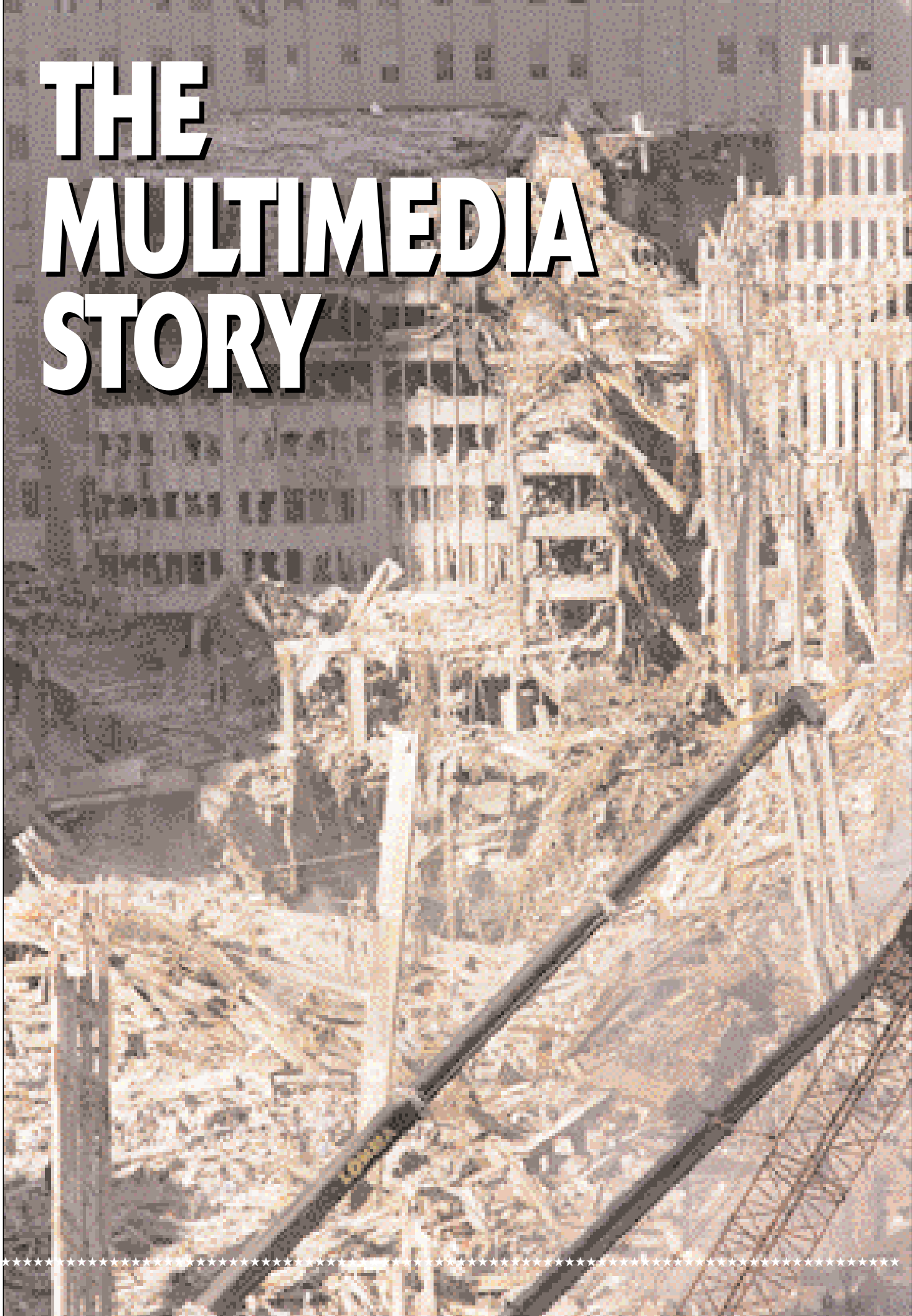




# THE MULTIMEDIA STORY



# In times of public tragedy, we learn to depend on media

By MICHAEL REAL

In learning to cope with the tragedy of the destruction of the World Trade Center, the suicide attack on the Pentagon and the loss of some 5,000 lives, we must try to understand what happened and learn to cope with it. And we certainly cannot separate our effort to understand from the striking importance of our dependency on media of communication in times of crisis.

While the horrific experiences of Sept. 11, 2001, may be the worst single tragedy any of us will ever witness, that Tuesday continues a long line of traumatic events shared by millions through television, radio, newspapers, magazines, telephones, and now the Web. The Columbine High School killings, the Oklahoma City bombing, the Gulf War invasion, the death of 20,000 in Bopal, India, from toxic gas, the shooting of President Reagan in 1981, the 1972 Munich Olympics hostage crisis, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and President Kennedy – there have been too many to even list them all. But from these publicly shared tragedies, patterns and lessons emerge. What are some of these?

The **FIRST LESSON** has to do with recognizing the incredible dependency on media that occurs immediately. When President Kennedy was assassinated, 51 percent of the public first learned of it through word-of-mouth – interpersonal, rather than media – channels. But then virtually everyone turned to broadcast reports. The average home in the United States viewed approximately 10 hours per day of assassination-related television from Friday through Monday after the assassination. And through that long ordeal of shock and mourning, television led the way through the three stages: obtaining news, surviving the shock, and achieving social reintegration.

As the week following Sept. 11 evolved, certain phases immediately became evident and were shared by most of us.

There was first the information: Something unusual is happening. We may have heard this from friends or through the media. That was followed by the immediate turning to media to obtain information. That information included the most powerful, riveting, troubling real life visual images we may ever be shocked by – the slamming of the planes into the towers and the subsequent collapse of each tower. That factual reality was hard enough to accept, but why was it happening and what did it mean?

To obtain information necessary to begin to understand these events, we are completely dependent on the energy and accuracy of the news media organizations. So a **SECOND LESSON** has to do with critically understanding and evaluating media information, being media literate in sensing what to trust and what to question in the first chaotic reports and the subsequent efforts to explain.

Events now rush at us with such speed. In the era before television, when the Titanic went down, it took many days for the details of the tragedy to reach the public. As these events now explode in front of our eyes, we are reminded of John Lennon's observation that "Life is what happens while you are making other plans."

Gradually the production of new information about our terrorist attack slowed over the next days, and the role of the media shifted. It became a "ritual" experience. The mass media of communication are often thought of as transferring information over distance in space. But the media also function to maintain society over time, to ritually bring together the millions of individuals attempting to cope with reality.

In the past, a traditional village might ritually cope with death and tragedy by face-to-face sharing of mourning and loss through a wake and funeral. Now the rituals of mourning are shared simultaneously by millions, as in the Memorial Service in the National Cathedral on the Friday following the attack. Remember how hundreds of millions around the world joined in the funeral for Princess Diana in early September of 1997? Media ritual, like face-to-face ritual, can bring people together symbolically, can reassure the public, and can provide shared activity

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through which people begin to come to terms with the tragedy.

So a **THIRD LESSON** of media and tragedy is that we can allow ourselves to share in the mediated mourning and reassessment ritual experience available through media. We can also personally share rituals of readings, candles, music and reflection. It is not odd or weak to need these; it is normal and potentially healthy. Tragedy brings a heightened appreciation of what we have lost and what we have not lost, our friends, our family, our classmates and colleagues. In the ritual observances, our perspective is adjusted to remind us of what is really important in life.

As we reconcile ourselves with the tragedy, a **FOURTH LESSON** emerges: We cannot let emotions and stereotypes guide our analysis of causes. Remember how, following the Oklahoma City bombing, everyone assumed it was the work of a Middle Eastern terrorist? But it turned out to be one of our own, a would-be patriotic but fanatically misguided American named Timothy McVeigh. Remember how, in the first days, after Princess Diana's death, paparazzi became the root of all evil, until we learned the condition of her driver and other complicating details?

Bertrand Russell once observed, "Few people can be happy unless they hate some other person, nation, or creed." The rush to judgment and revenge must be modified by careful, restrained but insistent rational investigation and analysis. The perpetrators of the Sept. 11 tragedy are specific people and not the entirety of an ethnic, religious or cultural grouping of people.

How well are the media performing in this crisis? Factually, I think many of us agree that the TV, cable, satellite, and radio networks performed respectably in the first day. They rushed for the information the public was crying for. The few erroneous rumors – a fifth plane, a car bomb in Washington, etc. – were quickly questioned and rejected. In the first days, the media did not, as in presidential elections, compete to be the first to name the outcome in numbers, in this case the death toll. Instead they carried spokespersons like Mayor Guiliani warning against targeting ethnic or religious groups for hatred and retaliation.

In subsequent days, the media moved to a new phase and brought home the personal quality of the tragedy: stories of victims' last phone calls to loved ones, firefighters and police officers who rushed to help and were lost, heart-breaking searches through rubble for survivors, the accidental circumstances that allowed some to miss the tragedy and survive, the pictures and stories of a few representing the thousands lost.

Interviewees seemed to welcome the media interest, avoiding that sense of invasion of privacy by overly aggressive reporters that sometimes follows

major tragedies. Statements of public officials, analysis by experts in security and public policy, debates about what should have been done before and what should be done now – these filled our airwaves and pages in more recent days and are necessary, no matter how inadequate some of the analysis turns out to be.

These lead to a **FIFTH LESSON**: We need to follow closely the aftermath and analysis because we, the American people, are the ultimate check and balance on what our leaders do. The weighing of options and choice of response or retaliation cannot be left to leaders to work out in secret and carry out in isolation. We all must be part of the national dialog about recovery and bringing to justice.

This brings up a difficult point. If there is one failure of the media in this crisis that especially concerns me, it is the lack of attempt to explain the background of why the attack took place. It is not enough to simply demonize the enemy, which in the case of Osama bin Laden is easy enough to do. We have called on our allies for support and the media have paraded foreign leaders and events before us to bring home the heartfelt sympathy and solidarity that many around the world feel. But what about other reactions?

There are millions around the world who resent the power, egotism, wealth and self-serving rhetoric of the United States. They see our advantages not as an earned privilege but as the result of historically based empires, violence, suppression and exploitation. It is sad to reflect how many may have felt a twinge of guilty delight in seeing us brought low. Why is it that we are resented? What can we do to change that so that fewer people in the future will be inspired to attack the United States, and no one will sympathize with those who do? What do we as American people really know of the lives and loves and values of the complex peoples of the Middle East, where this plot likely originated? Do we know the consequences and perceptions of our national policies there?

As Guido Stempel has noted, perhaps the public dialog of media, leaders and people would be better served by speaking and thinking of the United States more as a member of the family of nations and less as the last remaining superpower.

A **SIXTH LESSON**, therefore, becomes: Do not be content with understanding only our side of this tragedy; try to get behind the history and nature of other perspectives, including those on the opposite side. In bloody conflicts it is normal for both sides to have legitimate concerns and also blind spots and failures. If we really want to prevent repeats of the Sept. 11 tragedy, beefing up security is only a narrow, short-term tactic. Worse than that, engaging the United States directly in an ill-thought-out, endless retaliatory spiral of violence like we see in Northern Ireland, the Middle East, and chronic problem spots

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could be disastrous on an unimaginable level. True solutions require not only strategies but also much more sophisticated reassessments of our place within the world and not above it.

In considering the role of media in this tragedy, we cannot omit the amazing role that cell phones seem to have played. They were, for many, the final exchange with loved ones, in some cases while facing the certainty of imminent death. They can help find people trapped in rubble or lost on the streets. They even appear to have played a major role in defeating the mission of the fourth plane, as passengers learned via cell phone that the hijackers had even worse intentions than merely seizing control of the plane and endangering the occupants. The technological media of communication, for all the frustrations and criticism they engender, can be remarkably useful tools as well.

Where are we now? Life goes on. We will survive. We may be changed, but much will remain unchanged.

Ultimately, the tangible, long-term consequences of Sept. 11 tragedy may be much more in our own hands than we realize. If we take the time and care to learn the lessons of that week in September and everything it represents, we may wind up better off than before. We may be better, not just because we learned we can survive a horrible disaster by hugging and caring with other Americans – a wonderful lesson – but also because we will be smarter, better informed, and more responsible than ever.

But this will happen only if we are determined to make it happen.

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*Michael Real is director of the E. W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University. This article was adapted from his Sept. 17, 2001, address to the university community.*

# Online speed-boost checklist

BY STEVE YELVINGTON

Keep your eye on the ball. The first priority is accurate information, promptly delivered. All else is filigree. Don't let your desire to do a great Flash-multimedia presentation get ahead of this prime responsibility.

Have a disaster plan. All of us intend to have one. Few do.

If your site becomes jammed by traffic, strip the home page down. Discard graphics.

Move key information to the top level. For example, on an election night, get the numbers onto the home page or in the headline. When the server is overloaded, don't ask for a click unless it's really necessary.

Have adequate bandwidth and server horsepower. "Adequate" doesn't mean infinite – but if you're running at 60 percent capacity over the noon hour every single day, you're going to get killed when a big news event occurs.

Move the data upstream. If you host your own site, consider placing those servers in an Internet backbone provider's

facility (colocation). Consider distributed cache technologies such as Akamai – although they, too, were overloaded during the terror attacks on New York and the Pentagon.

Don't send a dynamic page to do a static page's job. If 100,000 people are going to look at the same thing, don't whack on a database and rebuild the page every time. Either push the page out as complete HTML, or use a pull-based cache (a la Vignette).

Segregate applications from page delivery. Posting to message boards, searching databases, storing data, performing computations – anything that eats CPU cycles and might interfere with the very prompt delivery of pages – should be segregated in the system architecture. It isn't always possible or expedient, but it is a noble goal.

Strive for redundancy. Editors are trained to eliminate redundancy in copy, but in technology it's a good thing to have backup systems. Any potential failure point – servers, disk drives, routers – should have at least a twin.



**Steve Yelvington** is manager of Web site development for Morris Communications Corp./Morris Digital Works, in Augusta, Ga.



# Online: Plan now for the next time

By RUSTY COATS



**Rusty Coats**, former editor of *startribune.com*, the Web site of the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis, is director of new media for MORI Research.

The terrorist attacks brought out the best in online news sites. Immediate, interactive and wielding a mighty wallop of multimedia, these sites proved that while some may debate the future of online news, when disaster strikes, readers flock to our sites to make sense of their world.

While some print publishers focused on the heroic task of reporting, editing, designing and publishing print extras, online editors were faced with a similar but more dynamic problem. They needed to launch what amounted to an extra edition immediately and build it in such a way that it could expand and contract throughout the day as more news, graphics, multimedia and resources became available.

Bandwidth only added to the problem. Many of the premier-brand Web sites were so slammed with eager online readers that they were inaccessible. Readers were bounced to error pages or watched their browser windows hang. Some sites hurriedly rebuilt their home page and story templates to shed non-essential graphics and gizmos to present online readers with a Spartan but fast and functional site. Some sites did admirably; others simply looked cobbled together.

This scramble is a common occurrence in online workshops. It's an adrenaline-pumping, satisfying and almost completely avoidable waste of time.

Big news happens. Yet we consistently act surprised by it.

And while much of it is utterly unpredictable, a lot of it is not.

The suddenness of the terrorist attacks has segued into a long-term history that will play out over the next weeks and months. There likely will be more spikes in this story, when news is instantaneous and newsrooms scramble to quickly present these stories and images in a way that helps our readers connect and understand.

Here is a list of things our online newsrooms can do now so that when these next spikes occur, we can spend

more time practicing journalism.

**Low-graphics mode:** This time, be prepared. Create a low-graphics version of your front page, pertinent section fronts and story templates. Right now. Have it on standby the way you keep a spare tire in the trunk. Consider headline organization and count, maximum graphic size, multimedia and interactivity integration, and "other news" presentation. Time you invest now in building elegant and utilitarian page architecture can be spent focusing on content and graphics to help your readers understand the next crisis, rather than waiting for your page to load.

**Staffing:** Some news sites didn't have the wire story posted online for three hours after the second plane struck the World Trade Center because their online staff hadn't come to the office yet, and no one else knew how to update the site. Create emergency staff plans now. If you have only one online content editor, what are your contingencies? Who else on staff should you educate on how to update your site – if only to get you through those first critical minutes of a breaking story?

**Real-time local news:** Review with your newsroom editor expectations and protocols for real-time local news on your site. Many sites did an admirable job posting the latest wire copy but didn't post local reaction, closings and other of-interest stories until later that night, long after local TV broadcasters aired the story. How can you get local news faster?

**Wires:** Some sites reported breakages in Associated Press feeds to their sites, so now is the time to review how stable your wire feeds are and whether the providers are working to make sure future breaks don't occur. Now is also a good time to review how your company – not just your newspaper – handles national/international news. Some companies centralize wire desks for their Web sites so local editors can focus on local coverage; other companies depend on site editors in every market to select, edit, package and post wire stories. Each has its strengths and weaknesses. Now's a

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good time to review what makes sense for your company.

**Multimedia:** Make arrangements now or review current agreements for use of video clips on your site, whether from The Associated Press, MSNBC, local network affiliates or vendors such as VideoAxs. Review the multimedia you're currently offering and see how you could package it better.

**Bandwidth:** Review your bandwidth needs and negotiate larger bandwidth. SignOnSanDiego.com's Chris Jennewein, for example, reported that his site adjusted its burstable bandwidth from 10 megabits to 100 megabits to make sure the site loaded smoothly.

**Interactivity:** Readers immediately wanted to talk about the terrorist attacks, and many news sites did an admirable job using online forums to present the scope of reader reactions. Two powerful examples are:

The New York Post  
([www.Webforums.com/forums/f-read/msa154.25.html](http://www.Webforums.com/forums/f-read/msa154.25.html))

The New York Daily News  
([www.Webforums.com/forums/f-read/msa110.55.html](http://www.Webforums.com/forums/f-read/msa110.55.html))

Analyze your interactivity software and how well you integrated it into your overall coverage. Make sure your print editors know what kind of resource you have on your site for touching readers – and letting them touch you.

**Advertising:** Talk to your advertising department to answer any questions about how you handled Sept. 11, 2001, and what your plan is for the next time. Let them know your criteria for going ad-free. (If you haven't drafted criteria, now's a chance to do that.)

**Marketing:** Meet with your marketing/promotions department to discuss how you handled the event online, what resources you posted and how you could better use the newspaper to reinforce the value, immediacy and interactivity of the site. Talk about how

to better guide print readers to the site and how your site can help guide people to tomorrow's newspaper.

**Readers:** Use this time to review your site server logs and other traffic measures to determine what readers truly valued and what they overlooked. Where should you have focused more attention? Where were your efforts wasted? What did their e-mail feedback say? What could you do better next time? Your readers may have already told you.

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Karin Winner, editor,  
*San Diego Union-Tribune*

**Q** Did your newspaper strengthen its position with readers?

**A** Our newspaper strengthened its position in the region by doing some really good community service projects and providing consistently strong daily newspapers — on the first Thursday and second Sunday following Sept. 11, we printed two versions of the American flag on jacket stock as wraps of the paper both for home delivery and the street (including the bulldog) for people to use as posters. On Sept. 16, we co-hosted a Day of Remembrance at Balboa Park in conjunction with the City of San Diego, where pastors and ministers of all faiths gathered, the mayor and other city officials and an audience of 15,000 - 20,000 people came together for inspirational sharing. We have sustained extended coverage from 4 - 11 additional pages each day on the aftermath of the attack and the build-up. We have been flooded with letters and e-mails of thanks for both the flags and the event. My sense is that we've never experienced a closer relationship with our readers than at this time of crisis.





# Clicking from coast to coast during a crisis

By ROB RUNETT



**Rob Runett** is the manager of electronic media analysis for Newspaper Association of America in Vienna, Va.

I visited a number of sites on Sept. 11, 2001, to get a sense of how newspaper-affiliated sites were serving their viewers.

The sites you'd expect most people to visit – The New York Times on the Web and washingtonpost.com – could not be accessed at about 9:20 a.m. ET. The New York Daily News site loaded quickly, but information about the plane crashes was not yet available. The New York Post site also was unavailable at this time.

I clicked across the country to Los Angeles, but the LA Times' servers must have been as overwhelmed as the major sites on the East Coast.

Washingtonpost.com's site loaded at about 9:28 a.m. and led with an Associated Press article with a 9:08 a.m. time stamp. During the next hour, I was able to quickly access Boston.com and sites from The Miami Herald, The Star-Ledger in New Jersey and The Hartford (Conn.) Courant. Boston.com presented a very effective – and chilling – “Latest News” box that appeared just beneath the site's name plate. Editors updated events as they unfolded during the morning in three- or four-sentence bursts. The Star-Ledger promoted a standing feature, its New York City skycam, on the front page. But an error message appeared when I tried the link. “The page cannot be displayed” messages were common on a number of sites.

The New York Times site, understandably, was still unavailable, as were national news sites MSNBC.com and CNN.com. USA Today.com presented news of the crashes in New York City with a large photo and links to Associated Press articles. At 9:47 a.m., SunSpot.net from The Sun in Baltimore offered “The Day in Pictures” and a video replay of the second plane crash. I was unable to connect to the video server.

The Chicago Tribune's site earlier in the day had led with the big story:

Michael Jordan's comments about inching close to a comeback. The site's editors pushed the story from the top position before 10 a.m., but MJ was still one element of the four-story package. Smartly tapping into its Tribune Co. corporate resources, the site posted an article from a Newsday reporter. Chicagotribune.com published an article about the cancellation of flights from O'Hare to the East Coast. The lead link on Philly.com took viewers to an updated Associated Press article about the New York disaster.

By now my colleagues in Vienna, Va., were staring out of the window to the east and watching smoke rise from the Pentagon. Access to sites around the country was still mixed.

Washingtonpost.com followed its strategy from the recent presidential election and stripped many of the front-page graphics to speed load time. The site published large headlines about the World Trade Center and Pentagon, plus a Webcam of the Pentagon fire and list of evacuations in the city. Almost 90 minutes after the first incident in New York, nytimes.com and MSNBC.com were still battling overloaded server requests.

NAA's building was evacuated as a security precaution, and I scrambled to get on the Beltway to avoid a massive traffic jam. During my next check at 2 p.m. ET, it was clear that many of the companies whose names are usually associated with once-daily, ink and dead-tree products, had transformed into fully functioning electronic information providers capable of informing thousands of people with breaking news. Staff reports were now mingled with AP stories. Web site managers stressed the interactive nature of the Web.

NJ.com's front page promoted bulletin boards that encouraged viewers to “share your feelings with others,” a much-needed form of community building and support offered by scores of other sites. The message board on The

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Tribune-Review's PittsburghLive.com hummed with messages asking for more information about the downed airliner in Pennsylvania.

The sites also acted as a communication point with viewers. Those willing to discuss eyewitness accounts or their attempts to reach relatives in New York City were asked to call reporters. The Knoxville News-Sentinel's KnoxNews.com was among the sites to take this approach and to announce an extra print edition published during the afternoon. The E.W. Scripps site developed a photo slide show that was distributed to the company's other sites, including the Naples (Fla.) Daily News. Tribune sites shared a photo gallery credited to The Orlando (Fla.) Sentinel. McClatchy Co.'s Nando Media acted as a key resource for McClatchy sites such as The Sacramento Bee.

Online publishers are regularly advised to "keep it local." Earlier in the day, this suggestion was wiped away because of the magnitude of the story and the server overloads at national sites. By the afternoon, however, local takes on the events were commonplace. Sites posted information about school closings, phone numbers for the Red Cross, American Airlines and United Airlines, and times and locations for local prayer vigils. At 3:04 p.m., Calkins Newspapers Inc.'s phillyBurbs.com was posting national news and linking to a special section with five locally focused, staff-written articles, including reaction from a high school where some of the students' parents work in New York City.

By now, nytimes.com was loading quickly. The site dramatically remade its front page, stripping out advertising and the left-side navigation bar. The trademark name plate was replaced by a simple font that spelled "The New York Times on the Web." Links to Reuters and AP coverage appeared to the right of three staff-written articles and one from Reuters. Unfortunately, the server was

unable to deliver video of the second World Trade Center airplane collision. Internal pages linked to a detailed map of the financial district and World Trade Center buildings and a large number of AP articles. Just prior to 4 p.m., I visited my last site of the day, washingtonpost.com. The news staff had pushed its content-sharing agreement with MSNBC into effect and posted links to four pieces of video from the cable network. Witnesses to the scene at the Pentagon appeared online in video shot by washingtonpost.com staff. Front-page links whisked viewers to transcripts of "Live Online" chats with a Washington Post reporter and a University of Maryland professor. The site posted a list of local and nationwide closings, a mix of Washington Post and AP articles and a question posted to viewers: "How did you get home today? Or are you still trying to figure that out? Reporters at washingtonpost.com would like to talk to you," followed by an e-mail address.

There's so much about the day's tragic events that we're still trying to figure out. But in terms of online coverage, we can learn from one another and strengthen the efforts to keep viewers informed.

**CNN.com**  
BREAKING NEWS

**AMERICA UNDER ATTACK**

- World Trade Centers collapse after planes hit, 10,000 emergency workers head to scene
- Plane hits Pentagon, part of the Pentagon collapses
- NTSB says United plane goes down near Pittsburgh
- Bush calls trade center crashes terrorist act
- Federal buildings, United Nations evacuated
- FAA grounds all U.S. flights, sends trans-Atlantic flights to Canada
- Israel evacuates embassies

**DEVELOPING STORY »**





# Online sources: Trust but verify

By STACI D. KRAMER

Trust but verify. In the scramble to cover the Oklahoma City bombing, a number of news organizations ended up using Internet material that turned out to be wildly inaccurate or, in at least one instance, a hoax, (that was an inflammatory call to arms that turned out to be a student experiment).

Check the posting date. Just because it's new to you doesn't mean it's new. If you doubt the rationale for this I have two words for you: Pierre Salinger. (Don't know what I mean? Test your Internet search skills.)

Don't rely on e-mail replies on deadline. Pick up the phone. Conversely, if you can't reach people by phone, try e-mail. Keep in mind that some people have their assistants read and respond to their e-mail.

Be adventurous. Be intuitive.

Use Web-wide search engines early and often.

Never rely on one search engine. Different methodologies turn up different results.

If the search engine offers help, use it. You'll save time in the long run.

Look for site-specific search engines. They aren't always obvious so you may have to dig.

Don't assume that searching a site via its general search engine will turn up everything you need. For instance, the Federal Communications Commission offers a number of different search tools, and each produces different results.

One search tool in particular will help you gauge public response:

groups.google.com replaces dejanews.com as the best way to search posts to Usenet.

Do yourselves a favor – use messages from chatrooms, listservs, etc. with extreme caution and make sure you let your readers know that you can't verify the information. Don't use the poster's name unless you're certain the person by that name posted the message.

Treat information from the Internet the same way you would information from any source.

Doublecheck information whenever possible. Use "official" Web sites as the defining source but realize that they are not always the last word.

Start a database that can be shared with others. You aren't going to be on duty 24 hours a day for the duration of this story. It doesn't have to be fancy. It can even be a text file that you leave on an open queue.

And remember, Ethics in Online Journalism = Ethics in Journalism. If you wouldn't do it in person, don't do it online. If you're in doubt, talk to a colleague. If you don't feel comfortable talking to someone in your newsroom, reach out to someone you trust.

Among others, you can call SPJ's ethics hotline, (317) 927-8000, Ext. 208, or the Ethics AdviceLine for Journalists sponsored by the Chicago Headline Club and the Loyola University Chicago Center for Ethics, (312) 409-3334.

You can also subscribe to post questions to spj-ethics, a listserv with about 300 members with far-ranging experience. Send a message to majordomo@ccrc.wustl.edu and in the body of the message, type "subscribe spj-ethics" and your address.

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**Staci D. Kramer**, a contributing editor to *Inside.com*, operates the *spj-ethics* discussion list and headed the Society of Professional Journalists' Online Task Force. She has been teaching journalists how to use the Internet since 1995.



STEVE HELBER / Associated Press





# Web site coverage in the crisis

BY ROB CURLEY

*The attacks on Sept. 11 occurred in the Northeast, but the coverage was the top priority for media outlets across the United States. API put five questions to Rob Curley, director of new media for the Topeka Capital-Journal and manager of the Midwest Content Group for Morris Communications Corp., regarding how his Web sites covered an event so many miles away that affected Americans so close to home.*

## **What was your very first instinct concerning what you had to do – your first thought?**

My first thought was, “What is our duty to our readers?” And the two overriding things flooding my mind were just how huge this event could turn out to be, and if I can’t get to CNN.com, then that means my readers can’t get to CNN.com.

The editorial staff from our Web site quickly got together – including calling in our online managing editor who had already been here until very early in the morning to do a site update – to determine how aggressive we would be with updates, how we would use our own online reporters, and what sort of multimedia packages we wanted to develop.

## **What was the best single thing you and your team did in organizing the online coverage?**

We had three editors on the wire updates, one focused on gathering multimedia to go with the local stories that were going to come out in the special print edition, one focused solely on photo galleries, and another just editing/encoding video. I took care of monitoring our message boards and coming up with opinion polls to be used on our site.

I guess that really didn’t answer your question ... but then again, maybe it did. The single best thing we may have done was to be calm and organized and have a general strategy. We knew we wanted to accomplish a lot. Though we are totally integrated with our print edition, the relationship can still be strained, even adversarial. But things went well between both staffs, maybe because for one of the first times (because of the extra edition), they got to see what it’s like to produce something so quickly, just on the spur of the moment – the way we end up operating a lot of the time.

## **What was the best single thing you did to make the package useful to your readers/viewers?**

This is a toughie. I think the thing that we did the best was keep things very updated and very

interactive. All of our stories had special pull-put boxes embedded into them after the third paragraph to send our readers to lots of other relevant content, multimedia and message boards. But our log files showed that almost half of our traffic went to the photo galleries. We didn’t expect it to be that high, but we did know that our readers love photo galleries. (We do at least three local galleries a week on our site.)

We always do lots of multimedia on our site, and the multimedia we had on the site was being accessed a lot. Of course, we had lots of video, but we also had a lot of expanded audio interviews with local sources. We also streamed Bush’s address live that night, and archived it. Not including photo galleries, our multimedia pages accounted for about six percent of our page views.

In a related note, our traffic was up almost 60 percent on Sept. 11.

We tried to change out the lead graphic on our home page about every hour so that our home page would always feel fresh to those looking for the latest news.

## **What were the chief barriers you faced, if any, in trying to do your best work?**

Time was our biggest barrier. We weren’t having many bandwidth problems. And the staff was working very hard. We really didn’t run into a lot of problems other than not having lots of time to do all that we wanted to do.

## **Most organizations have a set way of doing things. Did you break any rules?**

We broke our biggest internal rule.

Our site is extremely local. In fact, when some of our online employees are asked to speak at local schools and universities, they are very proud to talk about how our Web site in many ways has a much more local focus than our newspaper’s print edition.

That’s what made Sept. 11 a little strange for our staff because we have a very adamant rule about not putting any wire copy on our home page. We always go with a “local-only” home page. We did not follow that rule for a couple of reasons: 1) it was such a huge and important story; and 2) so many of the national sites were not coming up that morning that we decided it was a disservice to our readers not to try to get them this information.

Another thing that was strange for us was that we were used to building these big multimedia packages for local events. Building a Flash timeline for a national event is just not something we normally do.

