
THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

MASTER'S PROGRAM IN SPECIAL STUDIES

PROJECT REPORT

MAY 5, 1994

WILLIAM P. SKEET

The Making of The University Daily Kansan Interactive (UDKi) Newspaper

Conception, Development, Execution and Management of an Electronic Medium

This document will:

- 1) Specify goals of the electronic newspaper model.
- 2) Describe the importance of developing an electronic newspaper.
- 3) Document the construction of the model.
- 4) Explain how it works and offer explicit instructions for duplication of the model.
- 5) Analyze the importance of a background in information design and suggest future areas of research.
- 6) Offer a list of books and periodicals relevant to the topic of information design and new media.
- 7) Include materials for marketing and distribution of the product as well as a working version of the model on disk.

Introduction

1. Definition of the Project

A CLIMATE FOR EVOLUTION

INTERACTIVE NEWSPAPERS: A BRIEF HISTORY

INFORMATION DESIGN AND ELECTRONIC NEWSPAPERS

2. Building the UDKi

PARTNERSHIPS AND PLANNING

BLUEPRINTS AND FOUNDATION

THE WALLS GO UP!

GOING ON-LINE: PLUMBING, ELECTRICAL, CABINETRY

DETAILS, DETAILS, DETAILS

TESTING AND ANALYSIS

3. Implementation

ARCHITECTURE OVERVIEW

KU HOME

SERVICES

UNIVERSITY DAILY KANSAN INTERACTIVE SERVICE

Sections

Stories

Satellites

Other features

ADVERTISING

MARKETING AND DISTRIBUTION

4. Conclusion

WHY INFORMATION DESIGN BACKGROUND IS IMPORTANT

IDEAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

5. Bibliography

REGULAR READING

CORNERSTONE PUBLICATIONS

RELEVANT RESOURCES

6. Appendix

Keywords:

- Information Design
- Electronic Media
- Information systems and services
- Information networks
- Interactive multimedia

Metaphors have become popular when describing the Internet and its myriad possibilities. At the risk of reckless misuse of a literary tool, I have succumbed to the temptation to describe my vision for the Kansan and, in fact, the University's information system using a blend of metaphors, analogies and symbols that are part of an entertaining, albeit cliché, electronic vocabulary.

- - -

If what they say about the Internet is true — that cyberspace, like the great frontier of the 1800s, is to be explored and conquered, that intellectual communities are springing up in certain domains like towns along railroads and that the rush of private and commercial entrepreneurs resembles the great rush to settle land after the Homestead Act — then the construction of an information structure in the midst of the small settlement called the University of Kansas is merely a fulfillment of my own Manifest Destiny.

Compared to some of the thriving communities on the shores of cyberspace (e.g. U. of Illinois and U. of California-Berkeley), the University of Kansas is merely a commune that happens to include some pioneers of the Internet. Only now is it beginning to feel some growing pains. During the spring (1994) semester, accounts were issued at a record rate, mirroring the growth of the Internet.

While growth seems inevitable, little has been done to provide a structure — an identity — to the community for commoners and wanderers. Like that of a city, growth needs to be anticipated and managed. Rapid, unguided development can lead to rapid decline usually because of reactive or impulsive development. However, if we don't move swiftly we will be left behind as Universities and commercial developers, who are better prepared, zip down the superhighway building superexits for their supercommunities.

That damned Superhighway

The first car you pass on the interstate is driven by an angry, crazy-eyed man who flips you the bird. A few minutes later, another car pulls alongside, and the driver shakes his fist at you. You stop in a small town to ask directions, and instead of a downhome "howdy partner," the locals charge out into the street and begin jeering at you and throwing beer bottles. When you finally arrive, shaken but intact, at your resort destination, the owner charges out on the porch with a shotgun.

Imagine this going on for a month and you'll understand what March was like for the intrepid citizens of the America Online service who ventured out onto the Internet (the global network-of-all-networks) for the first time. The net natives didn't exactly roll out the welcome wagon for their on-line brethren; they brought out the battlewagon.

The San Jose Mercury News
April 5, 1994
Page 1C

Bill Skeet

Born: 6/20/65

B.S. Journalism,
Univ. of Kansas,
1988

M.S. Special
Studies, Univ. of
Kansas, 1994

Designer,

Knight-Ridder
Information
Design Labora-
tory, starting
June, 1994

Technology

Coordinator,
University Daily
Kansan, 1991-
1994

Graphics Editor,

*Burlington (Vt.)
Free Press,*
1989-1991

Speaker: graphics at small newspapers at Society of Newspaper Design (SND), Intl. Fiej Publishers Assoc. (IFRA) and other associations.

Redesigned

*Burlington Free
Press, The Uni-
versity Daily
Kansan and The
Kansas City Busi-
ness Journal.*

All of the resources necessary for KU to become a great information community are present: great minds, sufficient interest and experience. But, without careful planning, intangibles can eventually determine whether a community grows into a city or declines into a ghost town. Historically, newspapers have played an important role building successful cities by facilitating a strong sense of community and by maintaining lines of communication among the policy makers and the residents. Of course, history will also show that newspapers have been an extremely lucrative business. So, while it seems philosophically important to build an on-line newspaper for cybercommunity stability, billion-dollar joint ventures indicate that on-line news services could be financially rewarding. Meanwhile, as four separate industries struggle to dominate this new medium, it is becoming clear that journalists and journalism students will need to be prepared for the changes. Journalism schools, already struggling to keep abreast of the rapidly changing professional world, are threatened with a media evolution that may render present curriculums obsolete.

These financial, philosophical and educational implications have led me to build a working model of an electronic newspaper for my master's project at the University of Kansas.

If an interactive paper cannot succeed at a university, it does not bode well for the industry. Success of this project, like any product, depends on the acceptance of society, and the university population provides distinct advantages for an interactive newspaper model. First of all, the audience is young and more apt to have experience with or even own computers than the general public. College students are more likely to be intelligent, affluent and motivated. They also have free access to the Internet via university computers or through phone connections from home. The software is free and computer assistance is

Reasons for building the UDKi

Arguments for constructing an experimental on-line newspaper can be made for philosophical, financial and education reasons.

Philosophical

Can provide direction, identity and stability to a growing virtual community.

Financial

Potential to earn a percentage of market share in a trillion-dollar industry.

Educational

Prepare schools and train future journalists so that first amendment rights governing traditional newspapers may be extended to their electronic equivalents.

readily available. Plus, the university newspaper is distributed free, more than 90 percent supported by commercial advertising and the rest by an allocation of student fees. All of these give a university newspaper an edge over commercial counterparts. In short, our audience is the audience of tomorrow. For this reason alone, the newspaper industry should have a vested interest in our experiment.

Only time will tell whether the KU Home page and the University Daily Kansan Interactive will become cornerstones of a business district or a ghost town. If a careful course is plotted, I believe the University of Kansas could become a mecca for infonauts along the information superhighway and the University Daily Kansan could support and define that community.

This document attempts to provide that thoughtful pathway for newspapers to follow into the electronic medium of the future. It describes the process used to create the working model of the University Daily Kansan Interactive (UDKi). If it is a successful model, it is assumed that others may be interested in our procedure for development. The documentation should aid others who embark on similar endeavors as well as provide a valuable record of any brilliant insights as well as flawed logic, shortsightedness and ignorant misjudgments that time so mortally reveals.

— *Bill Skeet*
April 25, 1994

For more information

Contact the author at:

in Boulder

Information Design Laboratory
1877 Broadway, Suite 503
Boulder, CO 80203

Permanent address

Bill Skeet
Rt. 3 Box 40
Lawrence, KS 66044

University

University Daily Kansan
111 Stauffer-Flint Hall
Lawrence, KS 66045

