

CHAPTER 7:

A FEW FINAL THOUGHTS

What makes a good journalist has not really changed: Being accurate remains the most important rule. Fairness is a close second. Clear and concise writing and good story telling are other good journalism traits. What has changed are the tools a journalist has in his or her arsenal. Newsgathering techniques are regularly evolving and the Internet has, over time, become an essential tool for reporters and editors.

So how are reporters using the Internet? Perhaps you've seen the great journalism movie from 1976, "All the President's Men," which is about two Washington Post reporters digging into the Watergate scandal. In one scene, Robert Redford, playing reporter Bob Woodward, frantically searches through dozens of telephone books for someone's address. With Internet access in most newsrooms now, these searches would be conducted online with phone search tools like www.Anywho.com, www.infospace.com or www.switchboard.com.

Quick look-ups of information are one of many ways reporters and editors now use the Internet on a daily basis. Ask a few working journalists, and they'll say they use the Internet to:

- Check out newspapers and TV reports.
- Get e-mail alerts and background

information from government agencies on their beats.

- Locate people and get background information about them.
- Set up interviews and even contact company officials through their private e-mail addresses.
- Spot trend stories.
- Open up their Rolodex to experts from diverse places and backgrounds.
- Find quick reference materials, including calculators, dictionaries and encyclopedias. These are most helpful for quick fact checking, as well.
- Get access to fee-paid databases that provide extensive newspaper libraries going back decades, science information, or public and court records.
- Get instant feedback from readers and viewers, who also can quickly spot errors.

**For the
journalism and
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Broadcast and the Internet Go Hand-in-Hand

Just as Woodward and Bernstein would have been astonished at the technology available 30 years after their historic investigation, we, too, can barely imagine the technological possibilities of the future. But one thing is certain: Though we may not know the details of future technologies, we can be sure that journalists and broadcasters will use them in a variety of creative ways.

RTNDF's 2002 project, "Covering Politics On-Air and Online," showed how local television stations could use the Internet to offer in-depth political coverage during an election season. One interesting idea came from KCNC-TV in Denver, which launched a novel event on election night 2002: The station sponsored a webcast, providing four and a half hours of live election coverage available only on the Internet. This approach combined the expansive quality of the Internet with the immediacy of television, in the process stretching the boundaries of both media.

KCNC aimed the webcast at younger people, who rarely tune into television on election night. Aware that on-air promotions probably would miss much of the target audience, the station promoted the event by distributing fliers on college campuses and taking out advertisements in student newspapers urging students to "tune in" from a place they were likely to be on election night—their computers. The program featured guests likely to appeal to the younger set—young Republicans, young Democrats and local cultural celebrities. And it came in a form that multi-tasking young people would appreciate; rather than demanding their undivided attention, as television does, it let them

"watch" KCNC's coverage while participating in a chat set up by the station or doing any of a slew of other things, from instant messaging to studying.

At first glance, the webcast itself may sound like nothing new—an anchor sitting in a studio talked with a series of guests and occasionally broke away for news updates from the field. But, in fact, the event was quite different from the usual election night fare. Instead of jumping repeatedly between various campaign headquarters and waiting for returns, the KCNC webcast featured sustained discussion about politics from passionate observers rather than direct participants in campaigns. In an atmosphere that resembled a viewer's living room more than the fancy ballrooms full of political supporters and balloons, the station's guests talked politics in terms almost entirely free of the posturing and polarizing tones that repel many people from politics. "The webcast is everything you don't get with a broadcast," according to Libby Gardner, the producer. "It is an ongoing conversation."

So, for the journalism and broadcast students of today, the future is wide open. Emerging technologies will enable them to combine their traditional task—getting the story out—with unimaginable new ways of doing so. They are on the threshold of expanding possibilities.

In this book, we've tried to convey an understanding of the basics of journalism, how the Internet works, how to assess critically what you find online, how to work ethically and legally in doing your journalism, how to protect your privacy and how to put a Web site online. With these tools, students should have starting points from which to develop into great journalists. And, we hope, advisers should be able to train their students on how best to work in the changing online world. ■