

# Reconstructing the Written Word

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Once upon a time in a City we all know, there was an ethos of prosperity, knowledge and all things literary. The round table at The Algonquin was filled with the celebrated and was at the center of this kingdom. Print media publishing empires grew; newspapers and magazines flourished and columnists from Franklin Pierce Adams and Jimmie Fidler to Walter Winchell and Louella Parsons solicited both fear and awe from an admiring public. The written word reigned and was respected.

Or so the story goes.

Somewhere along its haughty rise to fame and fortune, the written word took itself too seriously. Much of print media was sure of its place in perpetuity. Failure to recognize its own mortality and as knowledgeable communicator, Paul Argenti indicates “assuming the problems would magically disappear”<sup>1</sup>, has proven detrimental to most in print media. As a result, publishing houses have laid off many illustrious writers and as well, readership has taken a significant nosedive. Is print media indeed past its prime? Has it become yet another victim of 21st Century technology? And if so, where do we go from here; what’s next for publishing?

In his article about the current state of publishing and print media<sup>2</sup>, David Carr points out signs that there is a “feeling of age, of a coming sunset... in all corners of traditional publishing.”<sup>3</sup> Although the mighty New York publishing houses have contracted, this pinch is also being felt nationwide. Mr. Carr further says the early warning signs that mainstream print media was taking a hit, started as early as 2000. Yet the ivory tower mentality of “media royalty”<sup>4</sup> refused to recognize these indicators and as such, became yet another example of past excess and the doomed collateral of a strained economy. In corroboration with Carr’s article, Argenti points out<sup>5</sup>- “these disparities [i.e.: unwillingness to deal with the changing business model]...made for unstable economic conditions”. To rebound – and thrive - print media publishing needs to change. Acknowledgement of its vulnerability will lead proponents of the written word to find new ways to recreate publishing.

In this respect, Argenti reports that most of America gets its news from television – and now more than ever, the Internet. The mere plethora of online media and content sources available from the likes of

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<sup>1</sup> Argenti, Paul. "The Changing Environment for Business." Corporate Communication, Fifth Edition. New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 2009. 20

<sup>2</sup> Carr, David. "The Fall and Rise of Media" New York Times 30 Nov. 2009: B1

<sup>3</sup> (ibid.)

<sup>4</sup> (ibid.)

<sup>5</sup> Argenti, Paul. "The Changing Environment for Business." Corporate Communication, Fifth Edition. New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 2009. 10

Google to Wikipedia means that print media must change its perspective in order to compete with these crowd-sourced suppliers of information and to accommodate the reading public. In this context, Argenti says that “technology has strengthened communication channels around the globe... [creating] a world so interwoven by shared knowledge that it becomes a ‘Global Village’”<sup>6</sup> We must heed the past and with these new tools, become better than our predecessors.

This is a time of redefining – rearranging – and reconnecting with each other. Rather than print media, the future success of the written word may be in promoting reliable, “environmentally friendly” online media content. Mobile technology has already joined the conversation. Instead of localizing media, information and the written word becomes part of and accessed by a global community.

Media has had a wakeup call. Argenti further encourages recognition of this change and to “adapt to the environment without compromising principles.”<sup>7</sup> Publishing leaders like the New York Times are finding ways to engage and inform while staying true to their premise to deliver “all the news that’s fit to print”. Perhaps the New York Times’ slogan will change over time to “all the news that’s fit to read”. Argenti urges a unified message tied-in to the “company’s overall vision and strategy”<sup>8</sup>, recognizing that change is the part of growth and evolution in order to adapt to the increasing demands of a changing business model.

In this new publishing world, the ideology of the Algonquin has evolved too, finding new life in online groups and forums across the globe. Blogs like the Huffington Post and Wonkette have already become staging grounds for the likes of Arianna Huffington, Nick Denton and Ana Maria Cox who have emerged as this generation’s media mavens, proving that the written word is not dead, it’s merely going through an evolution and “finding ways of making ambient information more useful.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> (ibid.) 18

<sup>7</sup> (ibid.) 20

<sup>8</sup> (ibid.) 22

<sup>9</sup> Carr, David. "The Fall and Rise of Media" New York Times 30 Nov. 2009: B1