

IS THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM JUST “AROUND THE CORNER”?

By Terry Irving

For years, the media business ran on the slogan “bigger is better.” Newspapers went national, and then international; television stations turned into “superstations” and cable networks expanded to cover the globe.

So how is that working out for the industry?

In the past decade, newspapers have closed across the United States, tens of thousands of journalists have been laid off, TV stations and cable networks are scrambling for both viewers and advertisers and free websites like craigslist.com have made billions of dollars in classified ad revenue vanish into thin air. And it's not just a trend in the U.S.: in the *International Herald Tribune*, media analyst [Marie Bénilde](#) reported that only one daily newspaper in France made any money last year and predicted, “journalists are now in the same situation as steel workers in the 1970s: They are destined to disappear...”

There is one type of news outlet, however, that is on the rise, backed by major corporations like the New York Times, AOL and the Hearst Corporation: the “hyperlocal” coverage of the neighborhood you live in. For decades, weekly newspapers have profited from the aggressive coverage of a small town, a county or a region – leaving the state and national stories to the giants. Now television stations and newspapers are trying to repeat this success – opening websites that offer stories about the robbery that happened around the corner last night and videos of the street fair that opens down the block next week.

This is a brand-new field and the sites are almost as varied as the neighborhoods they cover. Some are backed by local television stations or newspapers; offering stories tailored to the user's zip code, address or even their location as given by the GPS unit in their cell phone. Others are completely computer-driven; aggregating everything, from blogs to police and fire reports to video reports done by volunteer journalists.

They may be quite different, but they are all driven by the same reality – more and more, people are indicating that they are more interested in what's going on down the street than what's happening in Washington, DC or on the other side of the world. In addition, there is an untapped market of small local businesses willing to pay to reach their customer base if they can be convinced that they won't be wasting their precious marketing dollars.

Inevitably, some of these outlets fail as they try to maneuver onto this new playing field, but many are surviving and more are moving into the hyperlocal space every day. Take Seattle, where one of the major newspapers, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, stopped putting out a printed newspaper in 2009. Their [website](#), however, is very much alive and (as reported by [LostRemote.com](#), a news website focused solely on local media) they've been joined by a host of outlets with names like [Next Door Media](#), the [West Seattle Blog](#), [Neighborlogs](#), [Publicola](#), [TechFlash](#), [InvestigateWest](#) and [Crosscut](#).

Seattle isn't alone. Chicago has several hyperlocal sites and a number of companies are opening print and video outlets in the New York City area – including, of course, [eHarlemTV](#). There are still plenty of obstacles – convincing small business owners to advertise in the current economy, assuring accuracy and objectivity in volunteer journalists and whether hyperlocal sites can afford to have reporters or just depend on outside content.

On the other hand, Peter Krasilofsky of the Kelsey Group estimates that the potential small business advertising market could reach \$32 billion by 2013. That's enough to keep journalists hard at work – finding the success stories that are “just around the corner.”

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