

RTNDA

# Communicator

NOVEMBER 2006

THE MAGAZINE FOR ELECTRONIC JOURNALISTS



## Duopolies Do It Differently

A Look at Sharing Resources

Page 32

PLUS:

### The Art of the Hard News Feature

Page 24

Nancy Bauer Gonzales  
of KCBS-TV/KCAL-TV  
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# Communicator

THE MAGAZINE FOR ELECTRONIC JOURNALISTS



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**ON THE COVER**

Nancy Bauer Gonzales runs KCBS-TV/KCAL-TV in Los Angeles, one of the biggest newsrooms in local television.

Photo by Brian Davis

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BY SCOTT LIBIN  
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# Newsbreak

## INDUSTRY NEWS

### Positive Feedback

#### WYOU-TV debuts first local interactive television newscast.

One Pennsylvania station is changing the way it formats the evening news.

In early September, WYOU-TV in the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton market debuted the country's first interactive local newscast of a major network affiliate. The station's 5 p.m., 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. broadcasts differ from the traditional format because they focus on a single topic that changes every day, sometimes every newscast.

Topics are chosen at the morning meetings and are based on what the news management team thinks will resonate with the viewers. Some of the topic areas have included illegal immigration, gambling in Pennsylvania (under consideration by lawmakers), bans on public smoking and local political races. Newsmakers are invited on

the show and interviewed, and then the show is open to questions submitted by viewers either by email or phone.

WYOU news director Ron Krisulevicz says the response from viewers on-air has been considerable. "We literally get thousands of phone calls a night," he says. In fact, a second producer is needed to handle the volume of calls, which are on a five-second delay.

"We've had more viewer feedback in the past two weeks than WYOU has had in the past 10 years," he says.

Co-anchor Eric Scheiner, who had previously worked for an interactive-type news program on an independent station in New Hampshire, says there's a great deal of buzz surrounding the program off air as well. "Everywhere I go, people stop me to talk about the show,"

he says. "The people who like it are really into it."

So what has been the hottest topic on WYOU so far? "Immigration really made the phones light up," says co-anchor Candice Grossklaus.

"And the anniversary show we did on 9/11 surprised me with the volume of calls," adds Scheiner. "We had a fireman on who was part of the bucket brigade at Ground Zero and the show was very poignant."

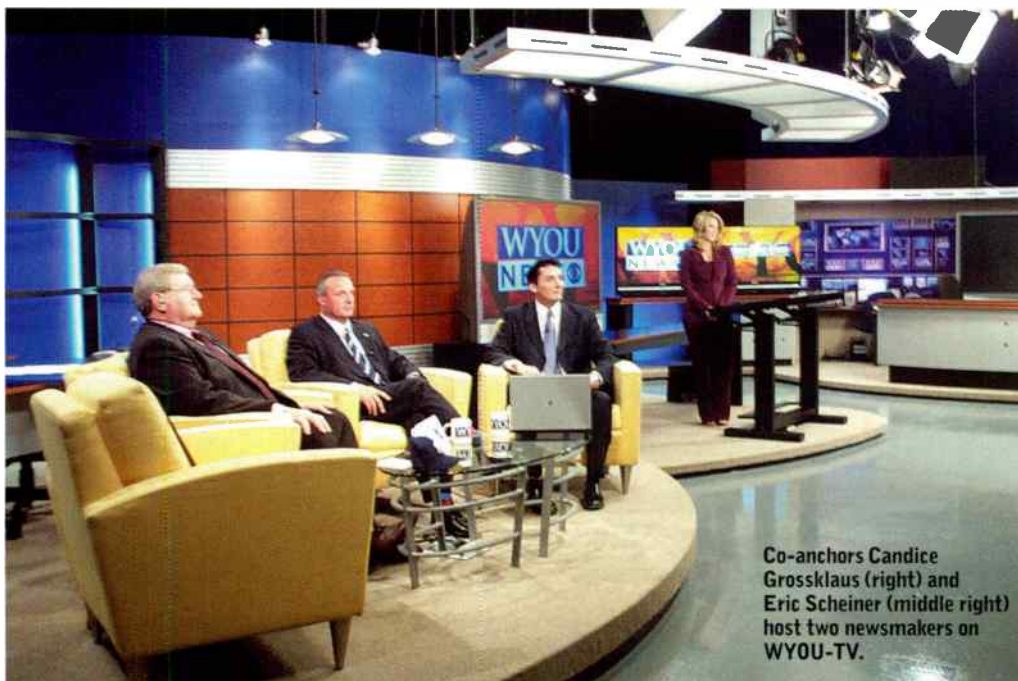
While the live interaction between the viewers and guests adds the spontaneity the news team wanted to the newscasts, it presented another challenge when it came to the news anchors.

"WYOU's interactive newscasts did present a challenge when it came to hiring the talent," Krisulevicz admits. "We had to find just the right people."

Scheiner heard about the new format in New Hampshire and decided to make the move. "When I read an article about WYOU launching its interactive newscasts in *Broadcasting and Cable* magazine I contacted WYOU right away."

And where did the idea for interactive newscasts come from?

"Our CEO, Perry Sook, came to us and said, 'You can be doing more. Think outside of the box; be creative, be bold,'" says news director Krisulevicz, who sees the change as a way to shake up the market.



Co-anchors Candice Grossklaus (right) and Eric Scheiner (middle right) host two newsmakers on WYOU-TV.

INDUSTRY NEWS

## RTNDF Survey Finds Local TV Is Top News Source

The Future of News Survey shows more Americans choose local television as their top source of news than any other traditional or new media.

If you named the top three sources from which you get your daily news, what would they be?

More than 65 percent of Americans surveyed said that they turn to local TV as the primary source of their news and information.

In RTNDF's The Future of News Survey released in October, about 28 percent of respondents named local newspapers, 28 percent named national network TV news, 14.7 percent named local radio news and 11.2 percent named the Internet as their preferred news sources.

Respondents said they have a strong interest in serious news; aside from information about the weather, national and international news stories are the most important types of coverage to viewers. Those surveyed also said that when given the choice of getting their news whenever they want via any medium, they prefer to get their news from television. In fact, more than three-quarters of those surveyed said they prefer to watch news on a television set, rather than a computer or handheld electronic device.

"The future of news is a matter of

*(continued)*

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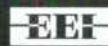
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vital concern to RTNDA and its members," says RTNDA and RTNDF president Barbara Cochran. "Through research such as the RTNDF study, electronic journalists can determine how technological change can influence the future of news. Armed with knowledge, electronic jour-

nalists can face the future without fear and enjoy the exciting times ahead."

The study was commissioned by RTNDF; conducted by Bob Papper, professor at Ball State University; and sponsored by the Ford Foundation.

Additional findings include:

- More than 90 percent of those surveyed said it is "very important" or "somewhat important" for news to be up to the minute. The public was most interested in urgent, breaking news, but some complained about the mislabeling of news that is neither urgent nor breaking.

- People want to watch news when it is convenient for them. Decisions about when to watch news appear to be based on having the time available, rather than watching something specific that they have heard about.

- Two-thirds of the public said they have never read a blog or don't know what blogs are.

- Fewer than 5 percent of those surveyed have ever watched news on a small screen device, such as a mobile phone or handheld electronic device.

- More than 60 percent of those surveyed would like to perform on TV the functions they now perform on a computer.

- The public desires more interactivity with television news. More than 40 percent of the public would like the ability to assemble their own newscasts. More than 60 percent would like to be able to push a button and get more information on screen about what they are watching.

- The public perceives that business and advertisers have influence on TV news—and those who are the most concerned about maintaining a clear separation between advertisers and news content fall into one of the following demographics: higher income groups, young people, those who are better educated, and males.

To read the complete survey, visit [www.rtna.org](http://www.rtna.org).

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## CORRECTIONS

In the President's Column (October 2006) the woman pictured second from the left is CNN's Candy Crowley. In Tough Calls (October 2006), Jason Heath is news director at WRTV not KRTV.



## ABOUT RTNDA

## RTNDA Sends FCC Comments on VNR Inquiry

Association asks FCC to halt its investigation.

The Radio-Television News Directors Association asked the Federal Communications Commission in October to halt its enforcement investigation into the use of video news releases (VNRs) on local television stations and to rescind the letters of inquiry sent to 77 stations in August.

In issuing the letters of inquiry, the FCC was responding to claims made in a report drafted by the Center for Media and Democracy last March that claimed those stations had used VNR material in newscasts without identifying the origin of the material.

In a supplementary memo to the commission, RTNDA argued that an examination of the evidence offered in the center's report finds that the collection of data was biased, conclusions were embellished and even erroneous, and the facts were inconsistent with the allegations. More than half of the center's assertions (56 out of 98) were unsupported by accompanying video and RTNDA was able to find more than 20 instances where stations actually did make the appropriate disclosures, used VNR material in stories that were critical of the companies or products that created them, or edited out the corporate overtones. RTNDA also found instances where it was obvious to viewers what interests were represented by the spokespeople used.

The comments filed in October called the FCC's action an unprecedented intrusion into newsroom operations, and cited four key issues:

- The letters of inquiry appear to have been prompted by a biased and inaccurate study regarding VNR use.
- The FCC has indicated that sponsorship identification rules do not apply in most cases where a licensee

has not received or been promised consideration for broadcast of certain material.

- Enforcement action has been initiated before the FCC has concluded a pending proceeding regarding VNR use.

- The investigation has had a chilling effect on the dissemination of newsworthy information to the public.

In urging the FCC to call off an inquiry based on a flawed report, RTNDA said: "Determining the content of a newscast, including when and how to identify sources, is at the

very heart of the responsibilities of electronic journalists, and these decisions must remain far removed from government involvement or supervision. The government would not dream of inserting itself into a print newsroom to dictate or otherwise oversee how newspaper editors utilize press releases."

For more information on VNR usage, including guidelines and FCC rules, as well as RTNDA's previous testimonies and comments, visit [www.rtnda.org](http://www.rtnda.org) and click on "Ethics" in the navigation bar and select "VNRs."

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## INDUSTRY NEWS

# On Your Side

Call For Action can help your viewers with their consumer issues.

Listen up, all you public service-minded broadcasters: There is a way to cement that on-again, off-again relationship with your viewers. Partnering with Call For Action, Inc. (CFA), an international, nonprofit network of consumer hotlines, can make you a local hero.

A descendent of the first radio hotline that began in New York City in 1963 to deal with housing problems, CFA has expanded to include all consumer issues. When aligned with a local radio or television station, CFA's all-volunteer staff assists viewers through mediation and education, helping to resolve problems they may have with businesses, government agencies and other organizations.

"We are like a family," says CFA president Shirley Rooker. "We provide fabulous outreach to the community, and information on what is going on in the community. Police departments all over the country are using our brochures on identity theft."

Each Call For Action team partners with a local broadcaster, who in turn provides the office space, supplies and on-air promotion of CFA's services. CFA then becomes associated with that station and that station only, making the relationship market-exclusive. Only three radio stations currently are participants; one

of them, Washington's WTOP radio, will celebrate its 30th anniversary with CFA this year.

### One Happy Customer

C.J. Beutien, news director at WQAD-TV in Moline, IL, was delighted to install a CFA office inside his station based on his positive experience with the organization at his previous job. CFA returned more than \$1 million to his viewers during his nine-year tenure at WTOL-TV in Toledo, OH. "Nobody in the newsroom has that kind of time to devote to viewers' problems," he says. Most disputes involved automobile purchases and repairs, computers, home repairs and construction, and more recently, Internet scams.

Now that WQAD has a CFA office, the station's viewers have somewhere to turn to as a last resort. For instance,

one consumer purchased a faulty air conditioner unit from a high-profile retailer. Despite an intense heat wave, and a manufacturer's warranty, the consumer was told it would be several weeks before she would get a new one. She called WQAD's help line, and they ran the story on the air. The woman received her new air conditioner the following day.

"The power of a TV station is enormous, and we get results quickly," says Beutien, who ran a follow-up story showing the happy resolution.

While the primary goal is to help as many viewers as possible, often the information CFA collects on trends and new frauds is rich fodder for news reports. CFA investigations are typically part of one on-air piece each week for WQAD.

### Keep in Touch with Community

CFA's national organization creates its problem-solving teams from scratch by screening and conducting interviews with potential volunteers in each city, and then by traveling to that city to train them. "We are very picky about who we have working for us, and we are there to oversee what they are doing," Rooker says. Volunteers have access to CFA's extensive library of training manuals and huge information database, and they contact the named company or agency directly to promote dispute resolution. They also work with state and federal agencies to track and combat scams.

CFA is headquartered in Bethesda, MD, and has radio and television partners that broadcast to more than 40 million people in the United States and Argentina. The group estimates an annual savings to consumers of more than \$30 million in lost goods, services and refunds.

It's not just individual consumers who benefit from CFA's services, Rooker says. About one in three frauds target small businesses.

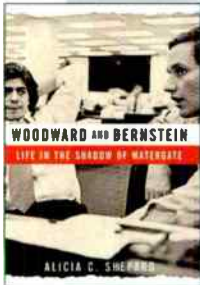
"We don't assume the consumer is always right," Rooker adds, "but we try to help everyone."

For more information about Call For Action, visit [www.callforaction.org](http://www.callforaction.org). —Andrea Rouda is a freelance writer in Washington.



BOOKSHELF

Pages for Fall



**Woodward and Bernstein: Life in the Shadow of Watergate**

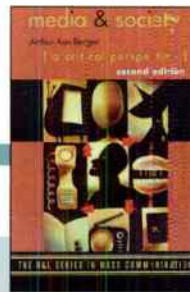
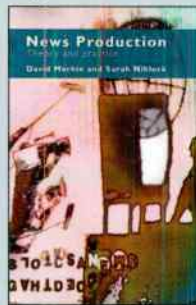
By Alicia Shepard, 304 pages, hardcover, ISBN 0471737615, Wiley, John &

Sons, Inc. \$24.95  
Shepard uncovers what happened to Woodward and Bernstein after Watergate, including the personal and professional ups and downs of each man.

**News Production: Theory and Practice**

By David Machin and Sarah Niblock, 224 pages, paperback, ISBN 0415371414, Taylor & Francis, Inc., \$30.95

Author Sarah Niblock compiles an up-to-date ethnography of news producers and their daily lives, detailing the tasks and responsibilities of the job. This book helps students gain a strong sense of the workplace and its demands before entering the newsroom.



**Media and Society: A Critical Perspective, 2nd Edition**

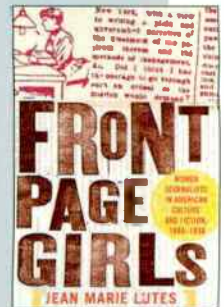
By Arthur Berger, 240 pages, hardcover, ISBN 0742553841, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., \$75

*Media and Society* features present-day examples and illustrations as well as expanded material on media theories and ideology, as author Arthur Berger helps the reader understand the relationship between consumers and both print and electronic media.

**Front-Page Girls: Women Journalists in American Culture and Fiction, 1880-1930**

By Jean Marie Lutes, 240 pages, hardcover, ISBN 0801442354, Cornell University Press, \$45

A detailed account of the role of women in the newsroom and the pioneers who made it possible, including a history of controversial writers Nellie Bly and Ida B. Wells. —Melanie Lo



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INDUSTRY NEWS

# AMBER Alert Training

For the first time since the AMBER abduction alert system was developed, broadcasters and law enforcement officials have the opportunity to participate in a training program that will prepare them to work together more efficiently to find missing children.

Through a \$200,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, faculty members at the University of South Carolina's College of Mass Communications and Information Studies have developed a one-day

training session that will continue through the beginning of April.

The training is designed to help participants work through specially designed scenarios, so that decisions can be reached more reliably for determining when or if an AMBER Alert should be issued in a particular area.

All of the sessions are held at USC's Newsplex multi-media newsroom in Columbia, and training and travel expenses are free for broadcasters, online editors, AMBER Alert coordinators

## Sign Up for an AMBER Alert Training Session

November 2, 30

January 22, 23, 25

March 5, 6, 20, 27, 28

December 4, 5

February 12, 14, 16

April 2, 3

Session sizes are small (approximately 12-14 participants) and are expected to fill up quickly. To register online, visit [www.amber-net.org](http://www.amber-net.org) and click on "AMBER Alert Scenario-Based Training at Newsplex," on the top of the page.

For RTNDA's coverage guidelines for AMBER Alert situations, visit [www.rtna.org](http://www.rtna.org) and click on "Ethics" on the navigation bar. Within that section, you will find guidelines for covering this and nearly two dozen other topics.

and law enforcement public information officers who wish to take the training.

The AMBER Alert system was created in 1997 and named for Amber Hagerman, an Arlington, TX, girl who

was abducted and murdered. It is a voluntary effort between law enforcement agencies and television and radio broadcasters to activate an urgent bulletin in child-abduction cases.

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# Names in the News

## Job Changes

**Taslin Alfonzo** to anchor/reporter, WDSU-TV, New Orleans.

**Robb Atkinson** to news director, WGME-TV, Portland, ME, from WATE-TV, Knoxville, TN.

**Brooke Baldwin** to freelance reporter/anchor, WTTG-TV, Washington.

**Shauna Bales** to anchor/news director from anchor, KCWY-TV, Casper, WY.

**Brandi Becker** promoted to anchor/producer, from reporter, KCAU-TV, Sioux City, IA.

**Deirdre Blake** to reporter, WFLS-FM, Fredericksburg, VA.

**David Bradley** to news director, KSWO-TV, Lawton, OK.

▲ **Sandy Breland** to news director, KTVK-TV, Phoenix, from WWL-TV, New Orleans.

**Carolyn Bruck** to reporter, KSEE-TV, Fresno, CA, from KNVN-TV, Chico, CA.

**Ainsley Bruister** to producer, WTVM-TV/WXTX-TV, Columbus, GA, from reporter/producer, WVUA-TV, Tuscaloosa, AL.

▲ **Nelly Carreno** to anchor, AccuWeather, State College, PA, from anchor/reporter, KXTX-TV, Dallas.

**Shirley Chan** to reporter, WFXT-TV, Boston, from anchor/reporter, WWLP-TV, Springfield, MA.

**Krisann Chasarik** to EP, KCNC-TV, Denver, from producer, KGO-TV, San Francisco.

**Claudia Coffey** to freelance reporter/anchor, WTTG-

TV, Washington.

**Ray Crawford** to freelance reporter, WCMH-TV, Columbus, OH.

**Mike Daniels** to reporter, KJCT-TV, Grand Junction, CO, from student, Arizona State University.

**Thomas Demane** to producer/photojournalist, KNAZ-TV, Flagstaff, AZ, from EP/reporter, KYMA-TV, Yuma, AZ.

**Josh Eure** to EP, WWOR-TV, New York, from WSB-TV, Atlanta.

**Tena Ezzeddine** to freelance reporter, WWOR-TV, New York, from KGTV, San Diego.

**Tim Fang** to online news producer, CBS5.com, from writer/associate producer, KPIX-TV, San Francisco.

**Liza Fernandez** to anchor, KMPH-TV, Fresno, CA, from WFTX-TV, Ft. Myers, FL.

▲ **Jamie Foster** to news director, WATE-TV, Knoxville, TN, from WJLA-TV, Washington.

**Bob Franklin** to GM, WPMI-TV, Mobile, AL, from WTWC-TV, Tallahassee, FL.

**Yetta Gibson** to anchor/reporter from reporter, KSAZ-TV, Phoenix.

**Carl Gottlieb** to EP, WCBS-TV, New York, from managing editor, Sinclair Broadcasting, Baltimore.

**Jennifer Hogan** to anchor/reporter, KOIN-TV, Portland, OR, from sports director, KLEW-TV, Lewiston, ID.

**Anny Hong** to anchor/reporter, KOVR-TV, Sacramento, CA, from KGPE-TV, Fresno, CA.

**Mike Hydeck** to anchor, WFSB-TV, Hartford, CT, from anchor/reporter, WBZ-TV, Boston.

**Liane Jackson** to reporter, WTVT-TV, Tampa, FL, from anchor, WAWS-TV/WTEV-TV, Jacksonville, FL.

**Teresa Jun** to anchor/reporter from reporter, KOLD-TV, Tucson, AZ.

**Tracy Kornet** to anchor, KTVT-TV/KTXA-TV, Dallas, from KNXV-TV, Phoenix.

**Gary LaPlante** to assistant news director, WTEN-TV, Albany, NY.

**Diane Lee** to anchor, WXXA-TV, Albany, NY, from WYOU-TV, Scranton, PA.

**Dave Leval** to anchor, WEYI-TV, Saginaw, MI, from anchor/producer, WAAY-TV, Huntsville, AL.

**Fabio LoNero** to associate producer, WTNH-TV, New Haven, CT, from student, Quinnipiac University.

**Melissa Mahan** to anchor/reporter, WLNE-TV, Providence, RI, from anchor, KJCT-TV, Grand Junction, CO.

**Kera Steavenson Mashek** to reporter/producer, KHQA-TV, Quincy IL, from student, Webster University.

**Joanna Masee** to reporter, WGCL-TV, Atlanta, from WRIC-TV, Richmond, VA.

**Barb Maushard** to news director, WESH-TV, Orlando, FL, from WISN-TV, Milwaukee.

**Jennifer McRae** to producer, KCNC-TV, from KMGH-TV, both in Denver.

**Patricia McRae** to VP/station



▲ **Sandy Breland**



▲ **Nelly Carreno**



▲ **Jamie Foster**



▲ **Christopher Glenn**

Send information for Names in the News to [names@rtnda.org](mailto:names@rtnda.org).

10:06 a.m.  
Legal department clears  
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## Names in the News

manager from news director, KHQ-TV, Spokane, WA.

**Randy Michaels** to EP, KLAS-TV, Las Vegas, from XETV, San Diego.

**Julie Moravchik** to news director, KQDS-TV, from reporter, WDIO-TV, both in Duluth, MN.

**Suh Neubauer** to news director, WICZ-TV, Vestal, NY.

**Phil O'Brien** to EP, WNBC-TV, from WCBS-TV, both in New York.

**Jim Platzer** to news director, WAND-TV, Decatur, IL, from WBOY-TV, Clarksburg, WV.

**Michelle Riell** to reporter, WMTV, Madison, WI, from reporter/anchor, KDRV-TV, Medford, OR.

**Aditi Roy** to anchor from reporter, WCAU-TV, Philadelphia.

**Doug Runyon** to news director, WTHI-TV, Terre Haute, IN.

**Joel Shanker** to EP, WSMV-TV, Nashville, TN, from producer, WTSP-TV, Tampa, FL.

**Carina Sonn** to reporter, KOTV, Tulsa, OK, from KAAL-TV, Rochester, MN.

**Derrall Stalvey** to assistant news director from EP, WATE-TV, Knoxville, TN.

**Mike Stevens** to anchor, WEYI-TV, Saginaw, MI, from News 12 Long Island, New York.

**Dutch Terry** to news director, WDEF-TV, Chattanooga, TN, from WCBI-TV,

Columbus, MS.

**Tracey Watkowski** to title, KFSN-TV, Fresno, CA, from assistant news director, KGO-TV, San Francisco.

**Steve Weakley** to EP, KING-TV, Seattle, from KNXV-TV, Phoenix.

**Chris Wright** to reporter, KOTV, Tulsa, OK, from KOAM-TV, Joplin, MO.

### Deaths

**James Caldwell**, former general manager/news director, WAVE-TV, Louisville, KY, died August 15 at age 87.

▲ **Christopher Glenn**, a CBS News correspondent for 35 years and 2006 recipient of RTNDA's John F. Hogan Distinguished Service

Award, died Oct. 17 at the age of 68.

**Dave Green**, EP of HDNET and former managing editor, KMGH-TV, Denver, died September 13 of a heart attack at age 60.

**Bob Morse**, former news director and general manager, WHAS-TV, Louisville, KY, died September 26 at age 69.

**Lynda Solomon**, producer, WZYX-TV, Detroit, died August 13 of cancer at age 57.

**Don Stubbs**, former news director, KVBC-TV, Las Vegas, died September 9 of cancer at age 67.

**Dan Young**, director of field operations, CNN, Atlanta, died August 13 of leukemia at age 47.



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John Gillette, Pro Audio Source, December 2005

**"A GEM"**

Lorenz Rychner, Recording Magazine, April 2006

**"A HOME RUN"**

Frank Bhacham, Radio World, February 15, 2006

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# Debating the Need For The 1st Amendment

Gap widens between its supporters and critics.

For most of us, it may be difficult to remember back to the exact moment in school when we learned about the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Perhaps it is a bit easier for many of us to remember those moments when we really understood the power of the First Amendment, when we realized the privilege and the responsibility of a career in journalism.

At our best, we come to work each day to give a voice to the voiceless, to hold the powerful accountable and to add new ideas to the public discourse. The ability to express thoughts, to hear alternative opinions and to make informed choices from those ideas is at the core of our democracy.

As journalists, it is hard to imagine that something so fundamental to our country's founders could ever be perceived as something that citizens might take for granted. And yet, if we look at our next generation of citizens—and future journalists—many apparently do.

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation funded a study in 2004 called "The Future of the First Amendment," and conducted a follow-up of that survey this year, releasing the results at the end of September.

"This most recent report says: U.S. high school students know more about the First Amendment than they did two years ago, but they are increasingly polarized in how they feel about it." The gap is widening between those who support this fundamental principle and those who don't.

According to the follow-up study, "Students show less tolerance than two



### Learn More

"The Future of the First Amendment" survey was conducted by David Yalof and Kenneth Dautrich of New England Survey Research Associates. It was funded by the Knight Foundation, which has given support to a number of RTNDA/F initiatives over the years, including RTNDF's High School Journalism Project. To learn more about the First Amendment survey, visit [www.firstamendmentfuture.org](http://www.firstamendmentfuture.org). To learn more about RTNDF's High School Journalism Project, visit [www.rtndf.org/resources/highschool.shtml](http://www.rtndf.org/resources/highschool.shtml).

years ago in their views of the First Amendment as a whole." In fact, 45 percent of students surveyed believe that the First Amendment goes too far in the rights that it guarantees. That's an increase over the 35 percent who believed that in 2004.

Other key findings of this follow-up study include:

- 69% say musicians should be allowed to sing songs with lyrics that may be offensive to others (down from 70%).

- 30% say the press has too much freedom (down from 32%).

- 54% say newspapers should be allowed to publish freely without government approval (up from 51%).

- 64% say high school student newspapers should be allowed to report controversial subjects without approval of authorities (up from 58%).

For most of us, these numbers may be a bit startling.

It makes you wonder just how we got to this point—that something so precious to the framers of our Constitution has become something so polarizing to our next generation.

So the question we must ask ourselves is, "What do we do about it?"

Quite simply, each of us must do something.

Certainly, a few of us do get the chance to meet with students every once in a while. Let's not squander those opportunities to talk about our press freedoms and to explain why our craft is so vital to our democracy.

For most of us, though, we demonstrate our commitment to the First Amendment in our work each day, as we sit in editorial meetings and decide which stories will affect people's lives. We need to be as attentive to covering issues that jeopardize our freedoms as we are about some breaking news events.

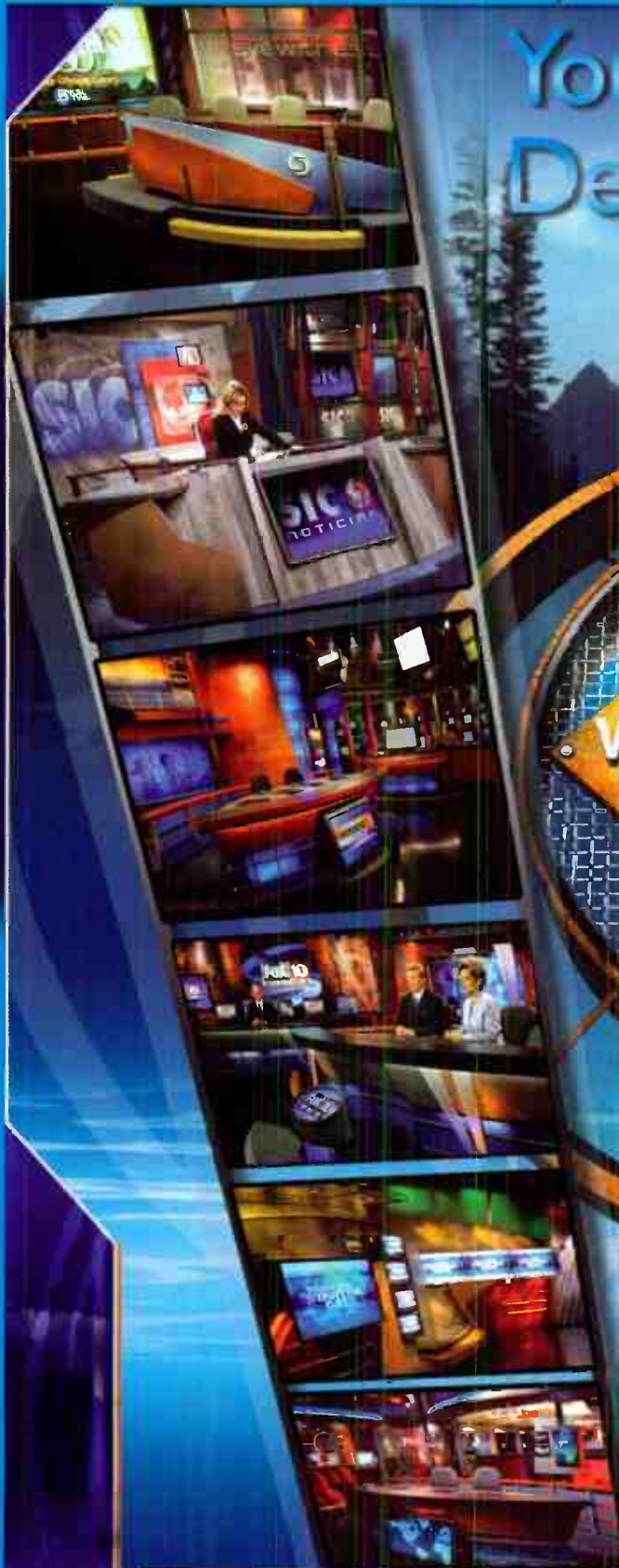
Think about it: There are stories in each of our communities about libraries that want to take certain books off of shelves because they're controversial,

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for November 06' book!**

or stories about schools debating what literature or prayers or music should be taught in classrooms. If we don't tell these stories with fairness and balance, who will? How will our viewers and listeners and users know about the threats that exist on their basic freedoms?

We can recommit to investigating and reporting stories that can stimulate change when citizens know all of the information to which they are entitled. These are stories about our government and public agencies, even though they often require time-intensive searches through public

records. There is no question that this task has become increasingly more difficult. But, at a time when many argue that the government is becoming less forthcoming with information, this task may never be more important.

And, maybe it's time to take a fresh look at how we tell our stories. Often we report stories and assume that our viewers, listeners and users are interested in the results far more than they are interested in the newsgathering process itself. In this time when so many question media credibility, maybe it's time to "take the veil off" of the journalism every once in a while. Maybe there are stories in which we can do a better job of demonstrating what is involved in protecting the public's right to know—and how much importance we place on this awesome task.


Most importantly, we can't stay silent when our own press freedoms are being threatened. We need to stay firm in our commitment to freedom of information, protection of sources and protection of notes and tapes that might be subject to subpoena. As the preeminent advocacy organization for electronic journalists, RTNDA will continue to be a leader at the local and national level, including the current fight for a federal shield law.

We should celebrate those who have the courage to continually exercise that voice. We must recognize and thank our peers who have fought—and continue to fight—for the right to add other opinions and other voices to our marketplace of ideas.

It is more than a privilege to be able to offer new ideas into our public discourse—it is our responsibility.

In their wisdom, our founding fathers gave us the gift of freedom of speech for just that reason.

We must do what we can to make sure our next generation of journalists and citizens understands this precious gift.—Angie Kucharski is vice president/station manager at WBZ-TV/WSBK-TV in Boston. She can be reached at [akucharski@cbs.com](mailto:akucharski@cbs.com).




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# Starting Out, Starting Over

Peers offer advice for new and incoming news directors.

Remember your first time?

Or maybe you're getting ready for your first time.

First time as news director, that is.

No matter how well prepared you are, that first job as a news director can be a bit intimidating. What do you do first? What are the biggest issues you will face? How will you relate to the staff, the general manager and the other department heads?

Whether it's your first news director job or your tenth, going into a new market and a new station calls for a clear strategy and effective methods for success.

For the staffs in newsrooms where someone new is in charge, there are questions as well. What is the new leader's mission and vision? What is he or she expecting of the staff? What is the leader's style? Most of all, what does this mean to me?

It's well known that news directors stay in the same job for only about two years on average. So most people in television and radio newsrooms will either be making changes themselves or seeing change at the top fairly frequently. Many first-time news directors seek advice from those who are more experienced or from others in their station group. But, up to now, that has been an informal process, a series of tips and tools passed along by word of mouth.

Now RTNDF is offering help to first-time news directors. The RTNDF Leadership Project, sponsored by McCormick Tribune Foundation, is cre-

ating a guide for new and incoming news directors, based on advice from peers. The guide will be released in January 2007 and will help not only those in their first news director job, but also those who are changing stations or markets.

Deborah Potter, executive director of Newslab and a popular RTNDF trainer, is writing the guide, which will be published as an easy-to-use booklet. The guide will be based on the results of an online survey of RTNDA members and a facilitated, one-day brainstorming session in Washington with 15 news directors from around the country.

I had a chance to observe the brainstorming session, which included managers ranging from brand-new news directors to veterans who are now vice presidents for news for an entire station group. The managers were from radio and television and included a news director from a Spanish-language station. In spite of the variations in medium, format and language, their comments complimented and reinforced each other. I learned a lot from them, they learned a lot from each other and all RTNDA members will learn a lot when the guide is published. Here is a

### Heads Up

*INCOMING!* Advice for New and Incoming News Directors will be available from RTNDF after the first of the year. Order online or by calling Erica Thode at 202.467.5252

sneak preview, based on the survey and the discussion.

**Do your homework.** Preparing for a first job or a new job as news director begins even before you have accepted the job, according to the brainstorm session participants. They said you need to do your homework. In evaluating the new job, they suggested asking yourself, is the general manager a winner? They advised applicants to conduct your own interview before you leave the room to make sure you know what you're getting into. One participant spoke of an interview in which the general manager, under a little gentle questioning, revealed some alarming hostility to the news department. The participant didn't take the job.

Another said you have to understand yourself and what motivates you. He said he thrives on going into a situation where the TV station is No. 3 among stations in a market, but acknowledged that's not for everybody. A radio news director said you need to be certain what your duties will be, because, in radio at least, news director responsibilities can vary widely from station to station.

Now you've taken the job. What do other news directors say are the biggest issues?

**Budget and personnel.** Most news directors get their jobs because they're excellent journalists. Training in budget and personnel practices, for the most part, takes place on the job. In the online survey, respondents mentioned the importance of understanding and working with the budget and the commercial realities of the station. One of the brainstorming participants suggested linking up with another news director in the station group to understand the budget process. Another said he was surprised that the news director's job turned out to be 30 percent journalism and 70 percent management. Another said first-time news directors are surprised at how little time they can end up spending

with the product unless they take steps to ensure they stay involved.

**Leading and motivating staff**, especially difficult employees, was another major challenge mentioned in the survey responses. The most important thing you can do is hire well, said one of the brainstorming participants. Several mentioned the importance of critiques, post-mortems and feedback to reinforce your vision. One talked about a news director who did a daily written critique that emphasized only the positive. As soon as members of his newsroom knew what was wanted and rewarded, they began delivering that more regularly. Others mentioned the importance of dealing with problems, including problem people, swiftly, rather than letting a bad situation fester.

**Getting to know the general manager, the staff and the community.** Both the survey respondents and the brainstorming participants recommended getting to know the general manager as a person, away from the office—asking how they like to communicate and inviting them to watch the news in the newsroom.

To get to know the staff, the news directors advised one-on-one meetings in which you get to know something about them personally and find out about their goals and what they like and don't like about their jobs and the newsroom. One who has made a number of moves as a news director said he always asks the producers and photographers what they need to do their jobs better and often asks the general manager for a "honeymoon" gift of new equipment for the photographers. Everyone agreed it is important to get out in the newsroom, to attend the daily editorial meetings and to watch or listen to the newscasts. Making the occasional late-night or early morning call to ask a question or make a comment on the newscast lets the staff know you're paying attention. A candy dish in the office helps, too.

As for getting to know the community, the survey respondents recommend joining a civic group, a faith community or something similar. Other ideas: ask a long-time employee to take you on a tour; hold community feedback meetings; read not just the local paper, but also the letters to the editor.

The news directors at the brainstorming session listed other stakeholders that need to be contacted and cultivated, including on-air personnel; other station department heads, such as sales and engineering ("especially engineering!" they said); agents; consultants; vendors; and unions.

**Communicating a vision.** One news director said that journalists have no training in marketing, but in communicating a new vision for the station, that's exactly what you have to do with staff as well as the community. He said

out of his seven starts as a news director, six times had been to change the culture. To do that, everyone agreed, you need to incorporate the vision in everything—meetings, writing, examples that fit. One person recommended finding the "evangelists" in the newsroom who are respected and who can be counted on to help further the vision.

**One last thought.** In the survey and the meeting, we also asked what the news directors wish they had known, what had surprised them or what other piece of advice they would offer. Overwhelmingly, news directors advised their peers to make sure they have a life outside the newsroom, and to have fun.

Now, that's advice that can apply to everyone, whether it's your first time or your tenth.—Barbara Cochran is president of RTNDA. She can be reached at [president@rtnda.org](mailto:president@rtnda.org).

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# The Art of the

**Intense, inciting, informative:  
Hard news can be more than just  
a standard story when done right.  
RTNDA honors these six Edward  
R. Murrow Award winners in  
the Hard News Feature category.**

**By Cameron McGaughy**

**A**t Yarmouk Hospital in Baghdad, the nurses told NBC News correspondent Richard Engel that the amount of blood and gore they witnessed was worse than it had been during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s.

Engel and his crew spent a week at Yarmouk filming the other frontline in the current Iraqi conflict, resulting in a hard news feature they later titled "Baghdad E.R."



Doctors tend to a young patient in the E.R. of Yarmouk Hospital in Baghdad.

Courtesy NBC News



# Hard News Feature

"Day after day, you hear '20 dead, 60 wounded,' and we wanted to see what happened to those 60 wounded on a typical day," says NBC Nightly News senior foreign producer ML Flynn. "Who are the people who are trying to save their lives? That's why we deliberately went to an E.R. ... We wanted to take the viewers inside and let them experience it for themselves."

Tensions ran high during the week Engel and his crew spent at the hospital, and not just for the patients. Police clashed with doctors over dead colleagues, and frustrated family members went so far as to spit on a producer out of misdirected anger.

"It took a lot of time, a lot of smoothing over of volatile situations where you have to talk to people and calm them down, where you have to stay out of the way," Engel says.

The images of people at their most vulnerable are incredibly intense, so the NBC crew thoughtfully deliberated about the choices they made in the editing room.

"We must have shot 20 tapes, but to condense it into something that is

intelligent, moving and representative is something we spent a lot of time on," Engel says.

Putting together a story like this is not always an easy task, particularly when dealing with the traumatic footage that comes from such hard news stories.

"We were editing [a] sequence with [an] old man in the end, trying to figure out how much to show," Flynn explains. "It was so raw, seeing somebody in an incredibly private moment... they were able to see that kind of thing and quietly capture it without getting in the way. That's why the story was strong, because we had a lot of these private, very intimate moments where it's almost like we're not there."

The resulting feature is a success, Flynn adds, because of the top-notch reporting and producing skills from everyone involved.

"Richard has this incredible talent for getting people to speak to him in a very straightforward way, where they see him as a real person," Flynn says. "He's very empathetic, and he listens to people well. That's one of his great strengths."

Flynn notes that Engel was not heavy-handed with his script, because he just wanted to let the doctors and nurses tell their story. In one soundbite, for instance, a nurse describes seeing one of his best friends come into the E.R., having been injured in the fighting, and knowing that he wasn't able to save him.

"I hope that gave the viewer a different side of the war," Flynn says. "That's what the goal is every day, to just put it out there... and let them decide for themselves."

While not every hard news story carries the degree of danger found in covering a war-torn region, the lessons learned from "Baghdad E.R." apply to any hard news story. Having lived in the Middle East for a decade, Engel speaks Arabic, is familiar with his environment and has established himself within the community.

"That created an intimacy that was really critical to this story, because the soundbites are very strong," Flynn says. "People are speaking with incredible frankness to Richard... not only because of his Arabic skills, but because they trusted him."

## Courtroom Drama

For his “Protected to Death” story at WTVQ-TV in Lexington, KY, reporter Tom Kenny got his lead from a court security guard.

“When you’re down there consistently, you get to know people...and one of the guys said, ‘How come you’re not covering this murder trial starting today?’ It started as innocently as that,” Kenny says.

The murder trial of a Lexington man—who had fired into a crowd outside a night club and killed a passerby—had flown under everybody’s radar, including Kenny’s. But the reporter went to check it out and was surprised by what he heard.

“What’s the first question anybody is asked when they take the stand at a court proceeding? ‘State your name.’ So here you get this routine question, and it ends up being this huge bombshell where this guy just floors the courtroom,” Kenny says.

Everyone in the room was surprised to learn, in fact, that the suspect had two names: his real name and his government-issued one. It turns out he is a former gang member from Boston who testified against fellow gang leaders on drug charges in exchange for a new life and identity through the Witness Protection Program.



**When WTVQ-TV reporter Tom Kenny entered the courtroom, he was expecting a typical murder trial, until the defendant said his name.**

Kenny was given exclusives from both sides, including the suspect, who spoke from prison after being convicted, as well as the victim’s devastated mother. Both sides, Kenny reported, blamed the federal government for the tragedy.

“With a story like this, you have to spend more time cultivating sources,” he says. “It often means a lot more phone work, a lot more face-to-face meetings, footwork, probably what some may even term ‘old-fashioned journalism.’ I met with the victim’s family three times, and it was almost like I was going to a job interview before they would agree to speak to me. They were very private, very protective; they were concerned about how I was going to portray their son.”

The family had Kenny submit his questions in writing before anyone would agree to speak, and he had to prove he had credibility and honest intentions to tell the story.

The hard work paid off. “Protected to Death” soared with its ability to relay emotion to the audience.

“It’s one of those stories that kind of leaves you feeling empty at the end,” says WTVQ news director Tai Takahashi. “Although our system has many strengths, it also has some incredible failures. The story had a number of sur-

prises, and one of those things that Tom does well is he infuses those surprises throughout his script, to where they pop out and they make you think, ‘Oh, wow!’”

More than anything, the frustration of the victim’s mother is what leaves viewers equally saddened.

“In itself, this is a story that—as a journalist—you should get out of the way of and hope you don’t screw it up. The thing almost tells itself,” Kenny says.

“You want to be able to bring that emotion out to be felt by the viewer. That doesn’t mean you have to build sympathy; that will do it on its own.”

## The Sound of Emotion

Sometimes the best reporting requires very few questions but a great deal of patience. Chris Sullivan, a reporter at KIRO-AM in Seattle, had been on assignment in New Orleans with colleagues from that city’s WWL-AM when residents of Jefferson Parish were



**Residents began returning to Jefferson Parish to see first-hand Katrina’s destruction.**

allowed back into their homes for the first time since the flooding from Hurricane Katrina. Sullivan’s friend from WWL was one of those residents.

“It was just kind of a spur of the moment deal...he was really nervous about his place, so we decided to cut away for a few hours,” Sullivan says. “I was sitting in the back of the truck as

## Hard News Feature

This category was awarded for the first time this year. All award winners were honored at the RTNDA Awards Dinner last month in New York.



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## Defining Hard News

What do hard news and pornography have in common? Their definitions. Ask a news director or reporter to define hard news, and the answer becomes harder than they expected. One thing is certain: You know it when you see it. Here's what some had to say:

**"Hard news is news that matters. I'm not a big believer that it has to be a house fire or a homicide to be hard news; it's about issues that are important to your community. Hard news is news that generally not everybody knows about. Hard news, where I come from, is strong enterprise."**—Keith Connors, KHOU-TV

**"For us there are two kinds of hard news. One is something that's blowing up or burning down or disintegrating in front of you, and you're just reacting to the situation...the second part is hard news that you sort of go out and find yourself, which could be investigative in nature. It may not be that the world is going to end if you don't do that story, but it helps you understand the world a little better if you know that it's going on."**—Heather Evans, CBC National Radio News

**"Stories that have an impact on the community, either the immediate community or larger community...one that requires a reporter to really go beyond the surface and take a look at all the issues involved. Sometimes it can be complex in nature."**—Ursula Reutin, KIRO-AM

**"We tend to define it as what fits the brand the best, and has kind of an investigative spin to it, which is by and large what we're trying to achieve with our in-depth reports."**—Tai Takahashi, WTVQ-TV

**"It's what's happening now, and what story—which may not be a breaking news story in the traditional sense—has the most impact on people. It's a story that resonates with a ton of people, but has a serious edge to it."**—Chris Sullivan, KIRO-AM

we're driving in, and I asked him, 'Can I just roll and record us driving to your place?'"

Sullivan sat back and captured the nerve-racking sounds of his friend's trek: an increasingly difficult drive blocked by cars, fallen buildings and debris, followed by the nervous sounds of steps up a dark stairwell, keys jangling and a door opening. All the while the New Orleans resident shared his nervous thoughts, virtually all on his own, with no prodding from Sullivan.

"The town by that point was pretty much deserted, so the sound of a key turning or a door opening or shutting made an awful lot of noise, and I thought that was important," Sullivan says. "I really wanted to hit the emotion, but not in an over-driven, cheesy way. I wanted it to be real and authentic. I didn't want to get in the way. That was the one thing I kept thinking: 'Don't interject yourself into this story, because it's not about you.'"



Reporter Chris Sullivan talks to a colleague from Louisiana who is trying to make sense of his hometown after the hurricane.

KIRO news director Ursula Reutin credits Sullivan with navigating the hard news waters perfectly in "Katrina: The Return Home," and thus gave him more time to tell the story than the usual 35-second wrap.

"Chris was able to put a human face on a story that we were covering," she says. "He was able to capture the emotions...he really kind of humanized the story instead of telling it, allowing

the person involved to tell the story."

The apartment was fine, and the clear relief from the story's subject gave hope to its listeners.

"One of the most poignant parts for me in the story is near the end when he says, 'Man, this place used to be so beautiful.' That just came out as we were just walking around...I wasn't even asking him a question," Sullivan says. "It's that kind of raw emotion that you have to wait for. You can't coax it out of people all the time. You have to be patient."

## Serious Is Not Always Dull

Hurricane Katrina inspired another Murrow-winning piece, led by news director Randy Bell at WMSI/WJQJ-FM in Jackson, MS. "Saved by the Bush" detailed the efforts of a police department in the small nearby town of Waveland. Unaware of the fury that Katrina would bring, the department had decided to ride out the storm in

the station.

As the hurricane roared over the Gulf Coast, the building became deluged with water and the officers had to break windows to escape drowning against the ceiling. Frantically the officers searched for safety, which they found in the form of a 16-foot-tall shrub.

"At one point there were as many as 20 of the officers basically clinging to the same bush. It was just an interesting, amazing story of survival," says Bell, noting the ironic twist: The shrub had been ordered cut down because it blocked traffic views, but the city had not gotten around to it yet.

To draw radio listeners into such a visual feature, Bell knew he had to get their attention immediately.

"With feature stories, you don't follow the usual rules of who, what, where and when," he says. "You want to hook the listener with a feature lead, try to draw them into the story, especially when



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Courtesy WMSI-WQJQ-FM

A number of Murrow Awards were given for coverage of Hurricane Katrina this year, including one for WMSI/WQJQ-FM in this hard news feature category.

you're doing a longer piece; you want them to be with you for the duration."

To keep his listeners interested, Bell wanted to take them to that moment.

"For a radio piece, you want to immerse the listener in the story as much as you can. With this particular story, I was trying to think, how can you show a bush on the radio? The only way I could think of was leaves, so we used the sound of rustling the branches of the bush, and the sound of leaves under foot."

Bell did a lot of preplanning for the story, and found that the officers were more than willing to share their personal experiences, which really made the piece.

"It's a little more difficult to do a feature treatment of a hard news story than a lighter news story, because you sort of get into the spirit of having fun, the way you write and produce it," he says. "With hard news stories, you have to realize it's a serious topic and use a little more restraint. But you can still use a great amount of creativity to move the story along, so it's not just some dry recounting of a serious story."

## Keep Stories Fresh

Handling such serious subject matter can be tricky, particularly if the story may be jarring to the audience. For instance, Thai students learning about HIV/AIDS by taking a field trip to a morgue to see the bodies of people who died from the disease might be startling to mainstream audiences. In "This Is

How They Teach AIDS Awareness in Thailand," news director Heather Evans and reporter Michael McAuliffe from CBC National Radio News in Toronto chronicled just such a trip, as well as the reactions of the students.

"It kind of brought a far-away situation home," Evans says. "The material is a little bit exotic or shocking or unfamiliar in one sense...it seems shocking to most people in Canada and the U.S., but [Michael] told the story and did the interviews in a very matter-of-fact way. It wasn't sensationalized or hugely dramatic; Michael just let the tape and the students in particular speak for themselves, and the students just sounded like students anywhere."

A big mistake to avoid with hard news features, Evans says, is to wait too long to use them.

"You shouldn't try and convince yourself it's a feature and put it on a shelf and wait," she says. "Sometimes some of these stories can seem less tied to a particular date or event, but I think that it does the story more justice—both in terms of the storytelling itself, and in terms of the impact on the audience, peoples' belief that this is valuable information—if you roll it out right away."

## Create Positive Change

If KHOU-TV in Houston had held back its report on "Firefighters: Cancer," who knows how long it would have taken the Texas legislature to pass a law giving firefighters line-of-duty death benefits for cancer. The measure passed just three weeks after the story aired.

Executive news director Keith Connors says a common mistake some news directors make is to give hard news features less time than they need when they could be the part of the broadcast that sets that news team apart from competitors.

"This competition is no longer a

couple of stations," he says. "Your competition is The Drudge Report, CNN and network news programs...it's all over the place, and you've got to be creating content every day that distinguishes your newsroom from your competitors."

In "Firefighters: Cancer," reporter Jeremy Desel spoke with firefighters battling the disease, and revealed some statistics about the more hidden dangers of firefighting.

"It was an important issue that had never been brought to light before. And it led to positive change," Connor says. "But more importantly, it gets to our core mission. We're a reporter-driven shop and an enterprise-driven station. A lot of people will do in-depth pieces during rating periods; we do them every night, all year long."

Connors notes that reporters have to dig deeper on these stories, and remember that even if the story can't be finished in the course of an eight-hour day, it's still worth doing.

"You hope that if you expose something that is wrong, that it will ultimately lead to people encouraging the people in power to correct the wrong," Connors says. "[Jeremy] was able to capture the emotion behind the story, and I believe in the formula that emotion creates empathy, and empathy creates understanding, and that's really what we're about: giving people a better understanding of the world they live in."—Cameron McGaughy is a freelance writer in Arlington, VA.



Courtesy KHOU-TV

Reporter Jeremy Desel reveals the hidden dangers that firefighters face. Shortly after the story aired, the state legislature passed a law giving additional death benefits for cancer.





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# Duopolies Do It Differently

Managing competing stations that share newsrooms and resources can be a handful.

By  
Scott  
Libin



Nancy Bauer  
Gonzales of  
KCBS/KCAL-TV  
in Los Angeles.



he way things are going, news director Derrick Hinds is going to need a bigger business card. He's running out of room for logos. Five separate station symbols stretch from one side of his card to the other, all under the umbrella of something called the Northland's NewsCenter. Hinds is in good company, as television journalists and news managers across the country find themselves working for more than one station at a time.

The word "duopoly" entered television vocabulary back in the 1990s. As a rule, the word applies in its strictest sense—outright ownership of two stations in the same market—only in relatively large markets. In most smaller markets, the relationships that allow one newsroom to distribute news on two or more over-the-air channels have a variety of names, such as shared-services agreements, local marketing agreements, news shares and outsourcing.

The distinction is important to station owners, their stockholders and their lobbyists, who hope to convince the Federal Communications Commission, Congress and the courts that regulations ought to be relaxed and outright duopolies allowed in smaller markets, too. The FCC is now examining that issue again for the first time in three years.

Whatever the actual ownership arrangement, the challenge to journalists and those who lead newsrooms is to reach more viewers with news than a single station could. And, of course, make more money for the stations and their owners in the process.

From Fargo to Fort Myers, Los Angeles to Boston, broadcasters have found no single formula that works in every application. They have found, however, some important issues in common and a number of concerns that transcend station structure as well as market size.

### Survival of the Economically Fittest

Hinds says the Northland's NewsCenter shared-services agreement came about when Malara Broadcasting, owner of CBS affiliate KDLH-TV in Duluth, MN, decided it could no longer afford

to produce a competitive newscast. It contracted for news services from Granite Broadcasting, owner of NBC affiliate KBJR-TV. In fact, Granite provides not just news, but sales, master control and other back-office support. The two stations operate out of one building, along with the market's CW and My Network TV outlets as well as NBC Weather Plus.

"Today, we offer more local news than before on each channel, including competing morning shows, staggered evening newscasts... and competing 10 p.m. newscasts," Hinds says. "With our combined resources, we now are able to offer programs we couldn't before, such as a weekly public affairs program and a weekly high school sports show."

But there are logistical challenges, Hinds acknowledges. "If we need video from another market, we have to make two phone calls and set up two feed windows, one for CBS and one for NBC. When big news happens in our market, we need to provide content for both networks, plus NNS (the Network News Service cooperative) and CNN."

Granite and Malara have a similar arrangement in Fort Wayne, IN, where executive vice president Jerry Giesler says, "For our journalists, the deadlines are much tighter, and they have to make sure there are two and sometimes three or four different versions of stories that they cover, so it is a little more like the heyday of radio news."

But he and Hinds insist adapting to the industry's changing economic climate does not mean compromising where it counts most.

"Certainly, broadcast journalists will have to develop new skill sets to keep up with the changes in our business, such as filing stories for more than one channel or writing a version of a story for the Internet," Hinds says. "But, in the end, the ever-changing business models and ownership structures do not change the values of quality journalism."

### Sibling Rivalry, Family Friction

The KCBS-TV/KCAL-TV newsroom in Los Angeles is one of the biggest anywhere in local TV. Compared with Granite's Midwest operation, the staff is many times the size and the stakes are far higher. But vice president and news director Nancy Bauer Gonzales grapples with some of the same issues that occupy smaller-market managers.

The two formerly competing newsrooms came together under the same roof in January 2003 with what sounded more like an L.A. freeway collision than a smooth merger, to hear Gonzales tell it.

"It was wacky," she says. "I honestly don't remember much of '02 or '03."

And almost nobody remembers the last time KCBS won the hyper-



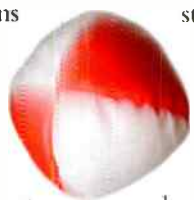
The business card of Northland's NewsCenter news director Derrick Hinds.

competitive late news race—until May of this year. It was a victory Gonzales says grew out of that network's success in prime time and more than three years of sometimes painful adjustment to the jarring new reality of life as a duopoly newsroom.

"We threw people together who didn't particularly want to work together, who didn't particularly like each other," Gonzales remembers. "We had the relatives that came over and never went home."

Gonzales says she understood the initial tension. "I don't know how I would have felt if... there's another guy whose head I've been trying to bash in for years, and now he's my brethren. We needed to allow some time," she says.

That friction is far from unique to shared newsrooms. And it doesn't always go away with time. The local marketing agreement between WZVN-TV



and WBBH-TV in Fort Myers, FL, is one of the industry's most established. Still, the competition between the two stations is the biggest challenge, says executive editor and news director Darrel Adams. "Employees in the newsroom seem to feel like the 'other' station is getting something better than the station they work for, whether it is a set, graphics, new reporter, new producer, music, live truck," he says. "The competition is daily."

In Sacramento, CA, assistant news director Lori Waldon helps lead a duopoly newsroom pairing a CBS affiliate and a CW affiliate. She sees some of the same dynamics Adams describes as a sort of sibling rivalry.

"I often tell my staff that we are two very different sisters living in the same house. There is no 'us' or 'them.' It's 'we,'" Waldon says. "As a manager for both stations, I don't play favorites between my two very different children."

At the CBS California duopolies, differentiation between stations is not a big issue; each had a distinct brand before coming together with its former competitor.

In Sacramento, for instance, "Our CBS station (KOVV) is a traditional news operation," says Waldon. "Our CW station (KMAX) does a five-hour morning show that's high energy, highly creative and very 'outside the box.'"

### All the News That's Fit to Watch

How can any news director watch that much news in a single day? Gonzales says she can't, at least not every day, but she hates to miss late news, when the stakes are highest. So, she admits, in order to monitor the product, she has harnessed technology and sometimes resorted to almost spy-like behavior. Her secret is a device called a Slingbox (<http://www.slingmedia.com/us/>), which connects her cell phone to her TiVo at home, enabling her to watch the news on her stations while attending evening events.

"I can be anywhere," Gonzales says. "I don't even have to be in town."



In Los Angeles, independent KCAL had a long history in the market as a full-service news station. So did O&O KCBS, but it needed to be reinvigorated as a serious contender in coverage of news—at least according to Gonzales, who spent 12 years at arch-rival KNBC and seven months at KCAL before the station sale combined the news departments.

Because of the L.A. market size, trimming staff to cut costs was not a post-merger mission. In fact, Gonzales says, the news department today is larger than the total of the two stations' newsrooms before they joined forces.

"It's just enormous," Gonzales says, paraphrasing her former boss Dennis Swanson, who left CBS for Fox. "One plus one doesn't equal two, it equals two and a half or three."

### Different Is Good

Station differentiation is a big issue in some small markets. Charley Johnson, who runs the newsrooms for KVLV-TV and KXJB-TV in Fargo, ND, calls it his biggest challenge.

"We're trying to fashion the CBS side (KXJB) with more national and international news, especially at 10," he says. "We've also employed the anchor team there in more reporting. Instead of co-anchoring, one anchor does the 5:30 news; the other does the 10."

Adams in Fort Myers has similar concerns.

"We consciously try to provide different information and different story angles on each station to appeal to different tastes of viewers," he says. "Our focus, strategy and brand are different for both stations. We even make some geographic differentiation of who we are, targeting with the two stations."

Granite's Giesler in Fort Wayne says making news available at the viewers' convenience is enough differentiation for his stations.

"We have had some criticism that we repeat a good deal of information, say, between the 5 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. newscasts (on different stations), which is true," Giesler says. "I would argue,

however, that any newspaper that published twice within an hour would have very similar front pages."

Giesler says that as news breaks and stories develop, his news department is better positioned to keep viewers updated than he could with only one station.

### Allocating Assets

Across the country, newsrooms serving two or more stations share resources in varying ways.

At L.A.'s KCBS/KCAL duopoly, Gonzales has two assistant news directors. Officially, both work for both stations, and most days, that's the way it actually happens, she says. One comes in earlier to get the day started; the other stays later, through the evening newscasts.

But, she says, "In breaking news, each takes care of one station. They go to their respective stations."

Gonzales, a confessed control freak, sends both assistant news directors home and tells them to go to bed early. She herself handles oversight of primetime and late news on both stations—a three-and-a-half-hour block of newscasts beginning on KCAL with something called "the Trombo." The term, Gonzales says, is a melding of "trio" and "combo," representing the 8, 9 and 10 p.m. newscasts.

The mammoth machine that serves KCBS and KCAL cranks out more than 11 hours of news each weekday. Gonzales employs an executive producer for each of four day-parts: One comes in at 4 a.m. to manage the 5 to 7 a.m. newscast on KCBS. Another oversees the 11 a.m. news on KCBS plus the noon, 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. newscasts on KCAL. A third has responsibility for KCAL's 4 p.m. newscast, plus the 5 and 6 p.m. newscasts on KCBS. And a fourth watches over "the Trombo" on KCAL as well as the 11 p.m. broadcast on KCBS—alongside Gonzales, of course.

"I'm not exactly the easiest person to work for, but I am loyal as a dog," she says.

Duopolies and other news-sharing structures tend to segregate primary news anchors and integrate other resources, including reporters and assignment desk staff. In Gonzales' newsroom,



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only one pair of anchors appears on both stations. All others are exclusive either to KCBS or to KCAL.

“Our on-air employees appear on only one station or the other, not both,” says Adams in Fort Myers. “We have separate producers, separate anchors and separate reporters for each station.” Only the number-five sports guy crosses over, he says.

The situation is similar in Fargo at KVLV/KXJB. “We’re a little top-heavy with anchors because we have to have anchor teams for both stations,” Johnson says. His reporting staff serves both stations.

In Sacramento, the stations share content and coverage, says Waldon. “One assignment desk drives both of our morning shows, which broadcast at the same time. Breaking news that airs on one station also airs on the other.

“In fact,” he adds, “we do our own version of ‘generics,’ where one reporter does a live hit that airs on both stations simultaneously.”

### Plans Change, News Moves

In some markets, duopoly-type arrangements have not developed quite as owners and station managers initially envisioned. In Minneapolis, two companies tried putting news on stations where viewers were unaccustomed to finding it—and didn’t, at least in adequate numbers.

Hubbard Broadcasting’s KSTP-TV hired 30 new newsroom employees in the summer of 2000 for a massive news expansion to serve the market’s first duopoly, with the addition of KSTC-TV—a re-named, re-launched station that had previously carried a combination of paid religion and home-shopping programming. At its peak, KSTC carried three live, original hours of news each weekday, produced in the KSTP newsroom. Within three years, all of those newscasts were gone, as were most of the employees associated with them. (So was I, the news director who had hired them and overseen the duopoly-driven expansion—although



Leaders of duopoly-type arrangements: (top L to R): Darrel Adams, Lori Walden and Derrick Hinds; (bottom L to R): Charley Johnson, Carol Rueppel and Jerry Giesler.

my departure had nothing to do with the revision of plans for KSTC.)

More recently, the Minneapolis market’s other duopoly consolidated its newscasts, too, on KMSP-TV, home of a long-running and successful 9 p.m. newscast. In 2001, Fox bought that station and WFTC-TV, which had never carried local news. The stations moved in together, continued the 9 p.m. on KMSP and put a 10 p.m. newscast on WFTC, which had been a UPN affiliate at the time.

“It was difficult to grow an audience at 10 p.m. on WFTC,” says Carol Rueppel, vice president and general manager of the Fox duopoly, a former long-time news director herself. “The newscast followed UPN programming, which didn’t do well in Minneapolis, and an hour of *Raymond* syndication. It was the only half-hour of news on a station that didn’t have a long history of being a news station. It was difficult to promote news viewing to an audience that was watching the station’s popular syndicated comedies, like *The Simpsons*.”

This past summer, Rueppel moved the 10 p.m. newscast to KMSP, where it now follows that station’s successful 9 p.m. news. “We still serve viewers who choose to watch their news at either 9 p.m. or 10 p.m.,” she says. “We were able to move almost all of our WFTC staff to work on the new newscasts on KMSP.”

And across town, KSTP, while no longer producing news for its sister station, has brought back a 6:30 p.m. newscast, which once aired on KSTC, and added a newscast at 4 p.m.

### Lessons for Leaders

Veterans of duopolies and similar structures say news managers need to think in some new ways in order to succeed in such a non-traditional setting.

“Newsroom leadership must deal with parity issues,” says Rueppel. “Although everyone works out of the same newsroom, do the two teams feel they get equal attention and respect? When one newscast sees success, how do you celebrate that without making the other team feel left out?”

Granite’s Giesler says, “In essence, we were adopting a ‘one factory, two products’ (approach) to newsgathering in Northeastern Indiana.”

Keeping up is physically grueling, adds Gonzales. “For reporters, photographers, writers, life changed immensely. It’s really rough on the managers. You have to keep an eye on people. There are more HR issues, more of everything. We look out for each other.”

Waldon says it’s important to lay out the vision and expectations for both stations. “News managers have to decide what kind of leadership model they want. If one set of managers leads both stations, how will they ensure that staffs will share—and play fair?”

In the early days of duopolies and other station pairings, journalists and their leaders agonized over the prospect of “scooping themselves,” breaking stories on their new, second stations before their established newscasts aired, perhaps tipping off competitors to stories that would otherwise have been exclusive.

That’s one concern few news directors seem to lose sleep over these days.

“You break it when you get it,” says Hinds in Duluth.

“Now,” adds Gonzales, “we scoop both stations on the web.”—Scott Libin, a former news director, is on the leadership and management faculty at The Poynter Institute.



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"I was shocked that this could happen to a reporter of ours," says XETV news director Tauna Lange, who had been out of town for a few days and returned to find video of her reporter on every major network.

"I've had investigative reporters threatened so many times. It just happens," Lange says, "But this was just unbelievable."

Obviously Mattes' case is extreme, but as reporters we have the potential to face real danger out in the field on a regular basis. We cover fires, inclement weather and crime scenes, and we knock on the doors of countless strangers hoping to get the interview. At one time or another, we've all been in situations that have made us uneasy. But we ignore the nagging voice in our head that tells us something is not right,



**XETV reporter John Mattes was beaten by a couple he was investigating for fraud.**

and we get the story. It's what we do.

"People in our industry get rewarded for taking risks," says Fred D'Ambrosi, news director at KFMB-TV in San Diego. After 30 years in the news business, D'Ambrosi says he's seen it all but he still believes, as does Lange, that no story is worth the risk to the personal safety of their employees.

D'Ambrosi says he recently asked his staff what stories cause the most fear in them, and the response was, by far, 'crime scenes,' especially those that involve children. He believes that anytime reporters and photographers feel they are in danger or feel that a situation could escalate and become dangerous, it's time to communicate with the desk and with management.

"It's their call," stresses D'Ambrosi. "It's our responsibility, as managers, to listen to our photographers and reporters and respect that. I think they need to know that."

It's a lot easier said than done for most reporters. We have a hard time coming back to the newsroom empty-handed. The worry that others will think of us as lazy or unreliable has stopped many of us from voicing concerns when we feel unsafe.

But we owe it to ourselves to be as instinctive about our own safety as we are about the stories we report.

Years ago as a reporter in Kalamazoo, MI, I was outside a hospital updating the condition of a high school student who was burned after an explosion during a chemistry class. It was a seemingly straightforward story; I thought we'd go live at five, live at six and be done for the day.

But the family and friends of the girl did not want us there, and they made it very clear from the minute we arrived. We explained that all we wanted to do was update her condition, but that didn't make a difference to them. After harassing us through the entire first live shot, things didn't look like they were going to get better. The second live shot just made everything worse.


My photographer ended up in a fight defending himself and his camera, and I was pinned against the live truck unable to do anything until police showed up. I had been thinking about calling the desk before we went live, but I talked myself out of it.

"No one would ever lose their job for feeling insecure in a dangerous situation," Lange says.

Mattes is still recovering from his broken bones, bruises and cuts. He was back at work just days after the beating. Lange says her first concern is to make sure he's doing well both physically and mentally. As for his investigation she says, "We will continue to cover the story, but we will do it with more vigilance."

After all, that's what we do.—Desiree Carvajal is the morning anchor on XETV in San Diego.





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Dealing with the unexpected.

A few days after Arnold Schwarzenegger became governor of California in a special election, he held his first meeting with legislative leaders in Sacramento and invited a pool of reporters to cover part of it.

Bret Burkhart, anchor/reporter of KGO-AM in San Francisco, represented radio in the pool, and wanted to know what the Republican governor thought about working with Senate President Pro Tem John Burton. Seated right next to Schwarzenegger at the press meeting was Burton himself, who was known for being outspoken and for sometimes using “colorful language.”

As Burkhart questioned Schwarzenegger and lifted his mic for an answer, Burton interjected from across the table with a decidedly non-verbal response—he gave him the middle finger.

Despite all of the exit polls and analysis provided during campaigns and elections, covering politicians is anything but predictable.

anchors and reporters who have traveled the campaign trail long enough have similar tales of bad behavior overshadowing party platforms, says Liz Mathis, co-anchor of KCRG-TV in Cedar Rapids, IA. For instance, she remembers a time when a congressman showed up drunk for a live interview at a national political convention (and then lit up a cigarette on camera).

Burkhart, whose assignment covering Sacramento politics was later dubbed by colleagues as “the



An alert photographer caught this shot of John Burton’s “non-verbal” response.

bird watch,” says that hostile—or just plain poor—conduct from politicians should not ruffle the feathers of good interviewers.

“I’ve been cussed at before during interviews and I’ve learned to use it as a motivator,” he says. “It used to distract me, but now I realize that it’s easy to *feel* like I can outsmart someone who has to resort to that type of language. And attitude is half the battle.”

Unless such an impression relates directly to the story, Burkhart adds, he tries

to not let it affect his coverage.

There are times, however, when a hostile reaction gains momentum and becomes a story of its own, the way Burton’s pointed gesture did following the interview.

“Burton’s colorful language was great for Christmas party fodder, but when he flipped me off during a planned press event, it

became a part of my report,” Burkhart says. Because the incident spoke volumes about the relationship the new governor might have with the state legislature, other journalists picked up the story as well, including the *San Francisco Chronicle* and fellow KGO anchor Gene Burns, Burkhart says.

“Burton’s reaction to the question told a graphic story of what negotiations would be like after Schwarzenegger took office,” he says. “And you know what?... The birds kept flying.” In fact, a number of media reported that the welcome gift Burton gave to Schwarzenegger when he moved to Sacramento was a cigar lighter in the shape of a hand with an extended middle finger.

As for continued coverage of state politics after “the bird incident,” getting interviews with Burton seemed to become much easier for Burkhart.

“It was as if the ice was broken,” he says. “Or maybe he just needed someone to pick on.”—Stefani Blair

### All in Good Fun

The relationship between journalists and politicians doesn’t have to be contentious, but campaigns usually know who is covering their beat.

John Jagler, anchor/reporter for WTMJ-AM in Milwaukee, knows this all too well. Earlier in his career he worked in Madison, WI, and was part of a team that covered election night. Every election cycle his news director would hand him a list of candidates to track down for reactions at their campaign’s headquarters. And for two straight years, all of Jagler’s candidates were losers, including some upsets.

His reputation preceded him heading into a re-election campaign for U.S. Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI). “As I walked into his party, the senator joked that surely it was bad news, like I was a really bad sign for him,” Jagler says.

But that night Feingold’s win broke Jagler’s losing streak.

“For a while,” Jagler admits, “I wondered if I truly was the candidates’ kiss of death.”

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*Coleen Marren  
News Director  
WCVB-TV, Boston*

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World Radio History



## Back to Basics

Depend on solid writing to get the story done.

It's a situation all reporters have experienced—you come in from the field and have all the elements of a perfect story. Your fingers are poised on the keyboard, eyes quickly scanning notes, knowing you're only a few keystrokes away from writing that masterpiece, but how do you do that in 30 minutes?

**Get focused.** Four-time Murrow award winner and reporter Boyd Huppert of KARE-TV in Minneapolis says it's possible to write a great story on a tight deadline as long as you have a clear focus.

"A good story has to be more than a collection of facts. I look for subtle themes that can tie together the loose ends of the story," he says.

Huppert recalls a story he did about a 10-year-old boy who found a rare fossil near his house. "It is possible to fulfill the journalistic mission—the who, what, why, when and where—and still tell the tale of the kid who has become the neighborhood celebrity," Huppert says.

Reporters have to figure out what message they're trying to get across to the viewer before they can write a memorable story.

**Find a character.** Another way to write an unforgettable story is to find an unforgettable character.

As a producer at NBC's *Today*, Dorie Klissas has written packages for former co-anchor Katie Couric as well as for her counterpart Matt Lauer, and says her job is to find people who can best articulate the situation or idea. In preparing segments, Klissas says she tries to "let them tell the story," and when she finds that great character, she writes around the most powerful soundbites.



When writing about a woman who survived the World Trade Center attacks with burns covering 80 percent of her body, she decided to let the survivor tell the story, but "highlighted her comments with thoughtful commentary." By incorporating the woman's own words, Klissas was able to keep copy objective and let the interview subject add the emotion to the story.

**Write for the ear.** Steve Scott, who recently moved from WLS-AM in Chicago to WCBS-AM in New York, says his secret to writing a great story is making sure it's easy to understand. "Say it out loud and then write what you say, rather than write it first, then say what you wrote," Scott says.

Admitting the technique could garner a few raised eyebrows and puzzled looks from co-workers, Scott says it en-

courages reporters to write for the ear rather than the eye.

**Make it pop.** KARE's Huppert says a conversational style helps the viewer understand the story, but it isn't a substitute for good writing.

"The broadcast writers I admire not only have a great command of the language, but make use of an array of literary devices," he says. One of Huppert's favorite writing tools is the use of common truths.

In a story about a soldier who made it home from Afghanistan just as his wife was going into labor, Huppert used a simple truth for impact.

"At the end of the story, under video of the newborn baby cradled by her father [who was still in fatigues], we wrote, 'Girls love men in uniform.'" The use of common truths provides a way to help the audience relate to the characters without overcomplicating the story.

**Write the action.** Some take a more direct, less grammatically correct approach. It's not uncommon to hear reporters or anchors spout off something that resembles a sentence, but there's a crucial part missing—the verb.

Klissas says she's seen the trend grow over the past few years, but it's one she doesn't plan to follow.

"I try to use verbs in order to show more action in my piece," she says. "The right verb will actually add spark to a script."

In harried newsrooms, it's easy to get swept up in the daily grind where reporters churn out stories to simply feed the beast. By taking a step back and asking yourself how to make your story unforgettable, you're not only helping to secure yourself a contract renewal, but also making sure the audience will keep coming back because everyone loves to hear a perfect story.—Katie Nielsen is an anchor/reporter at KARK-TV in Little Rock, AR.



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## Producer Magic

Improve your newscast with a few simple words.

I am not a producer. I am an anchor/reporter, but I believe producers possess a magic potion, a wizard-like power to create a strong, positive newsroom culture.

Recently, I completed a story by wrapping a live intro and tag around a package that was edited in the field. I was out at a local high school and it was a hot day. The story was nothing special, but I thought I did a good job and had a unique angle. I was satisfied.

As soon as I tagged the story live and before I could put the microphone down, the producer said in my ear, "Great story, Ross; thanks for the effort. Make sure you tell the crew." I thanked her, smiled, put down the microphone and felt good.

You might think this kind of simple compliment is common. Unfortunately it is not. But it is magic!

Producing a newscast must be a tremendously tough and pressure-filled job, but most good producers know that part of that job is managing people. The small, simple compliment the producer gave me that day made me want to do anything for her and the rest of the news team.

So, from someone on the outside to those on the inside, make note of how powerful positive reinforcement can be as a management tool.

**Be aware.** As your day in front of

that computer develops, pay attention to crews or reporters who are doing a particularly difficult story or one that you know is taking a lot of energy or time. They will deserve your kind words and you can turn a frustrating day into a positive one.

**Be a manager.** In the field, reporters manage their crews. They compliment



them, organize them, buy them a soda—whatever it takes to build a team feeling. Producers need to do that too.

There are times when you think you had a great program and it aired flawlessly and no one said a word. Be the kind of manager who knows the power of the compliment.

Make it part of your morning preparations to decide which field team you will pay attention to that day and give them encouragement. Good managers motivate, and so do good producers.

**Be sincere.** Don't just pay lip service. Word will get around if you are just going through the motions. There is no reason to compliment a field team that let you down or came up short. But, if there is one thing that turned out well, like a particular shot or interview or interview question, point it out and tell the reporter or photographer they "hit a home run" with that one.

**Be resourceful.** If you are too busy during the newscast, send a note, e-mail or "top-line," it does not matter, but it will let the field teams know you appreciate their hard work and when you ask for more the next day, chances are you will get it. The same goes for the team at the assignment desk or graphics. Jot a kind word on a sticky note and let them find it on their computer.

If you are reading this and find yourself thinking this is just common sense, you are right! Thank you for being a great producer.

If you find yourself saying, "I don't have time to babysit the whiny reporters and photographers in the field," then you may be

on to something, and it's in your power to change that. I call it producer magic.

By the way, when I returned to the station I went over to the producer and thanked her for the compliment. I told her it meant a lot to me. She smiled. It works.—Ross Becker is a reporter/anchor at KNBC-TV in Los Angeles.

News that Comes to Life.

*"The camera's video quality is exceptional, which maintains the station's excellence in quality programming."*

— Jeff Nelson

News Director, ABC Affiliate WDAY-TV

# ProHD



JVC's GY-HD100U ProHD Camcorder

## When Time is Crucial, Direct-to-Edit is Vital.

The ABC affiliate, WDAY-TV in Fargo, North Dakota knows that news happens instantly. When the WDAY-TV news crews are out in the field, they need reliable cameras that record video directly to a hard drive when time is of the essence. That's why WDAY-TV standardized on JVC's GY-HD100U. The GY-HD100U provides the versatility that WDAY-TV needs for studio and ENG shooting and durability to operate in North Dakota's below zero temperatures. This flexible and affordable camera was easily and economically integrated into WDAY-TV's existing Final Cut Pro post production workflow.

WDAY-TV's ProHD cameras are equipped with the optional DR-HD100 HDD recorder, which provides cache memory so you don't miss a shot. It also allows the editors at WDAY-TV to edit immediately from the hard disk without time-consuming transfer to a non-linear editor. Efficient and economic, the JVC GY-HD100U ProHD camera system is the ideal choice for news organizations such as WDAY-TV migrating from SD to HD.

*"We chose the GY-HD100U because the camera can record in SD and HD. The affordability of the camera will allow us to upgrade the entire station to HD in the very near future. JVC's ProHD cameras are WDAY-TV's primary cameras for ENG and the hard disk recorder lets us transfer footage directly to our editing systems."*

— Jeff Nelson

News Director, ABC Affiliate WDAY-TV

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## Visionary Sets

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Most of the designers this year highlight the need to accommodate both high-definition viewers with a 16:9 aspect ratio and standard viewers with a 4:3 aspect ratio.

### HD Tips

FX Design Group notes special issues related to HD, but senior designer Glenn Anderson says FX can "pay special attention to those issues and create a set that accommodates all concerns." For example, HD cameras tend to flatten anchors into backgrounds, but carefully selected finishes and lighting can ensure depth. HD requires less contrast in rear scenes. FX promises eye-catching designs that avoid overpowering talent. FX has its own printing facility to

create Duratran images up to 60 inches wide. FX sets won gold and silver awards from the Broadcast Designers Association this year. FX Design Group: 407.877.9600 or [www.fxbuilt.com](http://www.fxbuilt.com)

### Integrated Tech

Another HD issue forces co-anchors to sit apart. Of course, sitting closer is more desirable, so Broadcast Design International says it has desk shapes and shot techniques to minimize the problem. BDI also receives requests to integrate technology. An example is the set for the new CBS Evening News with a high resolution convex LED screen with 3 mm pixels in front of Katie Couric's desk. Each LED panel is "beveled on the back edges so there wouldn't be any gaps between pixels as it makes the curve," explains Tim Saunders, president of BDI. The set also has an HD curved rear projection screen that is 13

feet wide. Broadcast Design International: 760.729.9229 or [www.broadcastdesign.com](http://www.broadcastdesign.com)

### LED Lights

Graham Blyth, owner and principal designer for Blyth Design, says price decreases for LED lighting and plasma displays are opening new affordable opportunities for design this year. The LED accent lights allow color changes, accents and header illumination. Blyth says more plasma and other displays enable more graphics and backgrounds that can change quickly while maintaining the station's brand through its set. Blyth Design: 212.472.7889 or [www.blythdesign.com](http://www.blythdesign.com)

### Mobile Components

Park Warne, president of Park Place Studio, likes set pieces on rollers to allow for flexible camera shot options rather than large, immovable configurations. "Our strategy has

been to design small mobile components," he says. With regard to HDTV, Warne sees the industry as being in a transition period that may last a few years, with stations wanting sets to work with both standard and high-definition broadcasts, which will mean "compromise in both directions." He also sees more use of flat panel displays and LEDs. "At the push of a button a set can go from red to blue to green to any other color," he adds. Park Place Studio: 412.276.4030 or [www.parkplace.tv](http://www.parkplace.tv)

### Mix and Modular

Modular Broadcast Design emphasizes what chief executive officer and creative director Marco Angulo calls "reversible sets." To underscore the point he says MBD client KXAS-TV in Dallas this year won two gold awards from the Broadcast Designers Association for each side of the same set. MBD designs seek to provide options and value with movable scenery, ability to change day and night scenes, and flexible sets that can be changed in a matter of







Left and inset: Modular Broadcast Design set for WPVI-TV, Philadelphia; sculpted skyline for the same set; Below, from left to right: 1. FX Group set for WESH-TV, Orlando; 2. Express Group set for KNXV-TV, Phoenix; 3. Blyth Design set for WNYW-TV, New York; 4. Virtualsets.com virtual set in Trinidad; 5. Set for WFMZ-TV, Allentown, PA, by Devlin Design Group



minutes for special purposes such as sports shows or interviews. MBD creates dazzling city skylines from foam, plastic or even glass. For example, MBD used a powerful stream of water mixed with silica to sculpt the Philadelphia skyline for WPVI-TV's set. Modular Broadcast Design: 310.356.6986 or [www.mbdtv.com](http://www.mbdtv.com)

### Market Identity

Likewise, The Express Group emphasizes design elements such as skylines that identify with a particular market. Often they are large rear-projected images from live cameras or recordings. George Andrus, senior design consultant, says clients are putting a priority on weather and environment presentation, so designs incorporate large DLP, LCD or plasma screens "to

tailor all the elements into an exciting visual hands-on presentation." With more robotic cameras, Andrus says sets have to do more of the production work with more changing backgrounds, "bringing the settings to the camera rather than moving the cameras to the setting." The Express Group: 619.280.9061 or [www.theexpressgroup.com](http://www.theexpressgroup.com)

### Plan for Change

Devlin Design Group also sees strong interest in large video displays including rear projection. "We try to engineer some of this stuff for easy retrofitting," says creative director Dan Devlin, who recommends projectors that take upgrade cards. The current cards often display a 4:3 aspect ratio or

wide screen but not HD. Later, as card costs decrease when the station is ready, it can upgrade to HD projection. Devlin installs wide screens but often masks them for 4:3, so the masks can be removed when the time comes to convert to HD. Devlin also deals in sets that are part virtual and part hard sets. Devlin Design Group: 970.453.9360 or [www.devlindesign.com](http://www.devlindesign.com)

### Virtual Sets

interfaces for virtual sets are becoming simpler, "so everyday operation may not be by an expert," says Tim

Hedegaard, president of Virtualsets.com. As for the sets themselves, he gets more requests for big flat panels and virtual video walls that look like banks of monitors. He says the quantity and level of commitment to virtual sets has increased

dramatically in the last two years. Most clients are interested in high-definition sets. Hedegaard says creativity is the most important factor in virtual sets. "Designs are not held back by technology any longer," he says. The company says it serves as an unbiased consultant familiar with all virtual set software and hardware on the market. Virtualsets.com: 323.512.1542 or [www.virtualsets.com](http://www.virtualsets.com)

Michael Murrie is a professor at Pepperdine University in Malibu, CA. You can reach him at [michael.murrie@pepperdine.edu](mailto:michael.murrie@pepperdine.edu).





# Tough Calls

## THE QUESTION:

As news started to spread on Oct. 2 about a shooting in an Amish school in Lancaster County, PA, some television and radio stations decided to run the news story immediately while others waited until regularly scheduled newscasts. When did your station air the story and why?



**SCOTT GILBERT**  
News Director  
WITF-FM  
Harrisburg, PA

Immediacy is one of the chief advantages that radio brings to the table. We have the ability—if not the responsibility—to provide audience members with information on high-impact stories very quickly. But they rightfully expect that getting it right will always come before getting it first. The shooting at an Amish schoolhouse was certainly no exception to this rule. As far as getting the initial news on the air, we scoured the news wires and worked the phones until we had a critical mass of basic facts about the shooting. Being a dual-format public radio station, we broke into classical music programming within minutes with the first of several special reports. Finding material for these reports wasn't always easy, especially with all of the unanswered questions that remained in the hours after the incident: How many people were shot? How many of them died? What was the shooter's motivation? We made sure we were up-front with listeners about the fact that we didn't have all of the answers, being careful to avoid empty attribution phrases such as, "We're hearing reports that..." and "There are unconfirmed reports that..." Rumors swirled around the crime scene, where I spent several hours that day, but none of them made it onto our air because rumors aren't news. By covering this incident and its aftermath with attention to both immediacy and accuracy, we have again earned the respect of our listeners, many of whom have expressed their appreciation.



**DAN O'DONNELL**  
News Director  
WGAL-TV  
Lancaster, PA

It's my experience that withholding information from viewers almost always creates fear and confusion. Taking that position, our standards for accuracy and tone are paramount. Decisions with serious consequence have to be made very quickly. Procedures for handling a major event need to be established and practiced long before a newsroom faces a catastrophic event. Our decision to interrupt programming for the Amish school shooting was based on information, not the programming itself. There are several schools near the area where the shootings took place. We needed to know which were not affected just as much as we needed to know which was. It took about ten minutes to find that information, after which we went on the air. To increase our accuracy, an information czar is assigned. Their job is to make sure information is vetted before it's broadcast. Another person is put in charge of presentation. That person orchestrates the resources available to feed the line producer and the web editor with approved content. Each of these people is overseen by the news director who steers the coverage, monitors incoming video, the on-air broadcast and the internet. Viewer feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. ...Honestly, it's difficult to hear compliments on the coverage. As I write this, just days after the tragedy, pride is hard to feel. I'm still too close to it to judge how we did. I know we had a plan. I know we prepared. Circumstance gave us a job. We did it.



**EVAN FORRESTER**  
Assistant News Director  
WPMT-TV  
York, PA

When I first thought about a live cut-in for the Amish school shootings, I asked myself, "Why should we cut-in?" "Who would the cut-in serve?" and "Who does the shooting story really affect right now?" The short answer was: a few Amish families and those who knew the shooter, not the thousands of people who watch our programming on a given day. While it's certainly a big news story, the immediacy didn't affect a lot of people. I weighed that against who was watching our station at the time—primarily mothers and their children. I did not want to appear on the air in the middle of an afternoon program and "surprise" young children with the horrific news that other young children were murdered in their school. The danger was over. There was no gunman roaming the streets that people needed to know about. Had this happened in a larger school, where a thousand students were being evacuated, and parents needed to know where to pick up their children—that's a much different situation. There were unconfirmed details and misinformation floating around for several hours after the incident. I decided it was more important to have our staff work toward a complete and accurate story for the scheduled newscasts, than provide live cut-ins where we risk missing important pictures and sound—and risk broadcasting incomplete or inaccurate information.

Send your Tough Calls ideas to [toughcalls@rtnda.org](mailto:toughcalls@rtnda.org).



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