

MEDIA BIZMODELS: TIME-SELLERS & WATCHMAKERS

LE 1 OCTOBRE 2010 NICOLAS KAYSER-BRIL

Have you ever paid to find out what time it was? Of course not. And yet, many media outlets are trying to make a business out of selling a free commodity, while the real value lies in content editing.

Can you imagine a world where people on the street charge you \$1 to tell you the exact time? Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? And yet, that's exactly what news outlets are aiming to do: making a profit selling a free commodity.

At its core, news is available for free. Not only can you read it, see it or hear it in various forms, online or on air, many actors actually have an interest in spreading news for free. Traditional media organizations produce a smaller and smaller share of the total news output. Now that publishing costs have crashed, all those who have a message to push across can do it on their own.



Everybody wants to give you news

Governments, NGOs and captains of industry all have an interest in spreading their world-view so as to shape minds and advance their agendas. When a government pays for a 24-hour news channel that you can watch for free, such as Qatar's AlJazeera and its **YouTube channel**, they don't plan so much on selling eyeballs to advertisers, as on spreading a Weltanschauung that differs from the one provided by traditional international media. When Greenpeace **posts job offers on journalists' websites**, their interest lies not in producing independent journalism, but in having articles written that will promote their activities.

Even traditional brands now operate under a for-prestige rather than for-profit rationale. Russian oligarch Pugachev Junior's buyout of money-bleeding French daily *France-Soir* coincided strangely with **Pugachev Senior's** deal that will see his shipyards build three French-designed **Mistral-class** amphibious assault ships. Some observers took it as evidence of newspapers now being used to funnel influence rather than profit.

Media organizations ceased to act as a filter between the public and business or political actors. The latter can reach their audience directly by giving away news content, therefore driving the cost of a single news item to 0. Just like the time of the day is shown on public displays, news is shared and received by the end-user at no cost.



Selling watches

Despite the obviousness of time's costless nature, the clock and watch industry is a **\$17-billion operation** in Switzerland alone. Value comes not from the end-use; rather, it is added with the case, the prestige, its simplicity or the style of the object.

News outlets have to switch their standing from time sellers to watchmakers. Is it a surprise to see an aggregative media outlet such as the Huffington Post, **jump past established brands** of the likes of The Washington Post and The LA Times? Not if it is understood that value isn't derived from the volume of the content, but rather from the way it is organized.

One might look at an ancient sculpture and see a piece of stone while others can see a work of art. It all depends on the conservation efforts of the museum it is exposed in. In an age of content overabundance, care must be at the center of a news organization's processes. Value doesn't lie in the content, but in the way it is edited. Editors must watch over the sea of content available to them, select the pieces that will be most relevant to their audience and present them in an attractive way, just like a curator prepares his or her exhibition. This method is at work in the most successful single-person news operation online ever, **the Drudge Report**.

Manufacturing luxury cases for your news

In France, **OWNI** works in much the same way. A team of about 6 editors picks content from a 700-strong community of contributors and bloggers and edits it. Here at Owni, Editing is intended in its original, Latin sense of **putting forward**, as articles are sublimated from a basic, blog post form into a full-fledged news article and propelled into social networks, to be used and discussed by the whole community.



Original content can be commissioned when needed. Since editors watch over content produced elsewhere, these articles are sure to escape the pitfall of **pack** or **copy & paste journalism**. They are, most of the time, high-quality investigations that are then republished by other news websites, *à la* ProPublica.

Our business model differs from the ones described above, in the sense that our media is not and will not become a revenue stream. Rather, it is a showcase and a R&D lab. The experience we gather at OWNI is then reused on our for-profit arm, **22mars**, which offers social media and datajournalism solutions to institutional and media clients.

Beyond our success, as shown by **our nomination in the Online Journalism Association Awards**, internet mogul **Xavier Niel** is **taking part in our first financing round**, and the fact that we're probably the only profitable online, general-interest news operation in France, **this business model is in use in many other companies**, albeit in a less obvious form. Another French website, **Rue89**, also makes close to half of its turnover from services such as website deployment and training.

In Ukraine, the online media group **FineWeb** also has a news operation, HighWay (that resembles **Oh My News** rather than OWNI), as part of a larger portfolio of brands focused on particular verticals, such as Formula1, tennis or fashion. These properties run on cross-posting and translation of already-published content, playing the role of a luxury case that displays information. And it works, judging from the 400,000 monthly unique users the group gathers in a market 50 times as small as the US.



Content curation will not be the silver bullet that saves journalism . Nor will the bicephalous combination of a for-profit arm allied to a non-profit media. But they're an answer among others to the media crisis. A sustainable one.



Photo credits CC : **BrandonCwarren** / **bgavard-renoir** / **Curious Expeditions**

AUTOMOTIVE SHOP LANCASTER PA

le 11 novembre 2011 - 1:16 • SIGNALER UN ABUS - PERMALINK



*Nice post. I learn something more challenging on different blogs everyday.
Thanks for sharing.*

VOUS AIMEZ



0

VOUS N'AIMEZ PAS



0

LUI RÉPONDRE

1 ping

¿Y si el business-model de la prensa digital independiente no estaba en la información (sino al lado)? | El Comercio de la Información le 24 novembre 2010 - 20:34

[...] « Can you imagine a world where people on the street charge you \$1 to tell you the exact time? Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? And yet, that's exactly what news outlets are aiming to do: making a profit selling a free commodity. » (lean el artículo completo, en inglés: Media bizmodels: time-sellers & watchmakers). [...]