

[The always-interesting Andreas Pfeiffer, who publishes the acclaimed THE PFEIFFER REPORT TREND ALERT, says: "Ever since digital media and the Internet have begun to challenge conventional media, the impending demise of the latter has been predicted by industry observers and casual on-lookers alike. But today's media reality is beginning to look somewhat different." What does he mean? See this week's Ubiquity <<http://www.acm.org/ubiquity/>>. His TREND ALERT article is presented here with his permission and enthusiasm."

The Emergence of the Post-Digital Media Cloud

Media Multiplicity and the Post-Digital World

Major Points

- Digital media and widespread Internet use are increasingly challenging preconceived ideas about established media types.
- Each individual media-instance, both analog and digital, has unique qualities, which will continue to be appreciated.
- There is an increasing disconnect between business models and individual media instances.
- A media instance can be highly popular without making money.

Ever since digital media and the Internet have begun to challenge conventional media, the impending demise of the latter has been predicted with great conviction by industry observers and casual on-lookers alike. It seems so obvious: Who needs newspapers if you can have a website? Why leaf through a magazine if you can display the same articles and pictures on-line? And, of course, why watch traditional television if you can have YouTube on your computer?

Today's clever media iterations allow us to access content in ways that were unimaginable a decade or two ago. Blogs, podcasts, user generated content, social websites have expanded our notions of what to expect and appreciate in content beyond anybody's wildest dreams.

Yes, you'd have to be living on a faraway planet not to realize that we are witnessing a media revolution, and there's little doubt that these changes are profoundly transforming our lives.

What this revolution is NOT doing, however, is to make older media redundant. Everyone knows the sky is falling, a new day is dawning, the refrigerator will talk to

the bananas and blogs will appear on our contact lenses, but it's just as important to take note of what **won't** change.

I know, I know, advertising revenues are shifting from conventional media to the web. But does that mean that newspapers will disappear? I don't think so. Magazine publishers are facing tough times to be sure, but does this necessarily imply that the magazine is a dying genre? Absolutely not.

In fact, the most remarkable aspect of the digital media revolution is not that media are moving from one carrier to another, but that we have become comfortable and adept in using different media types and instances to access the same information. In short, **we have moved from unique media instances to media multiplicity; we pick and choose depending where, when, how and with whom we want to share a media experience.**

Most importantly, there is nothing exclusively digital about the new media consumption patterns. The new media landscape is not, as many observers predicted somewhat hastily, all digital, but it combines the best of both worlds, analog and digital. **The emerging media landscape is not digital, but post-digital. It ruthlessly uses what is best in both worlds.** The same kids that crowd MySpace happily read Metro or another free newspaper distributed in major cities on the subway. They watch YouTube, but also relax in front of the TV set or line up to see a blockbuster at the Cineplex (and they may be downloading movies while they are doing this).

As a result, media producers are becoming increasingly adept at mixing and matching, combining and adapting media. Some books come with the right to download a digital file you can read on your laptop; Newspaper web sites have gone way beyond the simplistic text and image repositories of the early days of the Internet. **The future of the media landscape is not one media instance fighting another, but different media delivering a variety of user experiences depending on the context a reader/listener/watcher may be in.**

Now, I'm sure that some of this will shift: It is a fact that people who use the Internet watch less television. It does not mean they watch NO television, however. Newspapers have been hurt by on-line media, but they are adapting. Even in the case of the most endangered species, the Audio CD, downloaded music is still in no position to replicate every aspect on which a CD delivers value to a customer.

Yes, these are difficult times for traditional media, but part of the perceived problem is due to incomplete analysis of the situation. Only truly redundant things go away; video content over the Internet may be the wave of the future, but it will be a long time before IP television has reduced broadcast TV to redundancy for a majority of the population.

A newspaper delivers a user experience no computer screen will replicate completely any time soon. So do magazines, books, DVDs, even lowly audio CDs.

We tend to forget that all of these things are not only media, but physical objects as well. And as such, they can deliver value a digital file can just not replicate. Just look at a record store before Christmas: do you really think the people crowding the aisles will henceforth give vouchers for free downloads instead of nicely packaged DVD gift sets? I don't think so.

The convenience of digital files is great, but it just goes so far. Dematerialization decreases perceived value. Ubiquity drives a need for scarcity. Physical products serve many purposes digital data just can't reach. Think about it...

What does this mean?

The implications of this evolution are both simple and far-reaching. Instead of thinking of individual instances ("The newspaper" "Broadcast Television" etc.) we should think of what is emerging as a post-digital media cloud: The reason I chose the term "post-digital" is that, in truth, **to the consumer it matters very little if a specific information or content is digital or analog - as long as it delivers the best media experience in a given situation.** If a newspaper is more convenient, take the paper; if you are at work in front of your computer, go to the web site. YouTube? Great - but not the best vehicle to roll out the next Hollywood blockbuster.

In this emerging media cloud, **business models will be increasingly disconnected from individual media instances.** In the early days of the web, advertising in the print version of a publication made all the money and had to pay for web efforts of a publisher; now, some of this is shifting. Maybe, in the future, on-line advertising will take over the role of the main breadwinner. That's at least the current trend in the market.

Yet this trend is not in itself spectacular news: media producers have always survived on combining moneymaking properties with less profitable yet popular media or products. Could the magazine section of the Sunday papers survive as a standalone magazine? Probably not, yet it is firmly entrenched in our media landscape.

For media producers, this trend may seem scary, particularly since nothing prepared us for such dramatic shifts. But once we start thinking of media as a continuum or a cloud, rather than focusing on individual instances, it all begins to make sense. Forget about "digital" vs. "analog", "New" Media vs. "old". All that matters is delivering perceived value to the audience. And that value can come in many shapes and sizes...

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