



Media Minutes

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TRANSCRIPT

Journalism in 2010: The Big Questions

The year 2009 will end with journalism as we've known it in a precarious position. With many newspapers and magazines folding like a house of cards, new media experiments are emerging with no clear model for success. What's in store for journalism's future?

Chris Anderson is an assistant professor of media culture at the City University of New York. He's been involved in many discussions and conferences about the future of journalism, and he blogs about the issue at Harvard University's Nieman Journalism lab.

C.W. Anderson: *One of the things that we should really be paying close attention to in this sort of new world we're entering is, how is our politics and our civic life affected by this new journalism, because journalism and politics have always been related*

Anderson predicts that, for 2010, the debates over the future of journalism will shift to questions that get to the heart of democracy, public policy, law, organizations, economics and education.

C.W. Anderson: *On the one hand, people have made the argument that this new journalism is going to lead to an increase in people's participation in politics and in public life. More pessimistic folks – and this argument has also been made is that what you're actually going to see is sort of the emergence of this highly partisan echo chamber. And the question is whether that will lead to sort of an inability to find more common ground and more consensus in our politics.*

Tracy Van Slyke, project director of the Media Consortium, an alliance of independent media outlets, hopes 2010 to be a year of action that moves journalism toward innovation and collaboration through increased experimentation, broader diversity, the creation of engaged communities and making media mobile.

Tracy Van Slyke: *This is really about how to focus in and use your networks, your audiences, your allies to help distribute and create powerful journalism. It's a new way of operating. It's a collaborative model versus a silo model. This is a real opportunity for independent media organizations to band together and sort of break down the walls of*

domination that mainstream media has had on setting the news and political agenda for our country.

Collaboration among organizations can take a lot of different forms.

Tracy3 (:25) – *Editorial collaboration, building on the link economy or aggregation of each other, around business models – there’s all different opportunities for organizations to come together and match their strengths, from citizen journalism to investigative journalism to focusing on a specific geographic region, what have you, to really build out and support strong journalism in 2010 and beyond.*

While many smaller, local and niche outlets may collaborate more, Anderson says legacy media companies are still largely averse to linking to other news companies.

C.W. Anderson: *Media organizations’ primary job has always been to create their own media under their own umbrella. That’s how they monetize themselves. And if there was this new relationship between little guys and big guys, I think it’s possible, but I also think it would be a real shift in the mental mindset of these organizations. We’re starting to see it a little bit. We’re not starting to see it maybe quite as much as I had thought we would have seen it by now.*

Josh Stearns of Free Press, who runs the organization’s SaveTheNews.org campaign, says that the journalism’s future will be shaped by the problems of its past – specifically media consolidation, which has pushed local and diverse voices out of the mainstream.

Josh Stearns: *We need to make sure we’re walking a fine line between collaboration and consolidation. In places like Peoria and Syracuse, N.Y., we’re seeing local news-sharing agreements than mean the loss of jobs, the loss of diverse voices and a couple of big television stations combining into one. What we need to be seeing is innovative forms of collaboration that create more local news and increases the number of diverse voices, not decreases them.*

Stearns collaborated with Van Slyke on a set of New Year’s resolutions for journalism in 2010. One of them is to create a more level playing field between noncommercial and commercial media.

Josh Stearns: *So our challenge in 2010 is to move from ideas to action. We need to develop the policies and the political will to jumpstart a new era to support journalistic innovation, funding and entrepreneurship.*

For more information about the future of journalism, go to niemanlab.org, themediaconsortium.org or savethenews.org.