

Jennifer Klitzke

Colleen Abel

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### Internet Effects

Wow! The Internet has it all: socializing, shopping, entertainment, and research in one, all from the comforts of your favorite easy chair. It's convenient, fast, comprehensive, multi-sensory, and time saving. You can blog with friends from all corners of the globe and receive a response in seconds. You can even upload videos and photos. This sure beats the weeks it takes to deliver a letter through the postal service. You can shop online anytime of the day or night from stores anywhere in the world and never leave your house. You can watch your favorite episode of LIFE without commercials, even when it's not airing on television. You can enter keywords into a Google search that instantaneously provides thousands of matches for your research project. This saves the hours it takes at the library searching through microfiche and paging through dozens of research documents that you can't take home with you.

All this convenience is a good thing, right? Well, there is an unsavory side of the Internet that is dissolving traditional media; displacing workers and living wage jobs; breeding bias and misinformation that raise concerns about what we read; and more.

Personally, I love many of the conveniences that the Internet provides. Like the search site [www.dreamhorse.com](http://www.dreamhorse.com). I can enter my search variables and seconds later the site produces colorful photos and videos of horses in my price range, within 50 miles of my zip code, and are of my favorite breed, color, age, and suitability. A decade ago, the only way to shop for horses

was spending hours on the telephone and traveling hundreds of miles to each stable. This process took several months to locate a suitable horse.

With all the time I save by shopping and researching online, I have more free time, right? No, not really. The very media I love, I hate. It is dissolving the livelihood that has afforded me the luxury to own horses. Over the last 20 years, I've worked as a keyliner, typesetter, art director, advertising designer, graphic artist, and editor for traditional forms of media like newspapers, direct mail marketers, and catalogers. All of these living wage jobs have evaporated because of the Internet.

Maybe you're wondering if I am just one of those complacent, middle-aged professionals, who is stuck in my ways and resistant to change? No, on the contrary, I've been chasing technology for the last fifteen years. It has consumed my free time with the pursuit to develop new skill sets and stay relevant. In the last five years, I have added college to full-time employment and am quickly burning out. I'm tired and my brain is full.

Sadly, I don't have any answers for where my career is headed. My college can't tell me either, and at the rate I'm going, taking one or two classes a semester, my education will likely be obsolete by the time I graduate. All of this is a result of the exponential change driven by technology and the Internet.

### Winners and a lot of Losers

Internet convenience comes at a great cost, and rapid change brings winners and losers. From my vantage point, there are a lot of losers. The Internet is bankrupting traditional media such as newspapers and direct mail marketers; eliminating millions of living-wage jobs, and breeding bias and misinformation that cannot be trusted.

Among the losers are people like me, middle-aged, once considered experts in the field, and quick to be displaced if I don't adapt. I'm giving my life to chasing exponential change and it's still passing me by. That just doesn't seem right.

Technology and the Internet are changing our world at an exponential rate. Fifteen years ago, I was less experienced and less educated, but fifteen years ago I was paid more than twice what I am earning today. These days I am working full-time hours between two part-time jobs for less than half the wage, with no benefits, and with more than twice the responsibility. Fifteen years ago I was responsible for the layout and design of print materials for direct mail marketers. Today I am responsible for the layout and design of print and Web site media, plus copywriting, image editing, compositing, printing, and the marketing of opt-in e-mail campaigns.

Don't get me wrong; I absolutely love the work I'm doing. It's just that with inflation and the added responsibilities; shouldn't I be making the same as I did fifteen years ago? At least I'm doing the work I love, being "green" by saving a few trees, bringing in enough to get by, and so far, keeping the horses.

The job I held fifteen years ago is hard to find in today's workplace. Between corporate downsizing and the Internet, there are few print advertising and direct mail marketers around. Sure, advertising and direct marketing still exist today, but not in the form of my skill base and experience. Internet media has changed the roles of media workers and the skill set required to do the job. Staying afloat means that I have to learn new skills and become more adaptable than ever. Eye strain, headaches, and weight gain are the consequences of spending 12-16 hours a day at the computer trying to keep up with exponential change.

So what are my options? They are even less attractive. I can join my colleagues in the unemployment line that is projected to reach 8% in the coming year (Lien) or I can greet shoppers with a cart at Walmart for even less money [if I'm lucky enough to get hired].

Yet I persevere because "everyone is online" (Brynko). Information Today reported that "93% of teens" and "94% of their parents" are online (Brynko). Since the Internet made its public day beau in 1993, Web site growth has grown from 18,000 Web sites in 1995 to 100 million in 2006 (Walton). The numbers keep climbing at a rapid rate.

Clearly the winners are corporations that stay ahead of the trends. Corporations that switched from print media and direct mail to digital media have saved time and money. The print production process and mailing are time consuming and costly. While digital media is cost effective, fast, measurable, and require hundreds less headcount to staff. The losers are the growing numbers of unemployed, displaced, overworked and underpaid professionals.

#### Decline of the Newspaper and Print Advertising

For over two hundred years, the newspaper has been one of the media pioneers in America that has shaped news gathering and provided a means to carry advertising messages to consumers. The newspaper industry supports many living wage jobs: editors, writers, art directors, graphic artists, photographers, production artists, printers, distributors, and more.

Less than twenty years ago, the Internet became a public medium and has quickly become the premier information source and advertising vehicle. Anyone with access to the Internet can set up a blog for free, apply Google AdSense to receive advertising revenue, upload content, opinions, news web feeds from AP, stories, photos, videos, and favorite links in minutes.

Online media is like a lump of molding clay. Content in cyberspace can be written, rewritten, corrected and updated continuously and instantaneously. Newspapers, direct mail and other print media are not moldable like that. Once material is published and delivered, it cannot be changed without re-entering the costly and time-consuming print and distribution processes. Beth Brinton, group operations manager at Penton Media, agrees that “digital is the faster-paced marketing vehicle, where you can change the message or the entire campaign on the fly” (The Power Of Print In An E-Marketing World).

If “everyone is online” (Brynko), that’s where advertisers want to be. Wachovia Equity Research reported that “newspapers are losing the most ad dollars to the Internet compared to other media” (Saba). Business Week reported that “early on, the Mercury News saw the Web threat coming. It’s still struggling to survive. Many dailies are losing circulation at an alarming rate” (“A Cautionary Tale for Old Media”). Statistics show that “Internet ad spending will grow six times faster than traditional media between 2006 and 2009.... The biggest growth will come from online ad spending, while newspapers will be the slowest-growing segment.... We will continue to see the migration of advertising dollars from traditional offline media into the Internet and other new digital media opportunities” (Maddox).

Gregory Barton is the executive VP of licensing and legal affairs at Ziff-Davis. He said, “Today’s marketers are seeking newer, faster, and cheaper ways to reach the audience. The audience is increasingly responding to digital formats, and marketing is following that lead.” (The Power Of Print In An E-Marketing World). This explains why direct mail marketers and catalogers have dissolved their internal creative departments. They have eliminated the time-intensive processes and expenses of internal creative departments, printing and mailing by switching from direct mail catalogs to low-cost digital media.

After all, why would advertisers want to spend more money on a smaller demographic in a shrinking readership when they can have a global market of niche readers for less money? A bigger readership for less money with a moldable medium like the Internet just makes good business sense.

### Evaporation of Journalism

The graphics industry isn't the only one being displaced by the popularity of the Internet, so is the reputable journalism industry. The journalistic process is time-consuming and costly. Checking facts, obtaining two-sources, and reporting an unbiased story from both sides of an issue takes time and time is money. When advertisers stop supporting newspapers, newspapers stop supporting journalist. Since the year 2000, corporate downsizing and the shrinking newspaper market have claimed as many as "four thousand newsroom jobs in print alone" according to the "State of the News Media report released in March by the Project for Excellence in Journalism" (Who Will Tell Us).

Reducing costs is a current corporate trend. By eliminating the expense of the journalistic process, the costs of printing, paper, and distribution, the Internet just makes good business sense over the newspaper infrastructure of news gathering. Plus, online content is quick to revise with no added expense. Remember, it's like a lump of molding clay.

According to an article posted on the CQ Researcher Online, "The Internet is changing business and human expectations, as well, and some of those changes are shaking the old information infrastructure to its foundations without providing guidance on how to replace traditional institutions that strove to ensure information credibility, analysts say...Part of the process will be figuring out how to pay people to provide organized, reliable information online"

(Clemmitt). I just wonder if we have noticed a difference in what we read online versus from a newspaper like the New York Times. Are people reading critically or are they taking what they read at face value?

Alissa Quart is an old school journalist who is feeling the effects of the rapid changes in the industry. She reported that “journalism is more or less divided into two camps, which [she calls] Lost Media and Found Media”. She defines “Lost Media” as the traditional journalistic practices and processes that led the industry up until the Internet. “Found Media” is this new digital era of bloggers. Quart writes:

“I went to the Nieman conference partially because I wanted to see how the forces creating this new division are affecting and afflicting the Lost Media world that I love best, not on the institutional level, but for reporters and writers themselves. This world includes people who write for all the newspapers and magazines that are currently struggling with layoffs, speedups, hiring freezes, buyouts, the death or shrinkage of film- and book-review sections, limits on expensive investigative work, the erasure of foreign bureaus, and the general narrowing of institutional ambition. It includes freelance writers competing with hordes of ever-younger competitors willing to write and publish online for free, the fade-out of established journalistic career paths, and, perhaps most crucially, a muddled sense of the meritorious, as blogs level and scramble the value and status of print publications, and of professional writers” (Quart).

Quart is left with the question, “Should I go to business school because everyone’s a writer now?” All you have to do is replace “writer” with “graphic artist” and that’s been my experience in print advertising. In fact, it is what led me back to college.

### The Birth of Bias and Inaccuracy in Media

The Internet is phasing out the newspaper. Along with it goes the reputable field of journalism which is being replaced with Google searches, blogs, and open-source wikis where “factual mistakes are alarmingly easy to find” and “misinformation often comes from highly reputable institutions” (Clemmitt).

Journalists are being replaced with bloggers. Many write for free, so a little bias is understandable and a few fabrications won't hurt anyone, right? Unless it is read by someone who doesn't have critical reading skills and uses the misinformation from a blog as fact in a research paper. English author Andrew Keen said, “We're increasingly creating a media-illiterate society,” in which people trust what they've read on the Web and “don't know they're ill-informed” (Clemmitt). Joseph Turnow, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication said that the immediacy of the Internet and multiple authors give “the rumor mill enormous new potential to spread” misinformation (Clemmitt).

Some feel a little bias and the insights from citizen journalists is a good thing. The Huffington Post blog allows “the public to participate in news gathering” something that “traditional journalists would never write about” (Clemmitt). Citizen journalists believe that bias breaks the false construct of “framing stories as conflicts” (Clemmitt) when professional journalists equally present both sides of a story. Citizen journalists feel that this “strategy actually harmed media credibility and accuracy because it polarized issues and positions instead of finding the gray areas that often exist” (Clemmitt).

Others are more skeptical like Neil Henry, a professor of journalism at the University of California, Berkeley. He has also noticed the cost that the Internet has had on the loss of



traditional media workers. Henry said, “I can’t help but fear a future – increasingly barren of skilled journalists – in which Google ‘news’ searches turn up not news but the latest snarky rants from basement bloggers, fake news reports from government officials and PR cleverly peddled as journalism by advertisers” (Clemmitt).

The shortcoming to blogs and other online content is that you never know if what you’re reading is true. Some online content is “written by experts, others are contributed by people with no expertise in the subject matter, and it’s difficult or impossible for unwary readers to tell the difference.” For example, anyone with access to the Internet can build a blog for free. Recently white supremacist groups have used the Internet to make false claims that President-Elect Barak Obama “not only practices Islam but is practically a terrorist” (Clemmitt). Obama’s campaign fought back with a Web site they launched – “fightthesmears.com” – which helped diffuse the lies that could have cost him the election. The downsides to immediacy and cost savings are misinformation, inaccuracies, lies, and bias.

As consumers, we need to ask: Is Internet news really news? Is it backed by the two source rule? Is it unbiased and cover both sides of an issue? Is it fact or opinion? Or is it advertising? Can society tell the difference between advertorial and editorial within a news Web site? Are we assuming that what we read is true and credible? Are we aware of the change in what we read online, or are we too busy chasing exponential change that we haven’t had time to notice?

Among the concerns of dissolving traditional media, displaced workers, growing unemployment and the loss of living wage jobs, and the birth of bias and misinformation, there are many more concerns that the Internet raises. Some of which are concerns about safety,

privacy, identity theft, viruses, plagiarism, copyright infringement, SPAM, Internet addiction, pornography, and the digital divide between socio-economic groups.

But we're not going to go there. I'm tired and my brain is full.

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