News... For the People, By the People

"This... Is WeNN" Dateline 2007.

THE VIDEO FEED IS GRAINY, *bursting with occasional static and jerking with the vibrato of its holder's adrenaline-pumped muscles — but its contents are unmistakable. ¶ A major earthquake has just hit Seoul, South Korea, and the story is broken, as it unfolds, via the most technically sophisticated newsgathering platform ever invented. ¶ A video-enabled, high-bandwidth cellphone — or, more specifically, thousands of such phones. ¶ In nearly real time, the feeds ping-pong through a network of global relays, spreading first-hand images of the quake across the globe. One such feed alights on a distant server, where it is piped to the community 'blog' (or Web log) of a distant friend, several relationships (and continents) removed from its original author.*

SMART CELL PHONE.
Motorola's 3G Concept Model Video Phone.

Once posted, the feed inspires a frenzy of collective activity. One site member overlays the feed's GPS data onto a map of Seoul, pinpointing the quake's epicenter. Another runs the audio through an online auto-translator, while a third starts collecting other emerging accounts from a variety of professional and amateur sources. Their work ripples through the community — and is improved by it. Other members correct mistakes and improve on successes, as the group guides its own efforts. Without explicitly being told to do so, the group has amplified, clarified, and begun to contextualize the quake. News is born.

Welcome to the not-too-distant world of journalism 3.0, the term Silicon Valley journalist Dan Gillmor coined for a world where the technology in your pocket can turn anyone into a news reporter.

Where the collective efforts of a loosely joined group of amateurs can complement, and occasionally trump, the most powerful news media organizations.

From its earliest days, the Web was seen as a new way to get the news out; it was initially lauded as a kind of hyper-efficient printing press. As the multimedia capabilities of the Web matured, news organizations began to see that the new medium expanded the possibilities of storytelling. Now, in the Web's adolescence, new dynamics are beginning to emerge. Individuals are empowered with ever more powerful multimedia devices. And new kinds of Web software are allowing regular folks to easily publish their own news stories and their interpretations of others' stories, and even to organize into their own novel forms of news organizations. This is participatory journalism on a grand scale, and it's eroding the traditional definitions and boundaries between journalists, events, and, in Gillmor's terminology, "the former audience."

Is journalism 3.0 an upgrade worth making? It depends on whom you ask.

New technologies have had a complex, and often paradoxical, impact on the business and experience of the news, and the promise is to continually reshape it in the future. The spread of both digital recording devices and tools for online community participation have bolstered the notion of the Internet as a "People's Press" that provides a new role for the passionate amateur, while offering people a huge variety of opinions and perspectives. However, like any highly democratized media, the digital "idea commons" is a noisy and sometimes misleading place. Quality is extremely varied, and insights are often couched in political rants and questionable rhetoric.
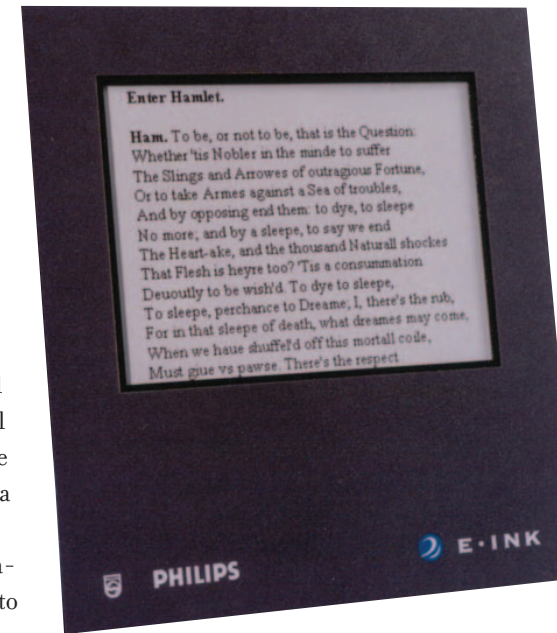
This variety guarantees that professional, standards-based news organizations will always be with us. But it's been more than half a century since people participated in media in this way, and those news organizations will invariably have to adjust to the presence, and expectations, of a wired populace.

In response, news organizations are working on new ways to personalize the news and tell stories in ways that are both novel and compelling.

There will be more subtle consequences of this revolution, though. No single news organization can compete with huge wired communities — they simply can't be in every place, every time. Thus, the rise of digital communities will shorten news cycles even further and may change the role of cable networks, much as their appearance transformed the role of newspapers. Perhaps the networks will cooperate, or further specialize. Perhaps they'll even put "bloggers" in their employ.

DIGITAL INK DISPLAY. *A prototype of a display from E-Ink and Philips, who hope to create electronic newspapers in the future.*

PROVOCATIONS...
Will ever-more personalized news erode our sense of a common truth?
In an era of lifelike digital recreation, will we trust what we see on TV?
Will news organizations put "bloggers" in their employ?

—Andrew Zolli

YOUR NEWS... ALL THE TIME, ANY TIME

The experiments are already beginning. ImmersiNews, a project of the USC Annenberg School for Communication, will deliver news stories that are customized in structure, narrative, and content according to user preferences and interests. The news will not only be tailored to the reader's background, it will also include multimedia experiences that are immersive and interactive. For example, users might be able to move through a 360-degree panoramic image of a sporting event and click on various parts of the image to get more information. USC Annenberg hopes to have a fully functioning prototype by 2006, and through partnerships with large media companies, news systems such as ImmersiNews could very well be the norm within 10-15 years.

WANT MORE?

MIT MEDIA LABORATORY'S INFORMATION
http://nif.www.media.mit.edu

USC ANNENBERG ONLINE JOURNALISM REVIEW "FUTURE OF NEWS"
www.ojr.org/ojr/future

IMMERSINEWS WEBSITE
http://imsc.usc.edu/test/research/immersinews.html

DAN GILLMOR
www.dangillmor.com

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