

WAN STEPS UP MIDDLE EAST NEWSPAPER ACTIONS

The World Association of Newspapers is organising several events and initiatives for Middle Eastern newspapers in the coming months, ranging from its "Media in Danger - Press Under Siege" press freedom conference in Beirut to the annual Middle East Publishing Conference in Dubai. WAN will also be making its first Gebran Tueni Award, given to an Arab newspaper executive who demonstrates exemplary free press values and ambitions to sustain independence, and will launch an Arab Newspaper Development Project, to aid the business development plans of news companies in the region.

The "Media in Danger - Press Under Siege" conference, to be held in Beirut on 10 and 11 December, will draw attention to the threat against a free press in the Arab world. Speakers include the Prime Minister of Lebanon, media personalities from across the region including Abdel Rahman El Rached, General Manager of the Al-Arabiya News Channel, and international media personalities including Thomas Friedman of the New York Times and David Ignatius of the Washington Post. Full details (in English, French and Arabic) of the conference, organized by WAN and the newspaper An-Nahar, can be found at www.wan-press.org/beirut2006.

The first Gebran Tueni Award, which will annually honour a newspaper publisher or editor in the Arab world who demonstrates the free press values upheld by Gebran Tueni, the WAN Board member who was killed in a roadside bomb attack in December 2005, will be given at the conference. The award, which carries a 10,000 Euros stipend for newspaper leadership training, will be given to an editor or publisher of an Arabic-language publication whose activity reflects a profound attachment to the freedom and independence of the press, courage, leadership, ambition and the search for high managerial and professional standards. WAN will also be launching the Arab Newspaper Development project at the conference. Three newspapers will shortly begin work on new business development projects, which they will share with Arab newspapers through the Arab Press Network, www.arabpressnetwork.org.

The centerpiece of WAN's Middle East activities is the annual Middle East Publishing Conference, to be held on 17 and 18 April 2007 at the Al Murooj Rotana Hotel in Dubai. This third annual event, organised with the Dubai Consultancy, Research and Media Centre, will be held at a time when the press is undergoing rapid change in the Middle East. New titles in the Gulf, the emerging importance of the Internet in the newspaper business model, changes in marketing and distribution and the increasing levels of press freedom are all part of what many see as 'the newspaper revolution.'

Source: WAN

WEB OR PRINT? WHAT WOULD

Should media students focus on a career online and say goodbye to newspapers? Student writer Manasa Kalkunte presents an ongoing debate.

Relativity, Einstein said, is all about time and space. For decades, it was also the story of print journalism - early morning deadlines and trying to fit a thousand-word story in a 500-word space.

Computer technology, plus the explosion in online news, has changed much of that, and journalism educators and professionals are adapting their work and their classroom perspectives to fit the digital world.

"The major difference between online and print journalism is that the internet has no limits; you can publish hundreds of pages, whereas a newspaper has limited pages," says Ammar Bakkar, chief editor of Al Arabiya Net.

Online journalism provides the best arena for distributing news quickly as it is "instant publication," Bakkar said, adding that it offers an immediacy that traditional print formats cannot match.

Faster audience reaction

"Online reporting is more timely, involving more multimedia elements and attracting faster audience feedback," said Dr Mohammad Ayish, dean of the College of Communication at the University of Sharjah.

He said that the time it takes to produce and distribute a newspaper means print journalism can at best only forecast what is going to happen that day and report on what happened yesterday.

According to Bakkar and Ayish, interactivity is also another positive key factor for online journalism, as news audiences can give immediate response to stories they read or hear.

Online journalism enables interactivity between readers and the staff as well as between readers themselves. As a result, the web audience has come to expect more than a single story. They want more interactivity and more ways to deepen the content published on the web.

New angles

To many professionals, the outlook now is that the web is a step-child of the print version. Most sites simply imitate the newspaper.

But the younger readers who rule the web are surfing for short stories, video, pictures etc. So it is important to make these essentials readily accessible and make your site more user-friendly.

Therefore, according to Dennis Lewis, professor at the American University of Sharjah, "online journalism places greater emphasis on the visual presentation of news stories.

"Because online news has access to a wealth of audio, graphic, and video resources it has the potential to be far more immediate and 'alive' than print journalism. It's very much in the present; it has the capacity to capture an event right now as it's occurring."

Bakkar said that archiving is more promising on web than in print. Reports online are very accessible, and can also be stored in cyber space; they have a "permanence" which - perhaps because of the limitations in storage capacity for hard copy - gives online an advantage over print journalism.

On the other hand, a website is not an "independent media". This means that online journalism bears the pressure of "losing the user".

Bakkar said the greatest challenge while writing for the web is to try and keep the reader within the site, since it is easy for readers to click another URL and access another site. This is not the case for newspapers.

Nevertheless, reading habits are easier in print.

"Online reporting requires deeper IT knowledge in addition to editorial and news gathering skills," said Ayish. Moreover, the web caters to a larger audience in terms of different cultures, sects, attitudes etc. This should be kept in mind while writing for the web.

Bakkar said that, "the level of education required for online (journalism) is much higher than that for print". However the standards of the profession haven't changed. In spite of all the differences, Lewis said, "both types of journalism are very similar when it comes to the most important area - writing. Both depend on accurate, clear and powerful writing to convey their information."

The future of journalism

Asked whether print journalism is dying due to all the different advantages the online version has and due to the technology advances, Ayish said: "Print journalism will survive alongside the emerging online journalism sector for decades to come.

"People will continue to read paper-based media simply because they (media) have unique features not available in online journalism. Both journalistic genres are expected to develop in parallel lines."

Lewis supported Ayish, adding that "just like other forms or genres of writing it is being influenced and possibly reshaped by the newer online forms. Any print newspaper or magazine worth its salt has an online version."

He also acknowledges that online journalism is "nourished" by many of the print formats such as the inverted pyramid and other features and virtues of print journalism.

There was agreement on the fact that there is some level of "convergence" between print and online journalism.

Bakkar agreed but also noted a theory that in this heavy technology-driven age, anything that is not technology-oriented will not be consumed.

Story in a nutshell

Major difference between online and print journalism is that the internet has no limits; you can publish hundreds of pages.

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The time it takes to produce and distribute a newspaper means print journalism can at best only forecast what is going to happen that day and report on what happened yesterday.

Online journalism enables interactivity between readers and the staff as well as between readers themselves.

Younger readers who rule the web surf for short stories, video and pictures.

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Both depend on accurate, clear and powerful writing to convey their information.

Source: Gulfnews

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