
FOUR



Conclusion



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One of the problems with most of the information services available on the Internet is the developer's failure to recognize the importance of the appearance of the information.

When people come home from work, they aren't looking for an information adventure. They want information that is easy to access from a service they comfortable with. They would much rather watch TV... or read a magazine... or the paper... or even a good book.

We are more of a visual society than ever before. Yet information is often placed online with reckless abandon for aesthetics. For programmers and others who are used to the fixed-character sterility of the UNIX system, endless screens of text are just fine. But, for the majority of people who are bombarded by a multiplicity of media from dawn to dusk, the last thing they want to do is embark on a cyberquest for valuable, entertaining or interesting information through a cryptic, idiosyncratic interface.

Designers organize and structure information. Journalists gather filter and package information. Psychologists study how people consume, process and store information. The principles of each of these disciplines have been considered and applied to the design and development of the *University Daily Kansan Interactive*.

The convergence is most evident in the underlying structure of the information system. The flexible network consists of vertical and horizontal pathways similar to semantic network models. If these models truly represent the way humans store knowledge, then this structure should be appropriate and intuitive. Fluid as it is, the network still retains some integrity. The hierarchical nature that emphasizes three vertical steps to base information, allows designers to guide the user through the system. The sim-

Student newspapers on the internet



Wisconsin Weekly on Gopher.



The Oak Leaf (Santa Rosa Junior College) on Mosaic.



The Tech (MIT) on Mosaic.

ple structure chunks information in levels that reflect traditional newspaper structure: services, sections and stories. The interdisciplinary approach yields an interactive new medium emphasizing identity and consistency.

Media, entertainment, computer and telecommunications industries are vying for control of this fledgling industry, each with unique advantages and disadvantages.

This project began on the assumption that newspapers were uniquely well-suited to deliver an electronic information service based on experience and infrastructure.

Media success was determined to hinge on resolution of several important issues. The project investigated:

- **STRUCTURE:** What is the best information structure for an interactive newspaper?
- **INTERFACE:** What does the optimal interface include?

The project concludes with partial resolution of most of these questions. The model demonstrates possible solutions for information structure and interfaces issues. While subscriptions are not required for a student newspaper, advertising and classified are vital to most publications and are included in the model. Philosophically, the term “community” may take on a broader definition in this medium and news services have an opportunity to champion the communities of the 21st century. In short, the transition from present newspaper to electronic format looks to be relatively smooth, as long as newspapers work efficiently and use their resources wisely.

But none are resolved and, as expected, new questions have arisen. These new issues are present challenges for future researcher and warrant investigation:

- **FORUMS:** What will be the impact of interactive forums on communication? Will these become the virtual town halls of the future? How will tenets of free speech, libel and laws of communication be balanced with ethics?
- **GATEKEEPER:** What happens when online research

allows us to give the people *exactly* what they want most? Will market forces change the way we report when we know exactly how people are using our information?

• VISUAL IMPACT: What is the allure of images? Photographs — without motion, black & white and with long access times — are the most popular feature of the UDKi. Is the secret to success as simple as more, better video?

**More questions
for future research:**

TRANSITION: How should newspapers prepare to produce an electronic product?

PROFITS: How can newspapers make money in this medium? What happens to subscriptions and advertising?

COMPETITION: Should traditional and electronic products compete or support each other?

COMMUNITY: Will this be the end, or a new beginning for publishers of community or niche publications?

Resolution of these issues and others will require a background in journalism, psychology and design. As demographic research is revolutionized by online monitoring, methods developed by psychologists will be necessary to analyze audience behavior in interactive media. Particularly robust research will be possible because user activity can be monitored precisely. However, as the medium evolves, concern for user privacy may elicit various regulations. In fact, electronic newspapers will face many challenges as unprecedented fusion transforms the industry from a simple news service into an information / transaction / entertainment / monitoring medium. At risk are more than 200 years of First Amendment protection and a loyal readership that reveres the printed word over all other media. Newspapers must retain their rights, readership and identity through this “mediamorphosis” by designing and developing products based on research and not intuition.

Overall, the medium’s ultimate success depends on society’s acceptance, use and enjoyment of the service. The product must invoke comfort and seem familiar to the user; information must be easy to access and the interface must be intuitive. Inevitably, reaping new information must be natural and rewarding; it must be as familiar as orange juice and casual conversation about an article in the Sunday paper.

