



No matter what the print and publishing industry do, a digital highway will lead directly to the consumer.

It is an inexpensive commodity that will reach as much of the global population as television and radio do today.



—Walter Bender

author of "Riding the Digital Highway,"
in *Presstime*, May 1993

Events

JUNE

12-16: NEXPO '93 Technical Exposition & Conference, Newspaper Association of America, New Orleans. Meg Smith, (703) 648-1211.

Notepad

For information on ProffNet, an electronic cooperative of college and university public information officers linked via the Internet (see April '93 *QUILL*, p.15), call Dan Forbush, State University of New York at Stony Brook, (516) 632-6308. For direct access to ProffNet:

- By CompuServe: 76550,750
- By Internet:
ProffNet@ccmail.sunysb.edu
- By fax: (516) 632-6313
- By phone: (800) PROFNET
(800) 776-3638

Suggested magazine of the month:

Online Access Magazine, Chicago Fine Print, Inc., 920 N. Franklin, Suite 203, Chicago, IL 60610
(312) 573-1700

Quarterly publication that fills some middle ground between the professional information base searcher/librarian and the average user. 1-year: \$19.80; 2-years: \$39.60; 3-years: \$59.40.

Suggested book of the month:

Barbara Semonche's "News Media Librarian: A Management Handbook," Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press (forthcoming: Summer 1993).



BY J.T. JOHNSON

The digital revolution hit three subsections of the newsroom before any others, and the librarians usually saw the technology coming even before the folks in the art and photo departments.

So it's not surprising that heads-up editors today are turning to librarians for advice and leadership amid the information revolution.

Consequently, good librarians have to know more about PC hardware than anybody in the newsroom. They have to know the details about CD-ROMs and modems and hard drives.

And they have to know software, not just key commands for a particular cataloging program, but the demanding intellectual issues of information taxonomy. What key words, for example, should be used to file a picture of Bill Clinton

jogging across the White House lawn? And what if the cutline adds entirely new information not directly related to the photo?

While it can be argued that classification is exactly what librarians are trained to do, how about this? Because librarians are often the ones who know how to use the computers to tap remote databases, they are asked to, say, get the latest census figures, voter registration data, and vote counts for Anywhere County.

Fair enough. But then, librarians tell me, because most journalists have spent a lifetime avoiding anything with numbers other than our paychecks, the librarians may be asked to put that data into spreadsheets and "help with" the analysis.

In fairness, I rarely encounter librarians who resent those demands. In fact, with their typically generous character and eagerness to be part of the action in the newsroom, many have welcomed the challenge.

So why not quit fooling around with this slow and sometimes emotionally painful evolution that is transforming the process of reporting? Let's steal a couple ideas from places like the *St. Petersburg Times* and one of its librarians.

For starters, the library should never be shunted off to some side room or another floor.

That may have made sense when libraries were described in terms of lineal feet of shelf space, but no more. Instead, at least one "information specialist" should be physically posted in the center of the newsroom, to save reporters' time by doing specialized searches and because not all data bases are created equal.

Barbara Hijek, deputy librarian at the *Times*, has suggested creation of an editorial position called Information Coach, someone who would run the information trading post.

"There is some data you're permitted to reprint, for example, while material from other databases can be used only as background and



Need leaders for news technology? Look to librarians

Information technologies elevate research functions

may not be reprinted, even with attribution or credit lines. Statistics from the Dun and Bradstreet files are one example.

"The editors can make the story readable, but who's monitoring the data going into stories?" she says.

Hijek points out that it's a full-time job just to keep up with the changes in holdings and search commands in the smorgasbord of information offerings.

For years, desk editors who didn't need to know an f-stop from a stopbath have been making decisions on pictures. We can't expect editors and writers to know the full details and techniques of online searching.

But we should expect them to have enough self confidence to recognize what they don't know and to structure the news-gathering process to maximize the retrieval of information appropriate for stories. That means putting the librarians physically in the center of the newsroom action and then making use of their talents—skills that are the keystone of the journalistic process.

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