

If Im going to give blogs their props at the expense of mainstream media, then I have to be fair (ok , i dont have to be, this is a blog ■ and give newspapers their props when appropriate.

As is usual after a Mavs game, playoffs or not, after I got home from the game I couldnt sleep. So I sat on my PC andgotcaughtup on email, did some work and sometime in the early am checked out various sports sites forcommentary about that nights game.

First stop is Yahoo Sports, where I know I will get the AP report of the game. A very, very simple “here is the score, here is something to fill space, and here is something I think is of note that happened during or after the game” Great for the casual fan. I find out what time the games are the next day.

Next stop, some of the fan forums. Each usually has 1 write up from someone at the game, and another from someone watching the game. Good spots to see a fans perspective and the only place to pick up on things TV announcers said. Interesting stop.

By that point I was toast and went to bed.

This morning, woke up, grabbed the papers at the door. Dallas Morning News, Star Telegram both had great coverage of the game. Multiple columnists, who although I dont think give their topics as much depth as they could, they at least covered different angles and aspects of the game. In addition the reporting of the game, again, although not in depth versus the opportunity, was far, far better and more detailed than the AP reporting. As would be expected. Plus, they provided some basic statistical breakdowns.

About 1pm Dallas time, got on the PC, and checked out ESPN. What a waste of time. AP story. A nice story by Marc Stein, the same kind of sportscenter highlights they have for every game, and that if you watch TV, you already saw. The same stats they have for every game, ok, but nothing unique. Bottom line, not worth the trip. It reminded me why I hardly ever check out the site any more.

The world wide leader in sports, for the NBA semi finals, basically did nothing more than it did for every game of the regular season. Its recap is the same AP recap that the tiniest of tiny newspapers users to fill its sports section. Its stats, the same available to any website from multiple sources. You would think that they could find some value to add beyond the usual.

So if the choice came down to newspapers at the breakfast table, or regurgitation online. Newspapers at breakfast win.

Whats the moral of the story ? Depth and differentiation beat speed and regurgitation. I read the NY Times business section with a grain of salt, knowing it can be less than factual, but I read it every day. I know that they differentiate themselves by finding topics of interest to me that I cant find anywhere else. If they find something I care about, the net, among other tools, allows me to find out more. The NY Times business sectiongets my business because their stories are different from the stories I read anywhere else.

During the playoffs, I make sure to read the local newspapers because they have made the decision to differentiate their coverage to include depth and in some cases differentiated information, far beyond what is available online. If they invested the same effort during the season, I would be sure to read it every day. Im sure fans of other sports and topics would feel the same way.

Its interesting to me how my online reading habits have changed over the past 2 years. It used to be that i had a series of sports sites bookmarked and I would check them out to see if there was anything of relevance. Now, they are all either live bookmarks in mozilla or in an RSS reader and I just glance at the headlines. Which makes it painfully obvious how much they all just reuse the AP feeds. I also use RSS feeds of searches from icerocket.com that I can just glance at to see if there is anything being published from news, blogs or other RSS enabled sites. No need to visit ESPN, Sportsline, etc. If they cover a topic im interested in, and they match the keywords ive chosen, I see it.

Which of course , creates a catch 22. if the sites I no longer visit, or even the newspapers or magazines I no longer read do publish a story i would be interested in, Im going to miss it. Or I should say, they are going to miss me as a reader and consumer.

Which is all the more reason that rather than focusing on speed and breaking stories, I personally think newspapers and websites need to define their brands to heavy readers like myself through depth and differentiation. Brand yourself as the home of unique stories, not for breaking news. We have been trained that the net has all news 15 milliseconds after its “broken ” elsewhere. But if i know that you are the sole home of in depth coverage on things I care about, you got me.

And while Im on the subject, one last suggestion for newspapers. I think internet readers have started to understand news sources. We know that a story with Ap as a source in the paper is going to be the same AP story online. Rather than wasting money on newsprint for a story thats available 20k places on the net as every AP story is, could you please just print a list of the stories you think would be interesting that are sourced outside your paper. In fact, just use any of the memeorandums as a template for each section of the newspaper. That hopefully will open resources for the paper to gives us the depth and differentiation we crave. Syndicated stories dont help you, they hurt you. It kills your brand. It makes you look like an outlet that puts regurgitation over origination. Not the way a paper or website for that matter, wants to be branded

As of today, for today, the newspapers get my business