

AN ODE TO PRINT

In 2005 I wrote that the 19th century newspaper we were producing in the 21st century was dead. But newspapers have a tendency to behave like the Phoenix.

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The resurrection of the printed newspaper has begun. The process requires all the energy, all the vitality and all the strength that our hearts can muster. The alternative is simply to keep dying, nibbled to death by discouragement, fear or the burden of recurring crises. Yes, the printed newspaper has a future, but only if it changes radically.

Let me use a Question-and-Answer format to outline a possible route map.



1. WILL THE PUBLIC ABANDON PAPER AS A VEHICLE FOR COMMUNICATING?

No, no, and no! Mankind will never abandon such a wonderful tool that has been its faithful partner for much of human history.

2. WILL PAPER CONTINUE TO BE MADE OUT OF NATURAL CELLULOSE FIBERS?

Probably not, or at least that won't be the norm. There is a growing ecological consciousness that strongly opposes such a process. Failure to recognize this leads to an undesirable and unsustainable clash between information and conservation.

Paper must be made with other fibers that do not originate in natural cellulose.



3. WILL PAPER RETAIN ITS ROLE AS A VEHICLE FOR JOURNALISM?

Yes, beyond a doubt. The range of paper stocks will continue to expand in the interest of greater functionality and quality, lower price, and the esthetic needs of the industry.

4. DO PRINTED NEWSPAPERS HAVE A FUTURE?

Yes. They will continue to exist, and will play an important role among present and future communications media. They are not going to disappear, and they are not going to turn into a marginal relic of an ancient information medium.

5. WILL PRINTED NEWSPAPERS RETAIN THEIR TRADITIONAL FORMAT?

Newspapers have long been searching for new formats, sometimes timidly, slicing away an inch or a centimeter at a time, and sometimes more boldly, shifting to a compact Berliner or tabloid format.

In my view, however, neither the broadsheet nor the Berliner or the tabloid, are useful, user-friendly, practical or functional for the reader.

Printed newspapers must evolve to look more like traditional magazines, not only for economic reasons but above all to become more user-friendly and more modern.

6. WHAT SHOULD PRINTED NEWSPAPERS BE LIKE IN TERMS OF PHYSICAL QUALITY?

Today, their quality is awful.

With some exceptions, they are poorly printed, in unstable colors, and they smell of

petroleum. All too frequently they stain the user's hands and clothes.

They are obese, hard to move, and hard to read, and they tend to fall apart. They are onion-like, peeling away in the reader's hands, hard to follow, and lacking in continuity.

The physical quality of printed newspapers must undergo a quantum jump. They must be impeccably printed, in stable full color with no variations in quality, using mineral-based inks, and heat-drying. They must be stapled or perfect-bound along the spine.

7. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF DESIGN IN THE FUTURE OF THE PRINTED NEWSPAPER?

Good design will be critically important. Printed newspapers will have to abandon the current fast food design and turn themselves into attractive "information jewels" that will help the reader absorb content, while at the same time allowing for more streamlined production.

8. WILL PRINTED NEWSPAPERS CONTINUE TO BE PUBLISHED DAILY?

I don't believe a daily cycle is necessary, and I can see various alternative options:

a. Supercompact newspapers with very few pages from Monday to Thursday, with content-rich magazine-like weekend editions from Friday to Sunday.

b. A more radical approach would be to publish online only from Monday to Thursday, and both online and offline from Friday to Sunday.

c. Or combine the two options in various permutations.

Breaking news would be free online 7/24.

