Renewing the News
The Future of Our News Media

Far-Reaching Changes Affect All News—Print, Broadcast, Online

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A Discussion Guide
Developed by the Interactivity Foundation

Multiple Policy Possibilities

Clothing Women Should Stop Wearing After 30

One “odd trick” cures erectile dysfunction

Never worry about money again with new formula for penny stocks

New “Brain Pill” used by millionaires.
Renewing the News
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Perhaps we should treat the news as a necessary public good for our democracy—and one that is not sufficiently provided by commerce. To fill the gap, we should provide more public funding and other supports for alternative business models.

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We should let consumer demand and commercial market determine our News. Consumers want—and advertisers will pay premium rates for—more Soft News, local news, and special interest news.

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The news industry should restore credibility, accuracy, and accountability to the news by re-focusing on Hard News and high quality journalism by providing more investigation and facts, more context and analysis; and less commentary, false equivalencies, and Infotainment.

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For our democracy to function and survive, a well “informed citizenry” must be actively engaged in public affairs, and not just as news consumers. They must also be much more engaged in both the creation and the content of their news.

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WHY TALK ABOUT THE NEWS? An invitation to discussion

What a silly question. Isn’t talking about the news—whether world events or neighborhood gossip—what we do constantly, innately, endlessly? Of course. Humans communicate and have done so since the dawn of history. We speak, write, blog, whisper, chant, paint, sing, and now tweet—in ever growing numbers. What we do a lot less of, however, is talk about the news process itself—the practice, and in the modern era the profession, of journalism. Another definition for journalism might be the attempt to systematically gather, verify, analyze and interpret information, and then share truthful accounts of it in a timely manner.

That definition and this discussion guide, however, are intended solely as an aid—a possible starting point—to exploring your own definitions of the news, the news media, and journalism, and to discussing why we share the news, how well do we do it, how should we do it, and, what it all might mean, if anything, for our selves and our democracy. This discussion guide is an invitation to discuss those questions with your friends, neighbors, classmates, and fellow citizens. And as an aid to starting those discussions, it also offers a mix of both complementary and contrasting approaches or “possibilities” for the longer-term future of the news.

But still, why talk about the news process or its meaning for society? Perhaps the most common—and many would argue the most important—rationale for such discussions is that an independent and vibrant news media is an essential component of popular self-governance. It is the “Fourth Estate” that is uniquely capable of checking abuses of power by providing for an enlightened and well-informed citizenry as the only true repository of the public will—to paraphrase Thomas Jefferson. It has become part of our democratic creed: that government is to be determined by the will of the people, which will be enlightened through public discourse, and that the press—the news media—is the means by which citizens and their discourse are kept well informed and enlightened. In this ideal, the news provides citizens with both access to information and an interpretation that verifies its truthfulness (or lack thereof) and attempts to explain its larger meaning(s). Without it, according to that creed, our democracy, our experiment in self government, will fail.

Another reason to talk about this essential component of democracy, is that the news industry is currently (and constantly) buffeted by significant change. Technological innovation especially, from the printing press to the smartphone, continue to shift how our news is created, delivered, and consumed. The latest waves of change—over the last 15 years or so—have been crashing especially hard upon the newspaper component of our news media. Many regional and national newspapers are in various death spirals as they lose readers and advertisers, then cut costs by shedding reporters, which leads to losing more readers. Considered alone, many would probably let newspapers and newsprint go the way of the fax machine, the floppy disc, VHS, and the buggy whip. Others might point out that newspapers have traditionally provided a majority of the original reporting delivered by all news media (some estimates are as high as 80-90%). Whether and how that reporting changes—and who does it—is part of this discussion. Broadcast and cable news are also losing viewers and quite recently ad revenue. While they remain profitable yet, they have done so—in great measure—by significantly reducing their news operations and changing their news content from reporting to commentary, Soft news, and re-packaging news content from other sources.

If we believe at least some part(s) of the democratic creed described above, then we might want to talk about our news. We might want to deliberate and—to borrow an overused phrase—to be intentional about the future of our news. The non-deliberate or accidental alternative will inevitably leave the decisions to a narrow elite. Conversely and even if some of us don’t think that we have much—or should have any—role in determining the future of our news, we might want to discuss it just so we can be more thoughtful news consumers, and because it’s fun.

SOME TERMINOLOGY A few definitions & distinctions – solely for this guide and to help get the discussion started:

**General interest** news reporting or stories – news selected and produced for—and assumed to be of interest to—a broad audience, the general public, and as opposed to “special interest” news, trade-group news, or public relations (organization-specific communications).

**Hard news** – general interest, fact-based news related to current public affairs/events, politics, government, the
economy, war and peace, elections, crime, legislation, the courts, public policy, etc. Sometimes also referred to as “accountability” news.

**Infotainment** - Nearly synonymous with Soft news, but more focused on entertainment news—including celebrity news, movies/TV, video gaming, social media, etc.

**Journalism** – the profession and practice of reporting the news in a systematic way, including investigatory reporting, editing and other editorial functions, production, etc.

**Legacy** news organizations or **Legacy** news media – traditional newspapers, broadcast TV/radio, and cable news organizations (both national and local); news organizations engaged in the profession and business of news reporting and established in reliance, originally at least, on newsprint, broadcast, and then cable media.

**Long form** journalism – traditionally the stories and reporting of national public affairs magazines: e.g., Time, Newsweek, the Atlantic, the Economist, the New Yorker; and now their online versions.

**New media** organizations – newer news organizations that employ online and mobile media platforms to deliver news content, which is often re-packaged from other, Legacy news media. Some New media companies are beginning to produce their own original reporting as well.

**Public interest** reporting or stories – general interest news that focuses—at least in part—on the interests of the broader public. For example, news about pensions and retirement accounts for all workers are of public interest. The quarterly earnings or daily stock fluctuations of a single company are likely not.

**Soft News** - as contrasted to Hard news, stories of broad public interest that are more personal and a step or two removed from the public/civic affairs of Hard news. Soft news includes commentary and opinion on the news and stories on entertainment/the arts, personal health and family life, personal finance, education, food, sports, and weather. Traditionally, Soft news has often been bundled and marketed with—and has greatly subsidized the high cost of—Hard news.

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NEWS** - just for fun and/or to spur discussion:

- **≈ 50,000 years ago** – development of language.
- **≈ 5,000 years ago** – development of written language.
- **≈ 1440** – Gutenberg invents the modern printing press – movable type, metal castings.
- **late 1500s–early 1600s**: something like the “news” develops in pamphlet form with multiple, unconnected stories of recent events—and primarily as an appendage to commercial information and the printing business.
- **mid 1700s** – dawn of journalism as a separate, news-gathering enterprise and occupation
- **1791** – First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits Congress from making any law “abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; . . .” which is promptly ignored and frequently violated until 1931.
- **1830s** – news and journalism begin to develop as a business, hiring reporters. Papers are still mostly filled with commentary. 1833 – first “penny press”; largest U.S. paper in 1833 has a circulation of 4,500.
- **1844** – first telegraph installed marking the dawn of the electronic information age; and makes possible the notion that **timeliness** could be a key element of news gathering, reporting, and consumption.
- **late 1800s**: newspapers become profitable relying on advertising; slow development of “objective reporting” to gain audience share and ad revenue; but also an era of “yellow journalism” featuring sensational and exaggerated (if not demonstrably false) headlines and stories.
- **1910** – number of U.S. newspapers peak at 2,200 (20 in New York city)
- **1919-20** – **Radio**: the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) formed, and regular radio broadcasts begin.
- **1931** – U.S. Supreme Court rules in *Near v. Minnesota* that the states (or any level of government) may not abridge the First Amendment’s freedom of the press by enacting laws placing a “prior restraint” on the ability of the press to publish news, even if a story is untrue.
- **1939** – 25 of the largest U.S. cities are down to 1 paper—the resulting local monopolies contribute to steady profits for the newspaper industry for the next 60 years and notwithstanding significant changes to their market.
- **1941** – **TV**: the Federal Communications Commission permits 18 television stations to begin broadcasting.
- **1949** – the *Camel News Caravan* premiers on NBC as the 1st TV news – it is 15 minutes.
• 1955-56 – color television begins; and NBC begins airing the Huntley/Brinkley report – still 15 minutes.

• 1960s - Development of TV news: in 1963, Walter Cronkite begins reporting at CBS; all 3 networks increase their nightly news to 30 minutes, and for the first time, most Americans get their news from TV. In 1968, CBS premiers, 60 Minutes, a weekly news show, which quickly becomes the highest watched show on TV.

• 1969 – the Defense Department funds the creation of a computer network that will become the Internet.

• 1971–1974 - in 1971, the Pentagon Papers are published by the New York Times and the U.S. Supreme Court rules that the government’s injunction is an unconstitutional “prior restraint”. The Watergate break-in and resulting cover-up, and reporting, primarily by the Washington Post, eventually forces President Nixon to resign in 1974, the same year that Time magazine spins off its People section to start a separate publication.

• 1980s – rise of cable networks and news (CNN) begin competing with broadcast networks and with papers. The VCR and the remote control contribute to audiences tuning away from broadcast news shows.

• 1990s – the Internet and the world wide web develop and become part of mass media; 1996 – Fox News Channel begins on cable. And yet newspaper profit margins remain high –between 20 and 45%.

• Late 1990s – local TV largely abandons original reporting on politics/policy and retains 60% profit margins.

• 2000 – Craigslist expands and begins decimating newspaper want ad revenue. For broadcast news, the number of foreign bureau reporters are reduced by two-thirds from the late 1980s.

• mid 2000s – Social media arrives: Facebook, Flickr, and the first news aggregator website (Digg.com) begin in 2004. In 2005, You Tube begins and Huffington Post’s internet news site begins mixing professional news (mostly from other sources) with opinion and “user-generated” content. In 2006 Twitter begins. And newspapers in several larger markets cut back: go online only, shift to local news, or close altogether.

• 2007-2009 – stock prices of larger newspaper/media companies decline by 60 – 90%, and more lay-offs follow.

• 2010s – by 2010, two-thirds of Americans get some news online each day, and by 2012 half of American adults own a smart phone and a quarter own some form of a tablet.

Some Common Concerns & Discussion Questions

About our News in general and about each of the policy possibilities.

• Our news is changing. How and why? And will that future be good, bad, different, and for whom? As outlined in the Brief History on the previous page, the business of our news is always changing: changing technology, audience habits and demand, and reporting practices. How has your own news consumption changed over your lifetime or just in recent years? Should we really be concerned if the newspaper industry or the local news broadcast goes away? Will something better replace them?

• Was there ever a “Golden Age” for news reporting or just for the profitability of certain Legacy news media organizations? Or is it a Golden Age now—at least for consumer access to more information and perspectives? Or is it becoming a Babel of self-selected news & information silos? Is information self-interpreting? And what happens when we can choose any interpretation from among thousands? Does this affect an informed citizenry?

• Is there a public good to the news? A key justification for a “free press” is that it provides a public good—namely an “informed citizenry,” without which popular government cannot long survive. Is this true? And if so, must it be provided only by private commerce? Or can we, should we, support it like we do other public goods? Conversely, what should be our public policy if popular government can survive without an effective first amendment or if the press can only be provided by private commerce?

• “Motivated Reasoning”: does the news help or hurt our understanding of events? How do selection bias, confirmation bias, the “backfire effect”—in which providing more information hardens views in the opposite direction—and other forms of motivated reasoning affect the News and the public interest?

• The economics: Hard news content is increasingly “unbundled” from Soft news and other forms of entertainment that in the past greatly subsidized the high cost of reporting. You can now get your weather, sports, crossword, celebrity gossip, etc. without having to buy (or even look past) Hard news. Is the remaining audience for Hard news large enough to support its high cost, unbundled from other content? Also, the monopolies of newspapers and broadcast schedules are gone—along with the viewers and ad revenue. In a far
more competitive market (much news is nearly free online), is there enough revenue to support the high cost of high quality journalism?
# The Possibilities in Brief

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<th>The “Possibilities” or Different Approaches to the Future of our News</th>
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<th>How &amp; What? How might we implement this? What might it look like?</th>
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| **A. Embrace our Digital Future: Go all Online & Mobile** | • The future of the news is online and mobile, not in print or in broadcast.  
• The high costs of newsprint, its distribution, and bricks and mortar are not necessary or sustainable.  
• Broadcast and cable news, while still profitable, can’t deliver quality reporting or attract younger viewers. | • Embrace online & mobile platforms & producers: e.g., Buzzfeed, Politico, Vox, Huffington Post, etc.  
• More computer written content.  
• No more free online content: paywalls and subscriptions for all.  
• Withdraw life support for newsprint and let broadcast/cable news wither. |
| **B. Public & Non-Profit News in the Public Interest** | • An informed citizenry is necessary to our democracy, but the market is no longer able to provide the news.  
• We should support the good journalism like we do other public goods—with more public and alternative funding and other supports for non-profit providers. | • Increase government subsidies or even ownership—though not management—for public news.  
• More support for other non-commercial providers: e.g., non-profits, low profits, & cooperatives.  
• Use other funding sources—foundations, licensing fees, etc. |
| **C. Give Us What We Want: Infotainment, Local, & Niche News** | • Times have changed: there are too many, more entertaining options out there to traditional, Legacy News.  
• The news must continue to evolve toward more of what consumers & advertisers will pay for: Soft News, entertainment, on demand, local, special interest news, etc. | • Focus on local and special interest news, which remain profitable.  
• Infotainment: e.g., Game Show news, Video Game news, and Graphic Novel news; more “Listicles.”  
• More comedy or fake news formats like The Daily Show, or The Onion. |
| **D. Reform & Renew the Legacy** | • There is still a need and demand for high quality reporting and analysis.  
• The “race-to-the-bottom” strategy of Soft News and cutting staff is not working.  
• To re-attract an audience, news producers should improve and not degrade their product. | • Establish an industry-regulated brand for high quality news.  
• More & better fact checking.  
• More investigatory & deep reporting, less commentary, breaking news, and horse-race news  
• More accountability for sources and claims; more analysis and context. |
| **E. News For Democracy: of, by, and for the People** | • Democracy and citizens require the information and analysis that good news can provide.  
• The news needs to be more directly and politically meaningful to citizens.  
• An educated citizenry should be involved in both consuming and producing its news. | • More emphasis in reporting on “what this means to you,” and “what can you do about it”.  
• Systemic changes, legal reforms to increase citizen control and engagement in public affairs.  
• Citizen journalists, Wiki News, cash awards/bounties for news stories. |
A. **Embrace Our Digital Future: Go All Online & Mobile**

What if... we just gave up on costly newsprint and generally low-quality broadcast and high-cost cable news, and just went all online and mobile for our news? This approach envisions that news producers and journalists (of all types) distribute their content—whether text, audio, video, graphics, or some combination—primarily online through websites, blogs, mobile apps, or other online sites and services.

The “Back Story,” or what’s behind this approach (underlying concerns, theories, goals)? The future of the news is online and mobile. The news industry must face some hard facts and should embrace its digital future that has already arrived. Consumers who still read newspapers in print (with their morning coffee) or who regularly watch any of the broadcast or cable news shows on TV at a scheduled hour each night are a dying breed—both metaphorically and literally. Increasingly, consumers get their news elsewhere—from multiple and alternative online and mobile sources—and this is especially true for younger consumers.

Notwithstanding their long-term dominance as Legacy news organizations, newspapers and broadcast/cable news media, no longer enjoy the monopoly they once had over both the news content and over the consumption habits of their customers. There are now many and cheaper (often free) alternatives for news that are accessible whenever the consumer wants and wherever they are. The previously “captive audience” of newspaper subscribers and nightly TV news program viewers continues to shrink, isn’t coming back, and will likely never generate anywhere close to the advertising revenue that it once did.

Many Legacy news organizations realize this reality but are struggling to make the transition. A number of newer, online-only media organizations are already exploiting the opportunity. This possibility would implement policies to (a) help those Legacy News organizations that can make this transition, (b) euthanize quickly those that can’t, and (c) support the continued rise of newer, online-only news organizations.

**Possible Means: How?** Some of the possible reforms or proposals under this approach could include—

- **For government:**
  - Enact price supports for online/mobile news: set minimum prices per subscription/story—similar to what many states do for gas prices or what the Dept. of Agriculture does for some farm products.
  - Provide regulatory approvals, tax incentives, and subsidized bandwidth to support both new and Legacy media in transitioning from print and broadcast/cable to all online/mobile.
  - Pay for these incentives and subsidies partly with the savings from not having to collect, recycle, or landfill all that newsprint and—over time—all those TVs.

- **For consumers:** continue canceling (or not subscribing to) newsprint or TV cable media; recycle your TVs (unless used to view online news), and subscribe and pay well for online/mobile news.

- **For the news industry:**
  - No more free online content! Implement paywalls for all content, and collude with competitors, work with government, whatever is needed to insure a reliable revenue stream from online content.
  - More stories written and posted by computers; use journalists primarily to supervise, edit & update.
  - For print: stop and sell the presses, take the losses, reduce your taxes, and/or declare bankruptcy.
  - Create and participate in online news portals that offer consumers the option of selecting their own “bundles” of multiple subscriptions (don’t follow cable model). Develop a shared interface for this.
  - For New media, online-only producers, continue to grow your market(s), and hire journalists and produce more original reporting, ala Buzzfeed, Huffington Post, Politico, Vox, Vice, The Intercept, the Daily Beast, and others—Netflix News?
The Op-Ed Page – Some other perspectives and concerns for discussion.

- This approach still may not be sufficient to support a news industry.
  - Clicks don’t equal viewer attention or necessarily generate high ad revenues or profits
  - And so far, the digital efforts by Legacy news companies have not been “entirely successful” in generating sufficient revenue to pay their way.

- People still watch TV—a lot. While broadcast and cable news may be terrible in quality, they still make money—and a lot in election years. Why would these news organizations abandon their broadcast licenses and networks?

- News producers may not thrive if they must rely on others to distribute their content. What happens, for example, if Comcast raises its fees to consumers or if Facebook reduces its rates?

- Will “new media” news companies be able to hire all the reporters that are cast off by dying newspapers, and will they enforce all the journalistic standards/ethics of newsprint?

- What about access? Do we care if the quickening death of the middle class and growing division of wealth maroons an entire unconnected class of citizens without access to the news? Or will we, at least, make high-speed internet available to all at subsidized rates?

- What happens to the journalism profession if there are no (or very few) full time professional journalists (that aren’t silicone-based artificial intelligence)?

Your Letters to the Editor:

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A Look Inside this Newsroom:

[insert a split screen image: on one half it’s a branded news organization with a room and a rack of computers; on the other side, it’s a reporter working from home; or do a screen shot of a news story that originated with a newspaper but is being distributed through Huffpo and/or Facebook...]

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Page 7
B. PUBLIC & NON-PROFIT NEWS IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

What if . . . we determined that investigative reporting and high quality journalism in the public interest were “public goods” (like national defense or clean air) and similarly committed ourselves to supporting, in multiple ways, those non-profit organizations or other organizations that provide such journalism in the public interest?

The “Back Story,” or what’s behind this approach (some of the underlying concerns, theories, goals)?

If investigative reporting, bearing witness, public accountability, and an informed citizenry are—in various ways—important to, or necessary if insufficient for, popular governance, perhaps we should start supporting these journalistic functions financially and otherwise and just as we do with other public goods—with public dollars and policy provisions. Perhaps it’s time to acknowledge that the old amalgam of commercial advertising and subscription revenue is just not ever again going to be sufficient to support the kind of journalism in the public interest that can provide these public goods. Not in a day when there are so many competing entertainment options, and the news audience is no longer forced or habituated to consume their news in specific time slots or on singular and delivered bits of newsprint.

Of course, any proposal for public funding or other government support for journalism is hugely complicated by the real concern that it would inexorably subvert the independence and objectivity of the reporting—a concern that has been a corrupt reality in many instances. On the other hand, such conflicts of interest are also present with existing funding—as when a story involves a commercial owner or a major advertiser. And in both the news industry and in many government activities there are a number of relatively common procedural and institutional arrangements to help safeguard independence/objectivity—usually establishing firewalls to separate the finance and administrative functions from the editorial and reporting functions, and providing certain employment safeguards. Whether and how well these arrangements work is always an important challenge, but it is a challenge shared by many important public endeavors, including, already, journalistic ones both in the United States and abroad.

Possible Means: How? Some of the possible reforms or proposals under this approach could include—

- Significantly increase direct government subsidies and grants for existing and new public news media—similar to but more of the type of public funding already provided to the news shows of non-profit public television and public radio. Add or increase support for public interest print and online news.
- Also add or increase support for other independent, non-partisan, non-profit, low-profit, coops, or networks, that produce or support as their primary mission original and general interest reporting in the public interest, such as ProPublica, the Center for Investigative Reporting (Berkeley), the Center for Investigative Journalism (Madison), or American Public Media’s Public Insight Network (New York).
- Provide public non-monetary supports as well: office space, bandwidth, internet access, technology, etc.
- Survey, adopt, and carefully enforce “best practices” from other fields and from journalism structures around the world to address the conflicts of interest from public funding, especially separate organizational structures and functions to insure independent and objective reporting and editing: e.g. separate offices, jobs, individuals; laws making it a crime to attempt to use funding to influence editorial; and third-party over-sight and appeal processes (e.g., ombudsman, independent review boards).
- Restore some form of the former Fairness Doctrine (requiring some coverage of controversial matters of public interest and contrasting views) for all news organizations that receive public support and regardless of media format (in past, only applied to broadcast, not print, cable, or online).
- How to help pay for it? Significantly revise the fee structure for the telecommunications industry: give much less to the few telecom monopolies that own the pipes—the cable, wires, and satellites—and much more to the content producers and especially public news producers. Also use non-government financing: help private foundations, public charities, endowed funds, and other non-governmental organizations to pool and leverage their resources in support of public news in the public interest.
The Op-Ed Page – Some other perspectives and concerns for discussion.

- Do the procedures, structures, and rules to insulate editorial from funding work, well enough? Do they work adequately in other public arenas (education, defense, public contracting, utilities)?
- How is it done in other markets, countries? Are there other examples of public funding for journalism, and how well do they work—or not work? For example, how does the BBC do it—both funding and insuring independence for the news function? Or does it?
- If commercial markets won’t support it, maybe we don’t really want or need it. Or if consumers do want it, maybe we should just wait for a new and market-driven solution to arise.
- What are the differences, if any, in reporting between current publicly-subsidized news (the News Hour or NPR for example) and commercial reporting?
- No matter how carefully done, won’t government funding inevitably lead to undue government control or influence and threaten editorial independence?
- How will we pay for it?

Your Letters to the Editor:

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A Look Inside this Newsroom:
[insert multiple logos and other images from public news – NPR, the News Hour Frontline, one from their website: ...add logos for ProPublica, Center for Investigative Journalism]
C. **GIVE US WHAT WE WANT:** INFOTAINMENT & LOCAL/NICHE NEWS

What if... to sustain the news industry we need to change the “product” and make it more entertaining—more fun, funnier, and fast—to recapture the attention of consumers now accustomed to multiple competing forms of entertainment on demand? And what if... the news industry refocused to serve smaller, niche markets with higher profit margins? This approach would not only focus on smaller geographic markets but also on particular “communities of interest” and other interest groups that can now be reached digitally and without need for a “bricks and mortar” presence.

The “Back Story,” or what’s behind this approach (some underlying concerns, theories, goals)? Let’s face it: reading long stretches of undifferentiated text in newspapers or magazines or listening to somebody read that text to us on TV or radio at times of their choosing is no longer a preferred leisure-time activity or a marketable commodity to advertisers. There are now just too many other—more entertaining—options, for consumers to get their news. For any form of public affairs reporting or news to survive, it has to be more engaging and more entertaining—at least for some part of the audience and for some part of their day—than the lure of video games, reality TV shows, or the cute cat videos and family vacation pictures on their Facebook, Twitter, or other social media feeds. Perhaps the only way for some part of the news industry to survive is for it to continue to evolve toward more engaging and individualized content and formats.

One of the few formats or venues in which traditional news content continues to make money is in “hyper-local” reporting and special interest markets where monopoly economics still largely apply. The few hundred neighbors and few thousands fans of Frisbee golf, weaving, or collectors of Coca-cola memorabilia, beer, wine, cheese, chocolate, bicycling, monster trucks, sailing, Justin Bieber, Wiz Khalifi, or the Berlin Philharmonic—all provide potentially profitable niche markets for the news industry and for those news companies that are nimble enough to serve them.

**Possible Means: How?** Some of the possible changes that news producers might make to the form and/or content of the news under this approach could include—

- More “comedy” or fake news formats that incorporate—and occasionally produce—some reporting about current events. Cable shows like the “Daily Show with John Stewart,” or “The Flipside” with Michael Loftus, or HBO’s “Last Week Tonight” with John Oliver, or print/online sites like the Onion.
- Develop “Game Show” news and reality TV programs that are based on reporting about and knowledge of public affairs. “Name the Senate majority leader and win a prize!” Develop graphic novel news too.
- Video Game News – develop video games that center on reporting and knowledge of current events.
- Punch up the remaining text: more color, more pictures, more charts, add video links, also and to make reading faster and clearer, add section headings, bullet points for lists, and space between sections.
- Shorter articles and stories and/or break them up into bite size nuggets: more “listicles.”
- News Media companies should focus on “hyper-local” markets—the small town, the neighborhood, etc.
- Also more “interest group” and “trade group” news: for memorabilia collectors, hobbyists, sports and music fans; for particular teams and artists, commercial interests, etc.
- Continue to produce more special interest stories and fewer “general interest” new stories.
- Reduce duplicative and less profitable international and national level reporting and bureaus.
- More partisan or advocacy news that appeals to—or advocates for—just slices of the political spectrum.

**For government**: reduce and/or eliminate subsidies and other support for general interest reporting and public interest news programming on public TV, radio, or in other media formats.

**For consumers**: read, watch, and follow only the news that most appeals to your individual interests.
The Op-Ed Page – Some other perspectives and concerns for discussion.

- Do we really want more clickbait? Aren’t we already doing much of this? And isn’t it what we don’t like about the changing news media marketplace?
- Does “Infotainment News” qualify as news any longer? Should it be disqualified automatically solely because it’s also entertaining?
- Will this possibility contribute to “social diabetes” where the public is overfed on media content but undernourished with respect to the quality of that content? Like consuming lots of candy but no vegetables. Are we there already?
- Could the public become simultaneously more informed and misinformed? Viewers of news comedy and/or commentary usually have higher levels of information about current events, but they also have higher levels of misinformation as well. More information, but less knowledge?
- Is it true that interest and retention are actually higher when employing humor or other entertaining elements?
- Would humor and other elements of this approach make the challenges of “information silos” and “motivated reasoning” better or worse?
- How do we come back together—if only occasionally—to deliberate and make decisions for the common good if we spend increasing amounts of our time and attention in ever more fragmented and compartmentalized “communities of interest”?

Your Letters to the Editor:

[insert multiple images – Daily Show, Fox News the Five, Onion Headline, Listicle - ]
D. Reform & Renew the Legacy

What if . . . the news industry focused on reforming and restoring its ability to produce high quality journalism with original and general interest reporting? This approach would focus on improving the overall quality and relevance of reporting to both attract new consumers and recapture some of the audience that has abandoned Legacy Media as it cut costs and chased ratings and profits.

The “Back Story,” or what’s behind this approach (some of the underlying concerns, theories, goals)?

For most journalists, their primary product or their “added value” is not simply the news content itself—the text, video, or images of current affairs that they churn out every day. Rather it is their reputation, their credibility, their trustworthiness for producing high quality content, for deciding what is newsworthy, checking and double-checking the facts, for providing context to the story and thoughtful analysis, for clear, straightforward writing that is able to accurately summarize the complex, for investigating the claims of the powerful, and for reporting that is non-partisan/fair, and yet unflinching in exposing deception, corruption, and wrongdoing. These are some of the ideals they strive for and which are increasingly difficult to deliver in an age that demands ever greater speed and volume with fewer staff and declining resources.

And admittedly the attention span of the audience for such journalism is limited and fickle. If it bleeds, it leads is a cliché for a reason. In the short run, the sensational captivates and sells, no matter how unimportant in the long run. However, while we may click on a cute cat video or sensational headline for a momentary diversion, we’re unlikely to develop any brand loyalty or return to that particular website the next time. Short-term ratings and clickbait don’t always equate to reader engagement, subscribers, or profits. And as Legacy Media have chased declining ratings and revenue with more Soft News and staffing cuts to save money, they have also lost much of that segment of their audience that wants—and is most willing to pay for—high quality journalism. As a consequence, many consumers have abandoned broadcast/cable news and newspapers altogether. This approach would attempt to get those consumers back and attract new consumers by producing more and better original reporting and other content that they can’t get elsewhere.

Possible Means: How?

Reforms that news producers might adopt under this approach could include—

- Standards & branding: like sports leagues, food processors, and other industries, news producers could collaborate on the creation of a new—and industry-regulating—certification and branding for high quality journalism. This brand could certify that the reporting meets certain, high standards. The certifying organization could be a non-profit jointly owned by all the news providers.
- One of those standards could be that a certain percentage of the news reporting would have to be original reporting of general interest Hard News: for example X % of text/pages or broadcast time.
- More original and investigatory reporting and less commentary; less emphasis on “breaking news” and less “chase-the-same story”, “inside-the-beltway,” and electoral “horse-race” coverage and commentary.
- Stop diluting & churning the news to fill time/columns: less 24/7 coverage, and more analysis.
- Get it right and source it: better internal fact-checking, and add footnotes and citations to sources.
- Do it right: emphasize, enforce, and market adherence to journalistic ethics.
- Eliminate false equivalencies and reduce over-reliance on so-called “objective journalism” in the sense of “he said, she said” reporting that omits any independent analysis or assumes the truth is in the middle.
- Analyze and explain: more context, more analysis, more emphasis on “how this affects you”.
- A longer attention span: much more accountability for inaccurate claims and those who make them.
- Much more specialization and training for reporters—make them truly expert in their chosen subfields.

For government:

- Provide any needed anti-trust exemption for the news industry’s efforts at self-regulation.

For consumers:

- Demand and pay well for better journalism. Stop watching, reading, and clicking on infotainment, clickbait, and news providers that repeatedly trade in sensational but unsubstantiated claims.
The Op-Ed Page – Some other perspectives and concerns for discussion.

- How will we pay for this? Is there really a market for it? Would there be enough new and returning consumers to cover the very high costs for this kind of journalism?

- Is this what “long-form” journalism and academic writing is for? If you want deep context and analysis of foreign policy mattes, subscribe to Foreign Affairs. Or if you want wonkish policy analysis, read the reports of the Brookings Institution or the American Enterprise Council.

- Sex and sensational crime sell; detailed economics or social policy not so much. “It takes a lot of courage to be boring.” Jim Lehrer of the PBS NewsHour. So while more context, deep analysis, fact-checking, and general interest stories may sound high minded, what we actually click on and read are stories about the Kardashians, diet pills, and the latest conspiracy theories.

- We’re all our own editors now. Individual consumers now decide “what’s news” for them and how it should be written and delivered. In this world, how do we justify paying a premium for the objective judgment and skill of an expert journalist?

- Will this renewed Hard News approach still provide a daily crossword puzzle, sports coverage, movie reviews, weather, and fashion news?

Your Letters to the Editor:

A Look Inside this Newsroom:

[insert old B&W movie image of news reporters next to .... Ezra Klein/Vox?]
E. NEWS FOR DEMOCRACY: OF, BY, AND FOR THE PEOPLE

What if . . . our news media was focused more on engaging with the broader public and empowering them to become more involved in civic life and public affairs? In this approach, the public would be actively involved not just as consumers of the news but also in its selection, creation, development, and, critically, its interconnected role in public affairs and as a central pillar of popular government. This approach would seek to make the news matter to more of us—both because we could better see the direct connection between our lives and the news stories and because the news process itself would be central to and supportive of our democracy.

The “Back Story,” or what’s behind this approach (some of the underlying concerns, theories, goals)?

Democracy needs the news. As in the earlier Possibility B for Public & Non-Profit News, this possibility sees journalism—and particularly, its functions of investigative reporting, bearing witness, insuring public accountability, and providing for an informed citizenry—as central to, if not a necessary though insufficient condition for, any sustainable form of popular governance.

Increasingly, however, there are concerns that our news media is failing to perform these functions. In fact many see our news media as doing more harm than good to our democracy. While Americans are often accused—and indeed are often guilty—of being generally ignorant of, unengaged with, and seemingly uninterested in politics and public affairs, many feel that our news media are actually contributing to these problems rather than mitigating them. For many Americans, news reporting on public affairs just makes them feel alienated and disempowered. Often the reporting seems to be primarily done by, for, and about political elites, not regular people. The news tells them what those in power have done to them rather than what they can do about those in power—or their abuses of it. Similarly, many news stories seem directed primarily to the interests of other journalists or newsmakers: as in stories that focus excessively on “inside-the-beltway” issues, or minor, daily changes in position (what he said today . . .), or on “horse race” style election coverage, or “he said, she said” reporting—all while giving scant attention to or explanation of how power and policy actually affect the lives of everyday citizens, much less how those citizens might affect power and policy. Finally, our growing income disparities and the even greater disparities in political power, understandably contribute to the other 98% often asking, “why bother.” This possibility has a very different vision for our news media and for our democracy.

Possible Means: How?

Some of the possible reforms or proposals under this approach could include—

- Directly involve and engage with citizens in making their news:
  - Use volunteer “citizen journalists” to contribute and help compile basic information, and research?
  - “Wiki News,” prizes/bounties for news stories, and other formats that encourage direct public input.
  - Work with non-profits and other non-governmental organizations that can contribute content and analysis—e.g. investigatory news networks, the Knight Foundation, League of Women Voters, etc.
  - Re-envision the role of a journalist from a mere watchman or translator to being a moderator who helps nurture ongoing and multiple community dialogues between people and power.
  - Use moderated comment fields, “live chats,” and other participatory forums.

- Reform reporting and writing practices to emphasize “how it affects you” and “what you might do about it”—involve the public in all stories. And decrease “inside the beltway” reporting of small daily shifts, and “horse race” election coverage that can be seen as more serving of the interests of reporters/elites.

- Consider structural/legal changes that might help to renew some public trust and increase agency: e.g., campaign finance reform, restore the Voting Rights Act, the Fairness Doctrine, reverse Citizens United.

- More and better “media literacy” and education generally—at all levels and for all disciplines, especially civics, history, politics/political science, economics, science, philosophy, etc.
The Op-Ed Page – Some other perspectives and concerns for discussion.

- Are citizens interested in and capable of being front-line journalists? Will this degrade the quality of the news reporting or its objectivity if ideologues or incompetents are the only ones who volunteer?
- How do we re-train journalists to be moderators? Current reporting and editing skills may or may not translate to being a good “moderator” and good public discussion skills.
- Do we know whether emphasizing how public affairs affect regular people and what they can do about them will lead to more public engagement?
- Do we know what “legal/structural” changes or reforms will encourage a more engaged citizenry”? Do we have the political capacity to enact those changes?
- What are the partisan impacts of this approach? Or why might partisans—from either side—favor or disfavor certain reforms.
- How would we pay for this?
- “Yeah sure, make me study it in school; that’s guaranteed to make me never want to read or pay for the news.”

Your Letters to the Editor:  

A Look Inside this Newsroom:  

[Insert images of reporter leading a group discussion and citizens in a pub marking up an online news story]
Other Ideas developed during the Panels’ discussions:
• Do nothing, let current trends continue and creative destruction provide new opportunities.
• Let the markets decide (strip away existing regulations and public supports/financing):
• An emphasis on Media literacy/education as its own, separate policy possibility
• ________________________________
• ________________________________

Possible Next Steps
• Learn/participate/experience more:
• Act/advocate for the change you want to see:
  o
• What else? Your ideas. What would you do, what would you recommend?
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About this Discussion Guide

What’s it for? **A way to start discussions, not settle arguments.** The Interactivity Foundation’s discussion guides are intended to provide rough—and intentionally incomplete—maps to encourage and assist readers’ own exploration, consideration, and discussion of the topic. As such they are intended to be “starting points” or sample trailheads for additional discussion, not clearly defined destinations. They are not meant to be answer books or expert policy papers that guide readers to a singular or specific policy solution. Rather, we hope that they will generate more questions, more exploration, and more discussion. As a consequence, most all of the questions, issues, and multiple contrasting “policy possibilities” in this Discussion Guide are intentionally broad, non-specific, incomplete, sometimes vague, and sometimes conflicting.

How should it be used? **Some suggested discussion guidelines.** Of course, one answer is however you like. While we use and generally promote a few guidelines for any public discussion, we also encourage anyone interested in this or any other topic to experiment and play with both the discussion process and the topic. Some of the guidelines for group discussion that we’ve found helpful include—

- The overall goal is to foster engagement, encourage exploration, increase understanding, and have fun.
- There is no intent or effort to achieve group agreement, consensus, or any other group decision. Exploration of contrasting viewpoints and divergence are encouraged, and respectful disagreement is expected and allowed.
- We seek to avoid 2-sided and confrontational debate in favor of group discussion that encourages and respects multiple points of view and builds on the contributions of all participants.
- We’re more interested in broader trends, bigger picture concepts, long-term choices and trade-offs. And we try to avoid getting hung up on any specific facts or small-scale problems (whether those presented in this Guide or from participants’ outside reading, research or experience).
- We encourage everyone to participate and are not concerned with special expertise or perfectly developed solutions. We hope that our discussions are safe spaces where all participants can try out and play with new and different ideas—especially those that may need more exploration or which may be politically unpopular.
- Finally, our discussions are—
  - generally small-group discussions with at least 4-5 and not more than 10 participants, with 6-8 being ideal.
  - Facilitated to help move the discussion along and keep it exploring, not mired in one or more of the swamps of specificity or ambiguity, frustration or despair, or single-issue advocacy, etc.

Who developed it and how? This Discussion Guide was developed and published by the Interactivity Foundation, which is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that works to enhance the quality and
quantity of our public discourse—and ultimately the health of our democracy—through facilitated, small-group discussion projects on broad topics of public concern. The Foundation supports the discussion of public policy concerns and the exploration and development of multiple and contrasting approaches to them. The Foundation does not, however, recommend or otherwise advocate for any of the specific ideas or policy “possibilities” in its Discussion Guides or other publications. The Foundation’s administrative offices are located in Parkersburg, West Virginia, but it employs Fellows, who facilitate and manage the long-term discussion projects that produce these Guides, and other staff in other locations around the United States. You can find out more about the Interactivity Foundation at www.interactivityfoundation.org

Most of the content for this Discussion Guide was developed from the long-term discussions of two panels, each with 7 or 8 members. One panel was primarily comprised of those with professional and/or educational expertise in one or more areas of the news media. The second panel was principally (but not exclusively) comprised of interested “generalists.” Their discussions were facilitated by an IF Fellow, the project manager and editor of this Discussion Guide. Although many of the policy possibilities and other ideas in this Discussion Guide were developed from the panelists’ discussions (in various and edited forms), the Interactivity Foundation, not the panelists, is solely responsible for all content. And the inclusion of any policy possibility for discussion is not in any way intended as a recommendation or endorsement of that or any other possibility by the Foundation or any panelist.

Other Publications of the Interactivity Foundation

Other Discussion Guides (previously termed “Discussion Reports”):

- Invention, Innovation and Intellectual Property (2014)
- What Might Childhood Look Like in the Future (2014)
- Human Migration (2013)
- Helping America Talk (rev. 2012)*
- Future Possibilities for Civil Rights Policy (2011)*
- The United States’ Democratic Promise (2011)*
- The Future of Energy (2011)
- How Will We All Retire (2010)
- Anticipating Human Genetic Technology (2009)
- The Future of Regulation (2009)
- Science (2009)

* Also available in Spanish

Other IF Publications:

- Let’s Talk Politics: Restoring Civility Through Exploratory Discussion (2013)
- Contrasting Possibilities and the Interactivity Foundation Discussion Process (2nd ed. 2009)
- Facilitation Guidebook for Small Group Citizen Discussions (2nd ed. 2009)
- Teaching Tips (2009)
- Guidebook for Student-Centered Classroom Discussions (2008)
- Public Discussion as the Exploration and Development of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities (2008)
- Facilitation Guidebook (2005)
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