditional reporters (with credibility) are willing to jump to on-line, so on-line is left with less credibility.

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“Traditional sources have more credibility, because businesses and institutions being written about online are often advertising right next to the stories. When I read by expose on a local company online and I’m seeing an ad for that company out of the corner of my eye, I question the content of the story.

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“Unfortunately a vast majority of consumers seem to believe that television news is actually a balanced and fair source. The online arm of a daily newspaper - although usually not utilized correctly - can provide much more detail than a 30-second TV blurb. However, newsrooms around the country haven’t fully given in to the potential of online news. Until online news sources (associated with a printed product) are no longer treated as a stepchild and uphold the same journalistic principles as a print edition they will not be thought of as credible sources of news.

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“Until online news suppliers develop “brands” that stand in the minds of news consumers for high quality journalism, their credibility will be low. Those online suppliers who can take advantage of a mature journalism brand from another medium have a significant advantage in this regard.

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“We have a history with our trusted print and broadcast sources, seeing them report over the years. We do not yet have that history of trust established with online sources; in fact, my personal experience with the advertising influence on our own online ‘product’ leads me to skepticism with regard to online sources of data.

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“Web-based news organization don’t seem to make any more mistakes than “mainstream” news media, but it may seem so because there are so many online news organizations competing in today’s news marketplace. However, there seems to be a weeding out going on. Credibility, at least in part, is helping to determine which ones stay in business. On the other hand, it appears that the news on the Web will end up being dominated by the same news organizations that now dominate “mainstream” news media. In the end, the Web is just a faster, more convenient and overall better way to disseminate news — especially for “print” news media. It also gives broadcast news organizations an opportunity to develop a strong “print” type component to their dissemination of news.

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“Web sites are still the “wild west” in many ways, untamed and loosely governed. I am skeptical of many sites

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“With online news, the organization of the news and the style of presentation still seem to be unsettled. Generally, there are no standards for delivering news online, and I think news organization and consumers of that news remain unsure of how to use news online.

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“You have children writing for Web sites who have little or no journalism experience. rewriting, missing the point, factual errors... on the whole it is not credible. sure there are a few good sites but the mass of incompetent Web sites takes down the good ones with it.

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“You have to be critical of the credibility of all media sources, but the cutbacks in staff and resources for online news has hurt both the usefulness and credibility (though this has been part of overall cutbacks at a time when there should be more resources provided to try and win new audiences and prevent the further erosion of present audience. The focus on short term profits will hurt news organizations in both the short and long term).

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“Younger people trust the Internet. Older people trust local TV news. I think the most complete and accurate information comes from newspapers but I don’t think the general public is aware of that.

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Traditional media organizations have procedures and policies in place to ensure quality and to lessen the odds of inaccurate reports—many Web organizations do not, in fact on some Web sites, content is posted directly by reporters, bypassing any review.

The Authors

Howard Finberg and Martha Stone are co-directors of the year-long Digital Journalism Credibility Study, sponsored by the Online News Association and funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

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He was honored in 2000 as the Newspaper Association of America "New Media Pioneer" in recognition of his work in developing online and other new media products and for mentoring others in the media industry. He was a founding board member of the NAA's New Media Federation and was the group's president. He served as co-chairman of the IFRA-WAN's Beyond the Printed Word conference for two years.

Finberg was a corporate vice president at Central Newspapers. He was a director at Phoenix Newspapers, Inc., where he led the creation and launch of the award-winning online service, Arizona Central [www.azcentral.com] on the Web and America Online in early 1995.

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Stone has spoken at such conferences as WAN in Paris; NewsWorld in Barcelona; the Society for News Design in Copenhagen, Reykjavik and Phoenix; NetMedia in London; Editor & Publisher's Interactive Publishing in New Orleans and Dallas; and most recently to news executives in Stockholm, Copenhagen, Sacramento, Rio de Janeiro and Lisbon. She also spoke at the European Journalism Centre in the Netherlands last year.

Stone has written for print and online publications including the *Chicago Tribune*, *FamilyPC*, *GameWEEK*, *Advertising Age*, *Business Marketing*, *Crain's Chicago Business*, CBS.MarketWatch, and ZDNet.com. In 1999, she co-authored "E-Commerce: A Media MoneyMaker" with Peter Zollman and Steve Sullivan through Editor & Publisher.

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ONA Study Committee

The Digital Journalism Credibility Project was developed and directed by a subcommittee of the Online News Association board of directors. Its members included:

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Elizabeth Osder has been Director of New Media for the New York Times News Service and Director of Product and Content for *The New York Times* on the Web. Prior to joining The Times, Osder was founding Executive Producer for Advance Internet and an editor at the Associated Press. She is currently studying technology, economics and communications at Stanford University on a John S. Knight Fellowship.

THE ONLINE NEWS ASSOCIATION

Digital Journalism Credibility Study



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