



## Shifting Ground

A few weeks ago there was a story in the *New York Times* (NYT) about two top-flight political reporters who left the *Washington Post* (WP) to join a Web-oriented news organization. On the same day seven newspaper chains announced a partnership with Yahoo, the Web portal, to share their stories, advertising, and technology. The newspapers include major metropolitan dailies such as the *San Francisco Chronicle* and our local paper, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (AJC). The reason given for the partnership is that the papers need to reclaim readership and ad revenue that has been lost to the Internet, as more and more readers get their news online.

Until I read those two news items, it didn't dawn on me how much our own access to news had changed. At one time our family got most of its news from our newspaper. Growing up I used to listen for the "plop" of the *Akron Beacon Journal* on the landing outside our second-floor apartment. Later, after being introduced to the NYT in a college English course, I drove downtown to get the *Times* on Sunday. For most of my life the local papers have been quite good: the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Boston Globe*, and the AJC. (We'll pass over the *Columbus Dispatch* that we read when I was studying at Ohio State.)

These days, with my wife and I both nominally retired, we absorb a fair amount of news over the course of the day. On weekdays, after returning from the gym around 7 A.M., we read the AJC during breakfast while listening to "Morning Edition" on the local National Public Radio (NPR) station. (For as long as I can remember my family listened to the news reported by Morgan Beatty of NBC on the radio. This familiarity, or bias, has continued in that we watch "NBC Nightly News." We tape the program and watch it later in the evening for the pictures and get a feel for the abbreviated treatment of the news presented by network television.)

After breakfast we retire to the study to open our e-mail and get our copy of NYT's "Today's Headlines" as well as the *Post's* version. Because we take the Sunday *Times* we have access to Times Select, a service that permits access to the *Times* archive and to certain columns and columnists in the op-ed section. In addition, I use a

newsreader to keep track of a number of RSS sites including SPIE's Newsroom (<http://newsroom.spie.org/x509.xml>), the Web logs of my two daughters, some Mac sites, and the entry from Samuel Pepys' diary for the same day 363 years ago (<http://www.pepysdiary.com/>). Finally, we keep track of the weather in Huntsville, Alabama, and Patchogue, New York, where our nonlocal children are located and, out of curiosity, my colleagues in Bellingham using a Mac-based program called Seasonality (<http://www.gauchosoft.com/>).

These days the AJC keeps getting slimmer and slimmer. On Tuesdays, I wonder if the editors should bother getting the paper carriers out of bed. So we are slowly migrating to the Web for our news and information. If you have been with SPIE long enough, you will have noticed the changes. In 2001, the *SPIE Reports* newspaper morphed into *oe magazine* with an electronic version on the Web, which has now been replaced by a combination of sources: *SPIE Newsroom*, which capitalizes on the many opportunities to deliver even more information more rapidly on the Web, and *SPIE Professional*, a quarterly print publication for members.

One concern of mine is whether the members who have opted to take this journal as part of their membership are taking advantage of their subscription. Since the print option incurs an additional cost for printing and mailing, it's safe to assume that most members take the online version. While this is convenient and gives them access to all previous issues of *Optical Engineering* in the SPIE Digital Library back to 1990, the publication of a new issue lacks the presence of a print volume sitting on the corner of your desk demanding that you at least thumb through it to see if anything captures your interest.

One way to keep up with new content is to subscribe to a series of e-mail bulletins, called E-mail Alerts, which provide the tables of contents for new journal issues or proceedings volumes. Currently, a subscriber to the online version of this journal has to be aware of this service and make an effort to find the page on [spie.org](http://spie.org) and fill out the form. However, those who sign up for this journal are owed, I believe, an e-mail with the table of contents of each new issue containing links to the papers. This will soon be provided monthly to subscribers. It really is an

integral part of your online subscription and is the electronic counterpart of having a printed journal arrive in your mailbox, ready for browsing, only it happens quite a bit sooner now. I believe readers of *Optical Engineering* will find this extremely useful.

The new electronic formats, whether newspapers or research journals, offer flexibility, relevance, and timeliness. But the one thing that is lost as we move away from printed publications is the opportunity to be presented with items that should concern us along with items that interest us. I think this is true in both our technical areas and in our knowledge of our local communities. For example, because I am presented with AJC each morning, I happened to see a review of a production of *Metamorphoses* at a theater we rarely attend. This happy circumstance, sometimes called serendipity, becomes less probable if we trim our information to suit only our interests.

Both readers and publishers are finding their way across this continually shifting ground to gain access to information and entertainment. But the outlooks for these two mutually dependent groups are different. For readers it is one of experimentation and anticipation; for the publishers it is also experimentation and anxiety, and continual investment. Enterprises, such as YouTube, arise and are adopted quickly by many users, while other attempts at engaging users fail miserably. How will peer-reviewed journals fare in this changing landscape? I am fairly certain that, as information technology evolves, the method of delivery and, perhaps, the format of *Optical Engineering* will differ substantially from what you are now reading.

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