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**A STUDY OF THE CHANGING FACE OF  
NEWSPAPER JOURNALISM**

**AND**

**ITS EFFECT ON PUBLIC RELATIONS**

by  
Eva Marnie

A Thesis Project

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of The Graduate School  
at Rowan University  
© May 1, 2002

Approved by

Date Approved

5-15-2002

## **ABSTRACT**

Eva Marnie

### **A STUDY OF THE CHANGING FACE OF NEWSPAPER JOURNALISM AND ITS EFFECT ON PUBLIC RELATIONS**

2002

Thesis Advisor: Mr. Larry Litwin  
Corporate Public Relations Graduate Program

The purpose of this study was to examine three newspaper markets within the Philadelphia region to determine how journalism is changing and how this change affects the practice of public relations.

The study compared and contrasted the results of a nationwide survey given to editors of all major newspaper markets.

In-depth interviews were conducted, followed by a survey, to determine the attitudes and opinions of the Philadelphia region's major newspaper editors.

The research of the newspaper industry led to the trend of civic journalism. Much research was conducted about civic journalism and its role in the newspaper industry.

From the findings of the study, conclusions were made as to the change in newspaper journalism.

Editors of the major newspaper markets within the Philadelphia region agreed that more community involvement and interaction is needed. Recommendations were made for future study on the subjects of journalism, the newspaper industry and the relationship between public relations practitioner and journalist.

## MINI-ABSTRACT

Eva Marnie

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AND ITS EFFECT ON PUBLIC RELATIONS

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The study compared and contrasted the results of a nationwide survey given to editors of all major newspaper markets.

The results found that the newspaper industry in the Philadelphia region is changing the way it practices journalism. There is a greater emphasis on community involvement and interaction than ever before. Therefore, the role of a public relations practitioner is affected.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is dedicated to my parents, John and Teresa Marnie, who shaped me into the person I am today. Through it all, their love and support has guided me and provided me with inspiration. They lifted my spirits when I wanted to give up and helped me find the strength to keep going. Nothing would be possible without them.

Thank you to my grandparents, Joe and Teresa Mickel and William and Marion Marnie, for instilling in me the importance of education, hard work and perseverance.

Thanks to all of my friends for helping me take time to enjoy life and appreciate the times away from this research.

And special thanks to my advisor, Mr. Larry Litwin, who helped me stay focused while doing this study. His generosity, patience and belief in me are unsurpassed. Professor Litwin's guidance gave me the extra drive and freedom I needed to complete this goal. For this, I will be forever grateful.

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## Survey

# Chapter One

## Introduction

For the past decade, newspaper circulation has fallen generally from 0.5 percent to one percent every year.<sup>1</sup> As circulation continues to decline, publishers, editors and journalists struggle with solutions to prevent the death of the newspaper industry.

As a result, a new trend in newspaper reporting is emerging. A recent survey<sup>2</sup> of the nation's top editors reveals that United States' newspapers have made dramatic changes in the way they define and cover news, and even how they view their mission. The developing trend is civic journalism, also known as public journalism or interactive journalism.

The study, conducted by the Pew Center for Civic Journalism<sup>3</sup>, shows that nine out of 10 editors surveyed say that the future of the newspaper industry depends on more interactivity with readers.

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<sup>1</sup> "Papers Try New Ways to Reach Readers," *Courier Post*, 29 January 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Center for Civic Journalism, *Journalism Interactive*, 26 July 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Pew Center for Civic Journalism- reports on various civic journalism experiments around the country.

Chris Peck, president of The Associated Press Managing Editors Association and editor of *The Spokesman-Review* in Spokane, WA states:

“The greatest writing in the world won’t make a whit of difference if no one is there to read it. Editors and other journalists are stepping forward from the sidelines and saying, ‘We have to find ways to engage our readers and communities again’.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Papers Try New Ways to Reach Readers,” *Courier Post*, 29 January 2001.



## What is Civic Journalism?

As a result of the decline in newspaper readership, editors perceived a disconnection between the media and community. Other cultural and economic signs indicated newspapers as well as journalism were in trouble.<sup>5</sup>

Civic journalism began as a reform movement during the 1988 elections to address some of these concerns. Just as citizens around the U.S. were disgusted by a campaign that focused on Willie Horton, Boston Harbor and the Pledge of Allegiance so were many journalists. Journalists began looking for ways to cover politics that would put citizens first.<sup>6</sup>

More than 400 media outlets, mostly newspapers, have undertaken civic journalism projects aimed at using the media's resources to reconnect the public to the democratic process.<sup>7</sup>

Civic journalism stresses the importance of journalists doing more than telling the facts. It is a philosophy that journalists should have an obligation to public life. By doing so, they can help empower a community or help disable it.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Gade, *Journalist's Attitudes Toward Civic Journalism and Media Roles* [article on-line] (Newspaper Research Journal, Fall98, Vol. 19 Issue 4, accessed 5 November 2001); available from <http://ehostvgw20.epnet.com>; Internet.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis A. Friedland, Jay Rosen, Lisa Austin, *Civic Journalism: A New Approach to Citizenship*, [article on-line] (, accessed 3 December 2001); available from <http://www.cpn.org>; Internet.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Gade, *Journalist's Attitudes Toward Civic Journalism and Media Roles* [article on-line] (Newspaper Research Journal, Fall98, Vol. 19 Issue 4, accessed 5 November 2001); available from <http://ehostvgw20.epnet.com>; Internet.

John X. Miller, public editor at the *Detroit Free Press* states:

“Ultimately, civic journalism strengthens reporting and adds community knowledge, not just information. It connects the dots of context; the cause and effect of the choice people make, and exposes government’s inability to solve complex issues. If done well, it gets citizens off the sidelines and into the game.”<sup>9</sup>

Civic journalism calls for both journalists and citizens to become more active in their communities. Civic journalism treats the readers as citizens with real concerns and social responsibility.<sup>10</sup>

Jack Nelson, former Washington Bureau Chief and Pulitzer Prize winner, states:

“Civic journalism is an attempt to bring the average citizen into the process of journalism to solve social problems...and that helps improve the credibility of newspapers...I think part of what’s wrong is that we look too much at problems and not enough at what to do about them. Civic journalism is a remedy.”<sup>11</sup>

Civic journalism includes more ways for the reader to interact with its newspaper by providing reporters’ email addresses or phone numbers, publishing their own stories, getting involved with community projects and discussing community problems through chat rooms or forums.

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<sup>8</sup> Definition of civic journalism provided by the Pew Center for Civic Journalism

<sup>9</sup> John X Miller, *Looking for stories in all the third places* [article on-line] (Nieman Reports; Cambridge; Spring 2001, accessed 5 November 2001); available from <http://proquest.umi.com>; Internet.

<sup>10</sup> Edward M. Fouhy, former director of Pew Center, *Civic Journalism: Rebuilding the Foundations of Democracy* [article on-line] (1996, accessed 3 December 2001); available from [http://www.cpn.org/cpn/pew\\_partnership/civic\\_partners\\_journalism.html](http://www.cpn.org/cpn/pew_partnership/civic_partners_journalism.html); Internet.

<sup>11</sup> Jack Nelson, *Civic Journalism Is... True Stories from America's Newsrooms* [article on-line] (accessed 18 January 2002); available from <http://www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/pubs/cjis/nelson.html>.; Internet.

## The American Newspaper and Community

“The American newspaper suffers from a persistent, severe identity crisis, and no wonder. Critics complain that papers are aloof and elitist-or mundane and irrelevant; that they are biased by a liberal agenda-or they are too sensational-or too boring, or both. But the main criticism, the one that cuts deeply into journalism’s pride and collective psyche, is that newspapers are no longer central to public life.”<sup>12</sup>

Newspapers have been around since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In America, the first newspaper appeared in Boston in 1690, entitled *Public Occurrences*. Published without authority, all copies were destroyed. The only known surviving example was discovered in 1845 in the British Library. The first successful newspaper was the *Boston News-Letter*, begun by postmaster John Campbell in 1704.<sup>13</sup>

The ratification of the Bill of Rights in 1791 guaranteed freedom of the press, and America's newspapers began to take on a central role in national affairs. By 1814, there were 346 newspapers. Newspapers became channels of gossip within small towns and villages. One cannot fully discuss the word newspaper without mentioning the word community.

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<sup>12</sup> Jay Black, ed., *Mixed News-The American Newspaper as the Public Conversational Commons* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1997), 96.

<sup>13</sup> Phil Barber, *Historic Newspapers and Early Imprints* (accessed 19 March 2002); available from [www.historicpages.com](http://www.historicpages.com), Internet.

Robert Park, author and sociologist, believed that newspapers were an important mechanism for integrating individuals and families within a localized social system – a community within a community.<sup>14</sup>

Civic journalism reflects this belief of community. The philosophy believes that the newspaper has ties and obligations to its community from which it serves.

*The Philadelphia Inquirer* conducted its first focus panel of readers from September 2001-December 2001 with a goal of sensing what their readers want to read in the newspaper.

Lillian Swanson, assistant managing editor/ombudsman for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, states:

“One of my projects involves the paper’s plan for more interaction with our readers. The *Inquirer* is creating a readers’ roundtable, so we can hear firsthand our readers’ comments and perspectives on different aspects of the paper.”<sup>15</sup>

The focus group, or “Readers’ Roundtable,” became preliminary research for the rest of the study. The focus panel consisted of 12 readers of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, ranging in age from 28 to 71, six men and six women who reside in the Pennsylvania suburbs, the city of Philadelphia and southern New Jersey.

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<sup>14</sup> Keith R. Stamm, *Newspaper Use and Community Ties* (New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1985), 3.

<sup>15</sup> “Readers’ Roundtable, for insights into the newspaper and the community”, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 September 2001, sec. I, p. 10.

## Journalism and Public Relations

Before the arrival of civic journalism, the fields of public relations and journalism were fundamentally different. Dennis L. Wilcox, Phillip H. Ault and Warren K. Agee state:

“Journalists gather and select information for the primary purpose of providing the public with news and information. The communication activities are an end in themselves. Public relations practitioners also gather facts and information for the purpose of informing the public, but the objective is different. Communication activity is only a means to the end. In other words, the objective is not only to inform but to change people’s attitudes and behaviors.”<sup>16</sup>

However, the civic journalist’s sole objective is no longer to just provide facts, but also to gain insight into the community’s attitudes and behaviors, much like that of a public relations practitioner.

Jan Schaffer, Pew Center Executive Director states:

“The future of journalism is about more than just coverage, more than convergence. It’s about connections; it’s about relationships with the community.”

Public relations has a closer tie to journalism than ever before.<sup>17</sup> With the introduction of civic journalism, journalists are gearing up to take on a new role: community builder. However, public relations practitioners have held both roles of disseminator of facts and relationship builder for years.

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<sup>16</sup> Dennis L. Wilcox and others, *Public Relations-Strategies and Tactics*, Fifth Edition (Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 1998), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Larry Liwin, professor of public relations, Rowan University

Scott M. Cutlip, Allen H. Center and Glen M. Broom state in *Effective Public Relations* that “public relations is the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends.”<sup>18</sup>

James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt in *Managing Public Relations* state that public relations is “the management of communication between an organization and its publics (or community).”<sup>19</sup>

The audiences of both the journalist and public relations practitioner are also becoming similar. Before the trend, journalists wrote primarily for a mass audience- the general public. In contrast, a public relations practitioner carefully segments audiences into various demographic and psychological characteristics.<sup>20</sup> However, today’s newspaper is becoming more segmented, more designed to fit personal characteristics of a specific audience.

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<sup>18</sup> Dennis L. Wilcox and others, *Public Relations-Strategies and Tactics*, Fifth Edition (Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 1998), 13.

<sup>19</sup> Dennis L. Wilcox and others, *Public Relations-Strategies and Tactics*, Fifth Edition (Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 1998), 13.

<sup>20</sup> Dennis L. Wilcox and others, *Public Relations-Strategies and Tactics*, Fifth Edition (Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 1998), 13.

Some academics believe that public relations will suffer because of the shift toward civic journalism. Burton St. John III, APR, a Communications Specialist for the U.S. Postal Service, states:

“...PR’s continuing practice of business advocacy has left the door open for the media to assume the mantle of community-building through the practice of public journalism.”<sup>21</sup>

St. John defines civic journalism as “an attempt by newspapers to be part of the dialogue within the community, essentially facilitating discussion and helping to mold consensus and further decision-making.” St. John goes on to say that civic journalism is beginning to fill the gaps that public relations leaves in regards to communication within the community. He believes that public relation’s information dispensing role is strong, however the role of community builder is weak. He states:

“It’s this reaction with the community (and the related community-building) that PR needs to investigate. Otherwise, PR might have to resign itself to continue primarily with information-dissemination. If so, the media, through public journalism, is already preparing to fill the need for dialogue facilitation and related community-building.”<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, three questions must be asked: How is journalism changing? Will this new trend in journalism survive? How does it affect public relations?

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<sup>21</sup> Burton St. John III, *Public relations As Community-building Then and Now* [article on-line] (Public Relations Quarterly, v 43 no1 Spring 1998, accessed 5 November 2001); available from <http://spweb.silverplatter.com/c5773>; Internet.

<sup>22</sup> Burton St. John III, *Public relations As Community-building Then and Now* [article on-line] (Public Relations Quarterly, v 43 no1 Spring 1998, accessed 5 November 2001); available from <http://spweb.silverplatter.com/c5773>; Internet.

To begin to answer these questions, we must first examine whether civic journalism is being practiced in the surrounding area. Are newspapers interacting more with their readers through focus groups, email, chat rooms and allowing their readers to publish their own stories?



## The Problem

Newspaper readership has declined and journalists need to find news ways to regain their readers. To reverse the trend, newspapers are exploring civic journalism, which closely ties together journalism and public relations.

The thesis advanced here is that the leading newspapers in the area have changed the way they do journalism, with an emphasis on becoming more interactive with its readers. As a result, the way stories are written has changed, which affects the practice of public relations.

### The Reasons for Study

The results of this study are designed to offer newspapers and public relations practitioners insight into interactive journalism, what it is and how it is being implemented in the Philadelphia region, and how it can assist public relations practitioners in getting “their news” into print.

This study presented an opportunity to test the Pew Center’s nationwide results with the results of five newspapers serving three distinct markets: to see what interactive techniques the newspapers are using, if any, and how they view the future of the industry.

The study also provided an opportunity to explore the concept of civic journalism within the Philadelphia region.

### Delimitations of the Study

The study was limited to five regional newspapers serving three distinct markets: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, which serves the large market, with a circulation of more than 300,000, the *Courier Post* and *Bucks County Times*, which serves the medium market, with a circulation of approximately 50,000-300,00, and the *Gloucester County Times* and *Burlington County Times*, which serves the small market, with a circulation of below 50,000.

## Definitions

Civic journalism (also known as public journalism, interactive journalism, community journalism or American journalism)- is a belief that journalism has an obligation to public life- an obligation that goes beyond just telling the news or unloading lots of facts.<sup>23</sup>

The Pew Center for Civic Journalism- reports on various civic journalism experiments around the country, sharing the lessons learned with the rest of the profession and tracking how those experiments are evolving. The Center does this through its quarterly newsletters, through training publications and videos, through conferences and workshops for journalists and academics, through research and public speaking.<sup>24</sup>

Associated Press Managing Editors- an association of U.S. and Canadian editors whose newspapers are members of the Associated Press. Since 1931, the APME have been dedicated to the improvement, advancement and promotion of journalism by our own newspapers and through our relationship with the Associated Press. APME is the key source of information and support for editors charged with producing a newspaper day in and day out.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Pew Center for Civic Journalism web site at [www.pewcenter.org](http://www.pewcenter.org)

<sup>24</sup> Pew Center for Civic Journalism web site at [www.pewcenter.org](http://www.pewcenter.org)

<sup>25</sup> Associated Press Managing Editors web site at [www.apme.com](http://www.apme.com).

## Definitions (Continued)

National Conference of Editorial Writers- founded more than 50 years ago, in 1946, NCEW dedicated itself to the purpose of "stimulating the conscience and quality of the editorial."<sup>26</sup>

Boosterism- campaigning for one's own newspaper or agenda.<sup>27</sup>

News- is a late Middle English word that means tidings, news information of recent events. A more useful definition might be "information about recent events that are of interest to a sufficiently large group, or that may affect the lives of a sufficiently large group."<sup>28</sup>

Newspaper circulation- the number of people who receive the newspaper, numbers differ on Sunday.

Readership- the mass of a particular group of readers.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> National Conference of Editorial Writers web site at [www.ncew.org](http://www.ncew.org).

<sup>27</sup> LeAnne Daniels; Judith Sylvester, *Community Connections*, [article on-line] (The Quill, Chicago 2001, accessed 5 November 2001); available from <http://proquest.umi.com>; Internet.

<sup>28</sup> Danuta Reah and others, *The Language of Newspapers*, The Routledge INTERTEXT series (London and New York, 1998), 4.

<sup>29</sup> The Merriam Webster Dictionary, 1997.

### Definitions (Continued)

Community- is a word rich in meaning; it is applied to places, to groups of people, to various organizations and institutions, and to such sentiments as “togetherness,” “wenness” and the like.<sup>30</sup>

The Philadelphia Inquirer- serves the Pennsylvania suburbs, the city of Philadelphia and southern New Jersey with a circulation of 365,000 daily and 730,000 on Sunday (19<sup>th</sup> largest daily in the United States and 8<sup>th</sup> largest on Sunday).

The Courier Post- serves southern New Jersey (Camden, Burlington and Gloucester Counties) with a circulation of 89,000 daily and 110,000 Sunday.

The Gloucester County Times- serves Gloucester County, located in southern New Jersey with a circulation of 25,000 daily and 28,000 on Sunday.

The Burlington County Times- serves Burlington County, located in southern New Jersey with a circulation of 43,100 daily and 47,300 on Sunday.

The Bucks County Times- serves Bucks County, located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with a circulation of 67,584 daily and 74,479 on Sunday.

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<sup>30</sup> Keith R. Stamm, *Newspaper Use and Community Ties* (New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, University of Washington, 1985), 13.

## Chapter Two

### Review of Related Research

The author reviewed the most important previous works related to this study and applicable to the change in newspaper journalism and the practice of public relations.

Extensive research was done using the Rowan University Campbell Library electronic databases, which searches all books, videos, academic journals, web sites, newspaper and magazine articles. The subjects searched under were “civic journalism,” “public journalism,” “interactive journalism,” “journalism and public relations,” “community journalism,” “newspapers,” “newspaper reporting,” “newspaper readership,” “newspaper circulation,” and the broad subject of “journalism.”

The search engines used were Vale- ABI/Inform, Academic Search Premiere, Proquest, EBSCOhost, Jake, Google, Lexis-Nexis, and Netscape.

Much information about the change in the newspaper industry and civic journalism was found on the Pew Center for Civic Journalism’s web site at [www.pewcenter.org](http://www.pewcenter.org). Other web sites explored were [www.newslink.org](http://www.newslink.org), [www.cpn.org](http://www.cpn.org) and [www.philly.com](http://www.philly.com). Also The News Library found on *The Philadelphia Inquirer’s* web site was used to search articles on civic journalism and its effects on the field.

### Most Important Previous Work

Editors of major newspapers have noted that journalism and the newspaper industry are undergoing a major shift. Evidence of this shift is found in a national study called *Interactive Journalism*, sponsored by the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, along with the Associated Press Managing Editors Association and the National Conference of Editorial Writers.

The results of the study were released on July 26, 2001 at a National Press Club luncheon in Washington D.C. Surveyed were 512 United States daily newspapers with circulations of 20,000 or more. Responses were collected by mail, e-mail and telephone and analyzed by the Campaign Study Group of Springfield, VA. Of the 512 surveys sent, 360 editors (70%) responded.

Key among the findings was that editors reported a need for more two-way connections with readers. Nine out of 10 editors surveyed say the future of the industry depends on even more interaction with readers.

Chris Peck, Associated Press Managing Editors Association president and editor of the *Spokesman-Review*, states:

“This survey tracks hopeful and overdue trends in newsrooms. Journalists are realizing their role is to connect with readers and interact with communities, not be disconnected and aloof.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Found on Pew Center’s website-news release July 26, 2001



The study also revealed that 45 percent of all editors surveyed said that their newsrooms use the tools and techniques of civic journalism. Sixty percent say they embrace the label or like the philosophy and tools.

Jack Nelson, chairman of the Pew Center's Advisory Board and Chief

Washington Correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, states:

“The poll reflects that newspapers finally have gotten the message that a press that too often emphasizes conflict and controversy to the exclusion of explanatory public service journalism alienates readers.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jack Nelson, *Journalism Interactive*, [press release on-line] (2001, accessed 1 November 2001); available from [http://www.pewcenter.org/about/pr\\_interact.html](http://www.pewcenter.org/about/pr_interact.html); Internet.

## Agreement and Disagreement in the Field

Civic journalism is about gaining a connection with readers. This focus on connection is viewed by the movement's supporters and critics as profoundly different from the media's common practice of detachment or objectivity.

Therefore, a mixed feeling about civic journalism exists within the newspaper industry. Proponents of the trend believe that civic journalism fosters new ways to connect with their communities and improve circulation. However, some critics of civic journalism worry that journalists will succumb to boosterism, which causes them to abandon the traditional "watchdog" role.<sup>33</sup>

"The best or the worst of times? Newspaper publishers and other top managers ask themselves this question as they try to balance the bottom line against responsibilities to the reader and to the community. Some have suggested a solution to this balancing act can be found in community (or civic) journalism, part of a current movement in the industry. But others aren't so certain."<sup>34</sup>

Jack Fuller, president and chief executive officer of *Tribune Publishing Co.* and the Pulitzer Prize winning former editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, states:

"It's certainly earnest and decent in its intention---but it is unbearably dull in its execution. It's hard for me to imagine that the dull things I've seen done in the name of civic journalism will re-ignite the passion for newspapers among readers."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> LeAnne Daniels; Judith Sylvester, *Community Connections*, [article on-line] (The Quill, Chicago 2001, accessed 5 November 2001); available from <http://proquest.umi.com>; Internet.

<sup>34</sup> LeAnne Daniels; Judith Sylvester, *Community Connections*, [article on-line] (The Quill, Chicago 2001, accessed 5 November 2001); available from <http://proquest.umi.com>; Internet.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Fitzgerald, *The Boredom of Civic Journalism* [article on-line] (Editor & Publisher, Vol. 132 Issue 20, 1999, accessed 5 November 2001); available from <http://ehostvgw20.epnet.com>; Internet

David Merritt, former editor of the *Wichita Eagle*, writes, “The obligation is to do our journalism in ways that are calculated to help public life go well by engaging people into it.”

Authors of the article entitled *The American Newspaper as the Public Conversational Commons* agree that:

“Newspapers need to be transformed. However, the transformation cannot simply be a more ‘public’ journalism, although that is useful. The transformation of the American newspaper must be grounded on a fundamental redefinition that permeates the institution- its ideas of news, its relationship with the community, its attitude toward citizens, its ways of communicating.”<sup>36</sup>

Richard Aregood, editorial page-editor of The Philadelphia Daily News, said:

“What in God’s name are we thinking about?” He argued that the public journalism crusade is only what good newspapers have always been doing.<sup>37</sup>

Joann Byrd, former ombudsman at The Washington Post, expressed her concerns:

“The goals of civic journalism can be accomplished without compromising journalism’s important principles. It does not help the community- or the paper- to have the paper acting as booster or as champion of its own agenda. Communities always need good newspapers that can stand back, take the broad view of the conflicts and avoid, in service to the whole community, taking sides.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jay Black, ed., *Mixed News-The American Newspaper as the Public Conversational Commons* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1997), 97.

<sup>37</sup> Jay Black, ed., *Mixed News-The Ethics of Civic Journalism: Independence as the Guide* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1997), 166.

<sup>38</sup> Jay Black, ed., *Mixed News-The Ethics of Civic Journalism: Independence as the Guide* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1997), 166.

## Evaluation of Existing Research

Although much debate exists within civic journalism, most journalists will agree that the greatest concern is that civic journalism has no clear definition.<sup>39</sup>

The authors of *Journalists' Attitudes Toward Civic Journalism Media Roles* state:

“Civic journalism’s lack of a clear definition contributes a great deal to the term’s semantic baggage.”

Davis Merritt, editor of *The Wichita Eagle* and proponent of public journalism, states, “A crucial fact is that public journalism is still experimental; it is a philosophy in search of printed expression.”<sup>40</sup>

The results of the Pew Center’s survey, *Interactive Journalism*, reveal that newsrooms across the country are implementing the practice of civic journalism, whether they recognize it as civic journalism or not. In other words, although editors are reluctant to define their news reporting techniques as “civic journalism”, many use the tools of connecting with the community and many look for ways to become more interactive with their readers no matter what term it is called.

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<sup>39</sup> Peter Gade, *Journalist's Attitudes Toward Civic Journalism and Media Roles* [article on-line] (Newspaper Research Journal, Fall98, Vol. 19 Issue 4, accessed 5 November 2001); available from <http://ehostvgw20.epnet.com>; Internet.

<sup>40</sup> Jay Black, ed., *Mixed News-Public Journalism, Independence and Civic Capital... Three Ideas in Complete Harmony*, (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1997), 181.

## Chapter Three

### Data Needed

The investigation revealed how five regional newspapers, each serving a distinct market, practice journalism, with a focus on civic journalism. It also revealed how public relations is affected by the way journalism is practiced.

The research determined which techniques the five newspapers use for reader interaction.

By use of in-depth interviews with managing editors, the study revealed the attitudes and opinions on the trend of civic journalism and the future of newspapers.

Civic journalism is a journalistic practice that involves more community input through focus groups, letters to the editors, web site queries, on-line chat rooms, email and phone discussions between reader and journalist, etc.

### Sources of Data

The study was limited to five regional newspapers in the Philadelphia area: the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, serving the city of Philadelphia and its surrounding suburbs; the *Courier Post*, serving southern New Jersey; the *Burlington County Times*, serving the towns located in Burlington County, the *Bucks County Times*, serving the towns located in Bucks County, and the *Gloucester County Times*, serving the towns located in Gloucester County.

Three separate newspaper markets were explored:

- Large Market (circulation of more than 300,000)
- Medium Market (circulation of approximately 50,000 - 300,00)
- Small Market (circulation of below 50,000)

## Tools and Techniques

From September 2001 to December 2001, a focus group was conducted by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, which revealed the attitudes and opinions of 12 selected readers of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Among the topics discussed were how to make the paper more compelling to its readers, the interaction between reader and journalist, the design of the paper, and the likes and dislikes of the paper.

The focus group served as preliminary research for the study.

In-depth interviews were also conducted, as well as a survey, with the managing editors of the five regional newspapers to determine what interaction techniques were being used, the opinions on civic journalism and the future of journalism, and how those opinions should shape the field of public relations.

## Chapter Four

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the newspapers in the surrounding area; to discover what steps, if any, they are taking to become more interactive with their readers. It also explored the concept of civic journalism and how it affects public relations.

Over a three-month period, a focus group was conducted with 12 *Philadelphia Inquirer* readers. This served as a preliminary study into interactive journalism.

In-depth interviews were given to editors of five newspapers. A short survey was also given to the editors to compare results with the results of the Pew Center's study. The data was then analyzed and reported.

To begin analyzing the data, we need to answer the three questions asked earlier in the study:

- 1.) How is journalism changing?
- 2.) Will this new trend in journalism survive?
- 3.) How does it affect public relations?



### 1.) How is newspaper journalism changing?

The results reported reinforce the notion that the newspapers in the Philadelphia area have undergone a change in the way they practice journalism.

Lillian Swanson, Ombudsman of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, states:

“The pace has picked up from five years ago. We have fewer people in the newsroom, and an expanding mission, so everyone is doing more.”

Pat Walker, Editor of the *Bucks County Times*, states:

“There is competition for the readers’ time that keeps changing. Television, radio and the Web are all taking time from the readers and the addition of more ways to get information has had an impact on newspapers. However, community newspapers continue to deliver to readers and to the communities information that can not be gathered in sum anywhere else.”

George Clark, Editor of the *Courier Post*, states:

“We still use the same basic tools as before- a good eye and ear for a good story, but journalism is more interaction than ever before.”

Ron Martin, Editor of the *Burlington County Times*, states:

“It’s difficult to attract new readers with instant access from the Internet.”

Gary Grossman, Editor of the *Gloucester County Times*, states:

“People are more sensitive to public opinion. People have more alternatives like television and the Internet, so we need to engage our readers more than ever before.”

They were asked *What topics are covered more today than five years ago and why?*

Lillian Swanson of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* states:

“We have more of a focus on news you can use; more reader friendly and shorter items; more graphics that give time-starved readers news at a glance.” She goes on to say, “We recognize that readers have less time to spend with a newspaper, and that they have many more choices of where they can get their news. So, we have reacted to a changed lifestyle and the explosion of information.”

Pat Walker says that the *Bucks County Times* covers:

“more issues affecting people’s daily lives, more education issues from inside the classroom and more stories involving local, real people.” Walker states that these topics are getting more coverage “because they are critical to keeping people interested in the newspaper, getting them to read, to take part in the community and to address issues that are critical to the community.”

George Clark of the *Courier Post* states:

“We’re interested in trends, not where we’re going, but why...in-depth investigative reporting, interacting with the community, etc.” These topics are getting more coverage because “that’s what people are interested in now. We are dealing with fairly intelligent readers, and you can’t dictate to them like you could 20 or 30 years ago.”

Ron Martin of the *Burlington County Times* says:

“Women’s sports, technology and business are covered more than before.”

Gary Grossman of the *Gloucester County Times* states:

“Transportation, topical beats and environmental issues are getting more coverage today.

## **2.) Will this trend of civic journalism survive?**

Although not all editors agreed that the trend of civic journalism would survive, all agreed that interaction with readers is essential to newspaper life.

The results reinforce the concept that newspapers need to be more interactive with readers.

Lillian Swanson of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* states:

“A newspaper is a great connector within the community. Its responsibility is to build bridges between groups; be a forum for the open discussion of ideas, and also to serve as a watchdog on government agencies. A newspaper plays a role in a community that is much larger than being a bulletin board for news.”

*The Philadelphia Inquirer* determines its readers' interests by focus groups, email, letters to the editor, and web site queries. *The Inquirer* provides the reporters email addresses after each story.

Lillian Swanson is not satisfied at all with the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* interaction with its readers. She suggests that the paper should be more proactive and systematic in its approach. She said, "We should have a concerted, organized effort to go out and meet with community groups to hear about issues and to talk about the paper's content. We also need to bring more people to the paper, and the Readers' Roundtable was our first effort toward that."

Pat Walker of the *Bucks County Times* states:

"The newspaper is part of the community. This newspaper works to be an active member of the community- supporting community projects and functions, helping to raise money to address community concerns and crises, etc."

*The Bucks County Times* offers its reporters' email addresses and phone numbers. They interact with their readers through focus groups, email, letters to the editor, and monthly reader advisory groups, disseminated by topic; for example, issues concerning seniors, crime/public safety, etc. Pat Walker is very satisfied with the *Bucks County Times'* interaction with its readers.

Pat Walker believes that the trend of civic journalism will survive.

George Clark of *The Courier Post* states:

“Every business has an obligation to the community it serves. The newspaper is a part of the community. If the community fails, it fails.”

*The Courier Post* provides its readers with ways to contact the reporter by email or phone. It conducts focus groups, readership polls and, most of all, letters to the editor, which are published. *The Courier Post* also believes strongly in online communication with its readers. New, full-time positions were implemented in Information Technology, as well as web site designers and personnel in charge of tracking web site queries and chat rooms. George Clark was satisfied with the *Courier Post's* interaction with its readers.

Ron Martin, of the *Burlington County Times* states:

“The newspaper should be the community leader.”

*The Burlington County Times* offers its reporters' email addresses, but not the phone numbers. Ron Martin is very satisfied with the *Burlington County Times* interaction with its readers. They interact through focus groups, email, letters to the editor, web site queries, polls, and the telephone. He believes that the telephone has been the most effective way to interact with the readers. Martin also believes that more focus groups, becoming a community education board member, and sponsorships are ways to become more interactive with the readers.

Martin does not believe that the trend of civic journalism will survive.

Gary Grossman of the *Gloucester County Times* states:

“There are tons of ways that the paper can be more interactive with its readers.

The newspaper has an effect on people’s lives, but it’s difficult for us to grasp the power of the newspaper.”

His response to whether civic journalism will last: “No the trend won’t last. It’s just keeping journalism professors in business. I don’t disagree with what they’re saying. Proponents of civic journalism are trying to package it and sell it. We’ve been doing what they claim to be “civic journalism” for a while. Yes, the newspaper industry should lead a community...the civic body must agree.”

*The Gloucester County Times* does not provide its reporters email or phone numbers. It does not conduct focus groups or readership polls. It does, however, reply to web site queries and publish letters to the editor. Also, it connects with its readers through email and telephone conversations, but it is up to the reader to find the contact information for that particular reporter. Also, they interact with their readers through community meetings. Gary Grossman was not satisfied at all with the *Gloucester County Times’* interaction with its readers.

### 3.) How does the change in journalism affect public relations?

The results also point to the importance of public relations in a changing media environment.

Lillian Swanson of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* states:

“Because news people are working at a faster pace, all public relations efforts should look for ways to be efficient with reporters’ and editors’ time. Press releases must be succinct and it’s easier to reach us by email than by phone. The best role they can play is to tip us off on important trends in the community.”

Pat Walker of *The Bucks County Times* states:

“Public relations needs to relate more to the public and less to the business it serves.” She goes on to say, “We need PR folks to tell us what is going on in our own backyards.”

George Clark of *The Courier Post* states:

“Journalists are seeking a connection to the public. Therefore, public relations people should focus on the audience (the public), not the channel.” He goes on to say, “PR is a small part of what journalism does. Journalists can’t be all over all the time. So they count on PR people to be knowledgeable and forthright about their organization and the public they serve. They can tell us what things are

being done a certain way. PR decisions have an effect on the community, so they leave the door open for journalists.”

Gary Grossman of the *Gloucester County Times* states:

“A newspaper has so much power in a community. People should have more access to the paper. We had a public relations person working for our paper before. She was the face of the paper and she engaged the community.”

When asked whether public relations people can offer the journalist better insight into community issues, editor of the *Burlington County Times*, Ron Martin, replied, “Infrequently yes, frequently no.” He did not elaborate on this answer.

The editors were asked:

*“Has the need for more interaction with your readers changed the way stories are written. If so, how?”*

Lillian Swanson of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* states:

“I don’t know of any changes in the way stories are written. We do publish email addresses for the reporters at the end of each story. Reporters do write back to as many readers as time permits.”

Pat Walker of the *Bucks County Times* states:

“More stories are written in a conversational style. That is important in catching the readers’ attention.”



George Clark of the *Courier Post* states:

“The way stories are written has changed. We need to get to the point much faster. People don’t have patience to follow jumplines and we need to get the five W’s out of the way in the first paragraph. Newspapers need to be edgier, harder and more controversial than ever before. We also need to focus on the How and the context of the story...the big picture. Why it’s important to every day people.”

Ron Martin of the *Burlington County Times* does not believe that the way stories are written has changed. He did not elaborate further on the question.

Gary Grossman of the *Gloucester County Times* states:

“We need to concentrate on the How of the story- the motivation and consequence. Also, we must ask, Why is this important to the readers?” He goes on to say, “There is a great effort toward the narrative rather than the inverted pyramid style.”

## Results on Civic Journalism:

*Does your paper use the techniques of civic journalism?*

Inquirer	No, not in the newsroom, some on the editorial board
Courier	Yes
Burlington	No
Bucks County	Yes
Gloucester	Maybe

*When describing the trend, which term do you prefer?*

Inquirer	Public Journalism
Courier	No preference
Burlington	Do not like any of the terms
Bucks County	Good Journalism
Gloucester	Interactive Journalism

*How do editors feel about civic journalism?*

- Lillian Swanson (*Philadelphia Inquirer*) states, “Civic journalism can be useful, but we prefer that it is practiced in the editorial board.”
- George Clark (*Courier Post*) states, “When practiced the right way, it is a benefit to both the paper and the community. When done properly, or not at all, both suffer.”
- Gary Grossman (*Gloucester County Times*) states, “Civic journalism seems like good ideas, but the definition seems elusive.”
- Pat Walker (*Bucks County Times*) states, “It’s not a mystery. It is what community newspapers do every day.”
- Ron Martin (*Burlington County Times*) states, “We don’t have the staff to go that way now.”

*How do you prefer to receive your press releases?*

Inquirer	Email, Snail mail and Fax
Courier	Email, Download from the Internet
Burlington	Email
Bucks County	Email
Gloucester	Email, Download from the Internet

With increasing ways for readers to get their news, like TV, radio or Internet, much debate has been discussed regarding the future of the newspaper industry. The responses were reported from the editors to the following question:

*What would you say to someone who said, "The newspaper industry is dying. There will be no future for them."*

- Lillian Swanson (*Philadelphia Inquirer*) responded, "Forget about it. Newspapers will always be a part of a democracy. Maybe in a different form, but still a thriving and important piece of the community."
- Ron Martin (*Burlington County Times*) responded, "When radio came in, they said papers would die. When TV came in, they said papers would die. When the Internet came in, they said papers would die. They haven't. They won't."
- Pat Walker (*Bucks County Times*) responded, "I'd say, 'try to find out what happened at the school board meeting last night anywhere else...And then try to spend 35 cents for that information.'"
- George Clark (*Courier Post*) responded, "I don't know. Maybe in 20 years everything will be online. But, I couldn't imagine a world without a newspaper to hold and flip through, although it is a possibility...we can't ignore that."
- Gary Grossman (*Gloucester County Times*) responded, "I don't know if I'd disagree with that statement."

### Charts for the findings of the study

In what ways does your newspaper interact with its readers?

Newspapers	Focus groups	Email	Letters to the editor	Web site queries	Polls	Telephone	Other
The Philadelphia Inquirer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
The Courier Post	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Gloucester County Times	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes, community meetings
Burlington County Times	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Bucks County Times	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes, monthly advisory groups

Rank in order the role that your newspaper seeks to play in the community.

Newspapers	News Explainer	News Breaker	Investigative Watchdog	Catalyst for Community Discussion	Community Steward	Disseminator of just the facts	Other
The Philadelphia Inquirer	3	2	1	5	4	6	N/A
The Courier Post	3	2	1	4	5	6	N/A
Gloucester County Times	1	2	6	3	5	4	N/A
Burlington County Times	3	2	4	5	1	6	N/A
Bucks County Times	3	4	2	1	5	6	N/A

N/A=not available information

Rank in order how most of your newsgathering is done by.

<b>Newspapers</b>	Phone	Email	In the field	Internet	Press releases	Other
The Philadelphia Inquirer	2	4	1	3	5	N/A
The Courier Post	2	5	1	3	4	N/A
Gloucester County Times	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Burlington County Times	2	3	1	4	5	N/A
Bucks County Times	2	4	1	5	3	N/A

N/A=not available information

### The Results Compared to a National Study

The results of this study were compared to the results given by *The Pew Center for Civic Journalism*. The results of the two studies contained similarities and differences. All of the Philadelphia region's editors surveyed agreed that the newspaper has an obligation to community life beyond printing the news. Eighty-seven percent of the Pew Center's editors agreed that newspapers should have a broader role in the community beyond just printing the news.

Like the Philadelphia editors, the Pew Center's results indicated that editors are less likely to embrace the label of civic journalism, although the philosophy and tools are being implemented in today's newsrooms.

The results of the 'most important role the newspaper should play in the community' differed between the editors. However, most of the editors agreed that "Disseminator of just the facts" was the least important.

The Pew Center for Civic Journalism's editors ranked "News Explainer" above all others. Following, in order, were the roles of "News Breaker", "Investigative Watchdog", "Catalyst for Community Discussion", "Community Steward" and "Disseminator of Just-the-Facts". Only *The Gloucester County Times* listed "News Explainer" as number one. However, "News Breaker" was listed as number two for four out of the five editors.

All newspaper editors reported that their news hole is smaller now than five years ago.

Also, most of the editors agreed that the way stories are written has changed. Journalists concentrate on the “How” of the story much more than before. They look for ways to engage the reader by asking, “What does the reader want and Why?”

## Chapter Five

### Conclusions

Editors of all newspapers surveyed agree that a newspaper's role should go beyond printing the news. They agree that journalism has an obligation to the community it serves.

Like the national results of the Pew Center, the editors of surrounding area newspapers agree that more interaction is needed between the journalist and the reader. And, in an age where the reader has more distractions like TV, radio and Internet, the journalist must engage the reader.

One thing is certain. All editors agree that the *practice* of civic journalism is something good news reporting should reflect anyway. When asked which term she prefers, Pat Walker put it best, simply "good journalism." Also, like the editors of the national survey, the five editors agree that civic journalism needs to be explored more and given an ultimate definition.

How does civic journalism affect public relations? All editors agree that public relations is a needed function that should act as liaison between the public and journalists. All agree that public relations should be the "pulse of the community",<sup>41</sup> spotting trends<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Pat Walker, editor of the *Bucks County Times*



and relating more to the public and less to the business it serves,<sup>43</sup> leading the community,<sup>44</sup> engaging the community and becoming a face for that community.<sup>45</sup>

The way stories are written has changed and this change affects public relations. News releases should be written in a clear and concise manner with a focus on the How and Why of the story. A public relations practitioner may want to include different angles of the story. The journalist may choose a community angle over the news angle. Both journalist and public relations practitioner must try to engage their readers.

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<sup>42</sup> Lillian Swanson, assistant editor/ombudsman of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*

<sup>43</sup> Pat Walker, editor of the *Bucks County Times*

<sup>44</sup> George Clark, editor of the *Courier Post*

<sup>45</sup> Gary Grossman, editor of the *Gloucester County Times*

## Recommendations

Three main ideas exist that the author feels should be further studied:

- *How to attract younger readers to newspapers*

After all, the future of the newspaper depends on the readership of upcoming generations.

- *How new technology (Internet) is affecting journalism*

Jan Schaffer, director of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, states:

“The Internet is dramatically changing the capacity of news organizations to help citizens grapple in very customized ways with public policy and community issues. And it’s doing so in a way that is enriching journalism.”<sup>46</sup>

- *The relationship between journalist and public relations practitioner*

This study touched upon how journalism and public relations are related.

However, more research is needed to understand the relationship between public relations practitioner to journalist and vice versa. This may include the process and importance of utilizing community newspapers to get the public relations practitioner’s news into print.

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<sup>46</sup> Jan Schaffer, *Civic Journalism* [article on-line] (National Civic Review, Fall 2000, accessed 5 November 2001); available from <http://ehostvgw20.epnet.com>; Internet.

In a 1999 email survey of 2,500 business reporters and editors for the Marshall School of Business, University of South Carolina, more than 65 percent said that public relations people were the least likely to be considered a useful source for new story ideas. In fact, 60 percent said that public relations people never or rarely give insightful comments that contributed to story assignments.<sup>47</sup>

Other ideas exist that may warrant further study. These include:

- What is news?
- Soft news, versus hard news
- What constitutes a good news release?
- What other changes has the journalism field undergone in the past? Where is it going? What happened to the field after the invention of TV, radio, and Internet?
- How has the look of the paper changed? Design, etc.?
- Newspaper online? Being more interactive online?
- PR for the newspaper industry

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<sup>47</sup> David Brooks, *How to Increase Media Coverage for your Product or Service by Understanding and Meeting Shared Responsibilities with the Media* [article on-line] (Public Relations Quarterly, Winter 1999, accessed 18 September 2001); available from <http://spweb.silverplatter.com/c5773>; Internet.

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## SURVEY

This survey will determine the attitudes and opinions of newspaper editors from five regional newspapers, serving distinct markets: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Courier Post*, *The Bucks County Times*, *The Burlington County Times* and *The Gloucester County Times*. The results will be used in a master's thesis, entitled "A study of the changing face of newspaper journalism and its effect on public relations."

1. Please mark the ways that the Courier Post determines its readers' interests.  
 Focus groups  
 Email  
 Letter to the editor  
 Web site queries  
 Polls  
 Telephone  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Which do you feel has been the most effective way to interact with your readers?  
 Focus groups  
 Email  
 Letter to the editor  
 Web site queries  
 Polls  
 Telephone  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Rank in order (1-7) the role the Courier Post seeks to play in the community?  
 News explainer  
 News breaker  
 Investigative watchdog  
 Catalyst for community discussion  
 Community steward  
 Disseminator of just the facts  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Is your news hole greater today or smaller than five years ago?
  - a.) Greater
  - b.) Smaller
  - c.) About the same

## SURVEY (Continued)

5. How is most of your newsgathering done by?  
 Phone  
 Email  
 In the field  
 Internet  
 Press releases
6. How do you prefer to receive your press releases?  
a.) Snail mail  
b.) Email  
c.) Download from the Internet  
d.) Fax  
e.) Other \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you use the techniques of civic journalism?  
a.) Yes  
...b.) No
8. How do you feel about civic journalism?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. When describing the new trend, which term do you prefer:  
a.) Civic journalism  
b.) Public journalism  
c.) Interactive journalism  
d.) No preference  
e.) Don't like any of the terms  
f.) Other \_\_\_\_\_
10. How satisfied are you with the Courier 's interaction with its readers?  
a.) Very satisfied  
b.) Satisfied  
c.) Somewhat satisfied  
d.) Not satisfied at all