

*“The Future of Journalism”*  
by Michael DePalma

While few argue the grim future for newspapers in America, citizens and journalists alike ponder journalism's prospects. As the news media struggles to embrace emerging technologies, one of its greatest resources may be the very audience it kept at a distance.

### **Doom and Gloom in the Newsroom**

How bad is it for the newspapers? Speaking to students at Yale University in September 2009, Tom Brokaw stated, “The business of journalism is on life support.” Numbers echo that conclusion.

The Newspaper Association of America shows print advertising down 17.7 percent in 2008. Before Congress in April 2009, journalist John Nichols cited 16,000 newspaper jobs lost in 2008.

Downsizing is so rampant that journalist Erica Smith started her own blog in 2008, *Paper Cuts*, just to keep track. As of October 19, 2009, her site displays 2009 job losses at 13,768 and climbing.

### **Viva la Revolución**

Multimedia approaches to journalism may be necessary for it to thrive. Writer Clay Shirky states, “There is no general model for newspapers [to use] to replace the one the Internet just broke.” He adds, “Society doesn't need newspapers. What we need is journalism.”

In terms of content, that may mean more specialization. Newsweek writer Daniel Lyons laments, “The typical daily newspaper...tries to provide a little bit of everything – politics, sports, business, celebrity stuff – and as a result, it doesn't do anything particularly well.”

Writer Philip Meyer sees presentation taking the form of a less frequent print publishing, supplemented by constantly updated online content. The question becomes how to support the content.

## Looking Ahead

One possibility is crowdfunding. Website Spot.us offers “community funded reporting.” According to that site, individuals make tax-deductible donations to fund reports they want to see. If a news organization picks up the story, the donation is reimbursed.

“Any good journalist needs to have a sense of what their community is,” comments Jeff Thomas, editor of the Colorado Springs Gazette. Thomas was speaking to a reporting class at Pikes Peak Community College in September 2009.

Thomas sees news agencies joining citizens in “round table discussions” online. “The Internet is nothing if not the largest repository of argument,” he adds.

As Brokaw mused, gone are the days when, “We talk, you listen...and maybe if we're moved, we'll print one of your letters.” Readers that embraced technology like blogs and podcasts are now demanding to be heard.

Journalist Tina Brown thinks the news will do more than survive. Speaking with Katie Couric on CBS News in September 2009, she maintained, “I believe...we're actually going to see a golden age of journalism.” That optimistic future for journalism may hinge upon the participation of its readers.

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