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## THE NEXT NEWSROOM: A WHITE PAPER FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

**OVERVIEW:** Mainstream American journalists sense a shipwreck ahead.

Veteran news professionals feel sickened as they watch traditional readers, viewers and listeners disappear beneath a sea change in media use and expectations, change driven by the Internet and a new generation of citizen journalists. These veterans feel the cracks rippling through the keel of the business model that traditionally has kept newsrooms afloat. They ask themselves, “Is this the end of journalism as we know it?”

This much we know. The audiences and stock prices of legacy media companies continue to plummet. Challenges to the relevance of newspapers and television stations, often fueled by non-traditional journalists with passion but without portfolio, have induced a kind of journalistic paralysis in legacy news organizations. At the very moment when the world is poised to be more interconnected than ever before, at a point in history when citizens need to engage in more constructive conversations about issues of the day, at this critical juncture where journalism needs to be reinvented, many of today’s journalists are lost, dazed and confused. Their inner lives are frayed. Their psyches dented. Their sense of purpose lost.

This paradox could grow into a civic disaster. Our society needs accurate, timely, credible sources of information. Men and women in journalism must rediscover their commitments and passion. But how? What changes are needed to save journalism, restore the soul of journalists, make their work matter?

These questions were raised in October 2005 and again in April and June 2006 at a series of Journalism That Matters conferences hosted by the Fetzer Institute in Kalamazoo, Michigan, by University of Missouri in St. Louis, and the most recent Journalism That Matters session at the Media Giraffe Project at the University of Massachusetts in June. Leading academics and journalists from legacy print and broadcast companies as well as emerging New Media examined what it will take to cultivate healthy journalists for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and conceive new economic models to support them.

The conversations were exhilarating, breathtakingly fresh. A picture began to emerge of how the future of journalism might be transformed.

Now, the Journalism That Matters coalition wants to bring other editors from around the country together in Memphis to talk about what it will take to lead the changes needed to build a 21<sup>st</sup> century newsroom. The 21<sup>st</sup> century newsrooms likely will need to embrace a new news ecology and use new technologies if they are to prosper. In turn, the new ecology and technologies will help restore the health of journalists.

This new ecology of news, powered by new digital tools, will be grounded in a partnership with citizens to build an informed local community.

Here is what that blueprint of The Next Newsroom looks like:



## BLUEPRINT FOR THE NEXT NEWSROOM

**The Next Newsroom will be built to create a different kind of news gathering organization that rests on a foundation of four commitments:**

1. A commitment to create an informed, engaged public as the best hope for the future of democracy and civic life.
2. A commitment to nurture healthy professional and citizen journalists who work together to produce reliable local news to serve healthy communities.
3. A commitment to a local investment business model to sustain The Next Newsroom, without undue profit expectations, and with a goal of universal access to the news through digital delivery and other platforms.
4. A commitment to shape content through direct conversations and interactions with citizens, who retain oversight authority for the newsgathering operation.

**Commitment 1: Create an informed, engaged public as the best hope for the future of democracy and civic life.** This is the mission statement. The principle will be at work every day in The Next Newsroom as journalists focus their effort to inform the public, strengthen civic life and build citizen engagement in a community. Journalists and community members together will devise workable ways to get people to pay attention to what is happening in the community and to participate in the shaping of community life.

**Commitment 2: A commitment to nurture healthy professional and citizen journalists who work together produce reliable local news to serve healthy communities.** This commitment widens the definition of who is a journalist and recognizes the importance of emotionally and intellectually healthy journalists in The Next Newsroom. Cynics need not apply. Those working in The Next Newsroom will include forward-looking professionals with high-level traditional journalistic skills, and citizen editors and journalists who will work directly with the professionals to shape and create content. All journalists will have a stake in the community and embrace participatory, collaborative efforts to gather and distribute reliable news and information.

**Commitment 3: Create a local investment business model to sustain The Next Newsroom, without undue profit expectations, and with a goal of universal access to the news through digital delivery and other platforms.** This is a commitment to build a different business model to provide local ownership and support of the news gathering operation. The model will be some combination of community trust, public utility, and collaborations with non-profit agencies and civic groups, plus advertising. Local funding will aim to provide universal access to news digital platforms (local Wi-Fi, Web site, podcasting, home-based printers, etc.) along with traditional print and broadcast media.

**Commitment 4: Shape news content through direct conversations with citizens, who retain oversight authority for the newsgathering operation.** This is a commitment to seeing news as an ongoing community conversation. Control of content shifts from journalists to a mix of citizens and journalists who regularly meet, talk, share feedback. Management oversight of this news gathering enterprise rests with community directors, a community oversight board, or related community-based management structure.



## **FIVE WAYS THE NEXT NEWSROOM WILL BE DIFFERENT**

**Different people** – Starting from scratch, The Next Newsroom will build new news ecology around journalists who strive to be healthy, passionate and open to a very different model of defining, gathering, and distributing the news. These are converts to citizen journalism, who bring different skill sets to the job:

- They commit to caring for the community and strive to work without cynicism;
- They understand and embrace the Web and its interactive, multimedia potential;
- They strive to build communities of interest based on trust and shared purpose;
- They can teach others and are open to learning from others;
- They reflect the diversity of age, race, economic interests and politics in the communities where they live and work;

**Different economic expectations** – The economic model for The Next Newsroom is designed to operate in the black to support the journalism and to finance universal access to the news. Lower margin, community-based funding is the preferred model. More citizen-produced content will lower costs. Distribution platforms will be largely Web oriented with local search ads, some paid online content, perhaps modeled after OhMyNews, where readers/users voluntarily pay for stories/photos they find useful.

**Different definitions of news** – Definitions of news in The Next Newsroom will begin with conversations among citizens and journalists about what needs to be covered. Conversations can begin anywhere in the community. The Next Newsroom will host online conversations, use instant messaging, and mine community e-mail databases to gather feedback and convene community discussions. These conversations about the news will be fostered at listening posts owned or set up by The Next Newsroom in coffee shops, at kiosks, or using computer stations in libraries, schools, retirement centers, etc. The citizen effort might even have its own brand name: MyPersonalJournalist.

**Different approach to delivering content** – The Next Newsroom will strive to provide universal access to news for everyone in the community. This would include a plan for Wi-Fi Internet access for all in the community. News would be distributed to tablet PCs, cell phones, Blackberries, home computers, or via laser printers in the homes of those who want ink-on-paper to read with a cup of coffee. Eventually we would have no presses, no big rolls of newsprint. And, not everyone gets the same mix of news. Those of different ages, different economic status, or different political and social interests receive a tailored package of information that fits their life stage or preferences. No more news that assumes one-size-fits-all.

**Different relationship to community** – The local community owns, controls, oversees The Next Newsroom. Editors will work more like school district administrators, reporting to a community board even as they organize the news gathering. The news report routinely is critiqued by the community, through a simple feedback loop that is monitored online and published daily. Some journalists can be voted off the island, some can be added to the staff if there is missing element in coverage that the community needs.