Online Newspaper

The state of the media is an ever-changing beast. The newspaper is not exempt from this constant cycle of change as the industry experiments with new tactics. And one new tactic over the last several years has been the ever-increasing launch of the online newspaper.

**Dynamic, Accessible and Immediate**

An online newspaper allows the reader to interact with the paper itself. Readers can now leave comments, watch videos, view photo slideshows and oftentimes contribute their own opinions and written pieces to the paper. The wide range of access points also contributes to the success of the online newspaper. Viewers can get their news straight off their smartphone or tablet computer. News is at their fingertips in an instant. Print papers are slowly losing their luster while the online newspaper continues to grow. “Basically, it’s alive. To me, online news is like a walking, breathing vehicle,” said Diane Lilli, editor of the Jersey Tomato Press, in an email interview. “I can immediately get the word out for emergencies, breaking news, events, wonderful stories or even hard news.”

Hyperlocal online newspapers have also taken over by storm. This year alone, Aol’s Patch launched over 80 online newspaper sites, which is nothing compared to the nearly 700 sites Patch launched in 2010. Main Street Connect, a fairly new player in the online newspaper world, launched 32 hyperlocal online newspaper sites this year. Both publishers boast they will be adding more local online newspapers as the year goes on.

The Dubois County Free Press in Indiana began publishing their online newspaper on April 26. The paper started as a way to entice readers with more lively news. “The ability to ‘liven’ up the news with video and audio with an online news source provides richer content for subscribers,” said editor Matt Crane in an email interview. “Many smaller, older papers are simply posting their paper as a downloadable PDF file with static advertising, with the same content that the paper edition has.”

For Gina Hamilton, editor of the New Maine Times, the decision to go online was a question of affordability. “Primarily, it was cost-driven,” said Hamilton in an email interview. “We are a nonprofit and don’t have much in the way of underwriting or ad revenue.”

**In Online Newspapers We Don’t Trust**

Without paper, ink, building costs for a traditional newsroom and delivery, the online newspaper can save money while still presenting news to its readers. Online newspapers are not all flowers and rainbows, however. They do have their sour points. For example, the credibility of an online newspaper can often be called into question. In a market where competition is stiff, the online newspaper has to prove itself. “At this point in a market competing with this traditional source that has been in the community for eight years and being a solely online news source, credibility is a problem to a certain extent,” said Crane.

In a 2010 [study](http://people-press.org/2010/09/12/section-5-news-media-credibility/) by the Pew Research Center, the local daily newspaper only received a 21 percent credibility rating. This is a big drop from 29 percent in 1998. With the online newspaper being so new, earning the trust of readers will only prove to be more difficult.

**The Missing Newsroom**

Also missing from the online newspaper is the traditional newsroom. Staffers are no longer side by side in their cubicles, bouncing ideas off each other and looking to colleagues for inspiration. The online newspaper does away with the need for a standard newsroom, since stories can be updated remotely from a home computer or even a smartphone. With the lack of a concrete newsroom, journalist relationships also flounder. “It’s sad not to work in a newsroom,” said Lilli. “I really miss the camaraderie.”

It’s evident that the traditional newsroom is becoming a thing of the past. Patch eliminates the need for a brick-and-mortar newsroom. Reporters work on the road, from coffee shops, cafes or from home. The same can be said for many of the online newspapers that exist today. “At this point, we are laptops, phones, cars and coffee shops,” said Crane.

The lack of a standard newsroom and smaller staff sizes has caused some of the online newspapers to suffer, in terms of editorial content. Without a large staff, the ability to delve deep into investigative issues is gone. Many stories get lost in the shuffle and never see follow-up. “At this point in our development, yes, we have issues due to staff size in really building investigative features, said Crane. “I think the key is smaller markets, smaller staff, smaller stories, in the sense that it is easier to develop and investigate stories when your county government is smaller, less people, less scandal.”

**Reaping the Benefits**

There are a lot of positives and negatives for the newspaper itself, but the readers reap the rewards. In addition to the ability to have news instantly at your fingertips, readers can customize their news. Before, a reader had to take the sports section and put it aside if they weren’t interested. Now, it doesn’t even pop up on their radar unless they choose to see it. “You pick and choose what stories you want to read, meaning you don’t have to buy a newspaper that fills their pages with Associated Press,” said Crane. “Readers get the stories they want to read.”

It looks like the online newspaper is here to stay. So what is next? For Crane, evolution is a constant factor. “We are launching video interviews soon, but we are also looking to become the source of information about this community we are in,” said Crane. “It is powerful to be able to go to Google and search for an event in your community and find it in a local online newspaper.”