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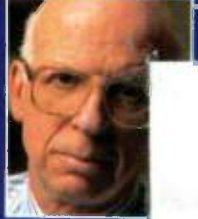
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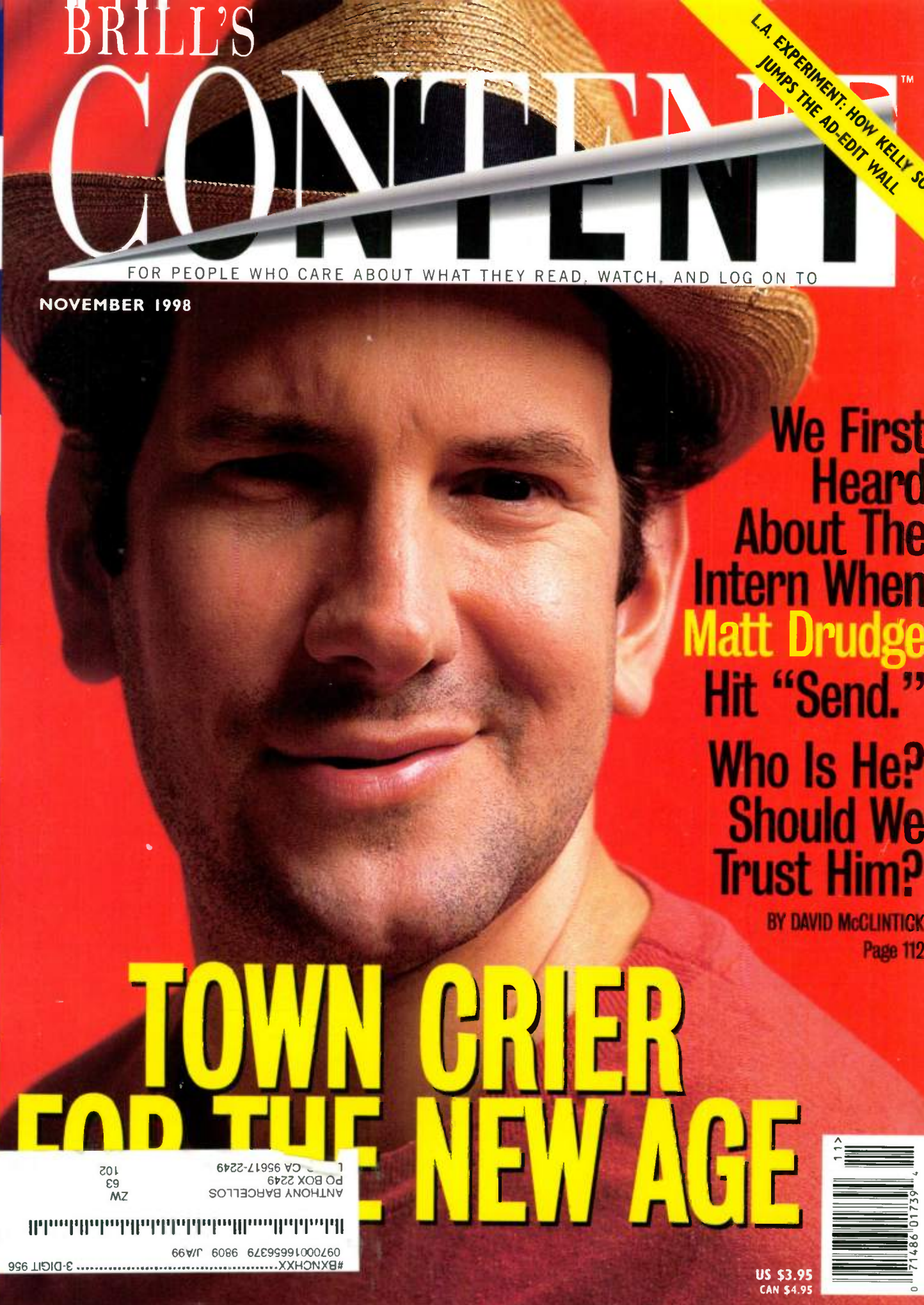
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L.A. EXPERIMENT: HOW KELLY SOLE  
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FOR PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT WHAT THEY READ, WATCH, AND LOG ON TO

NOVEMBER 1998



We First  
Heard  
About The  
Intern When  
**Matt Drudge**  
Hit "Send."  
Who Is He?  
Should We  
Trust Him?

BY DAVID McCLINTICK  
Page 112

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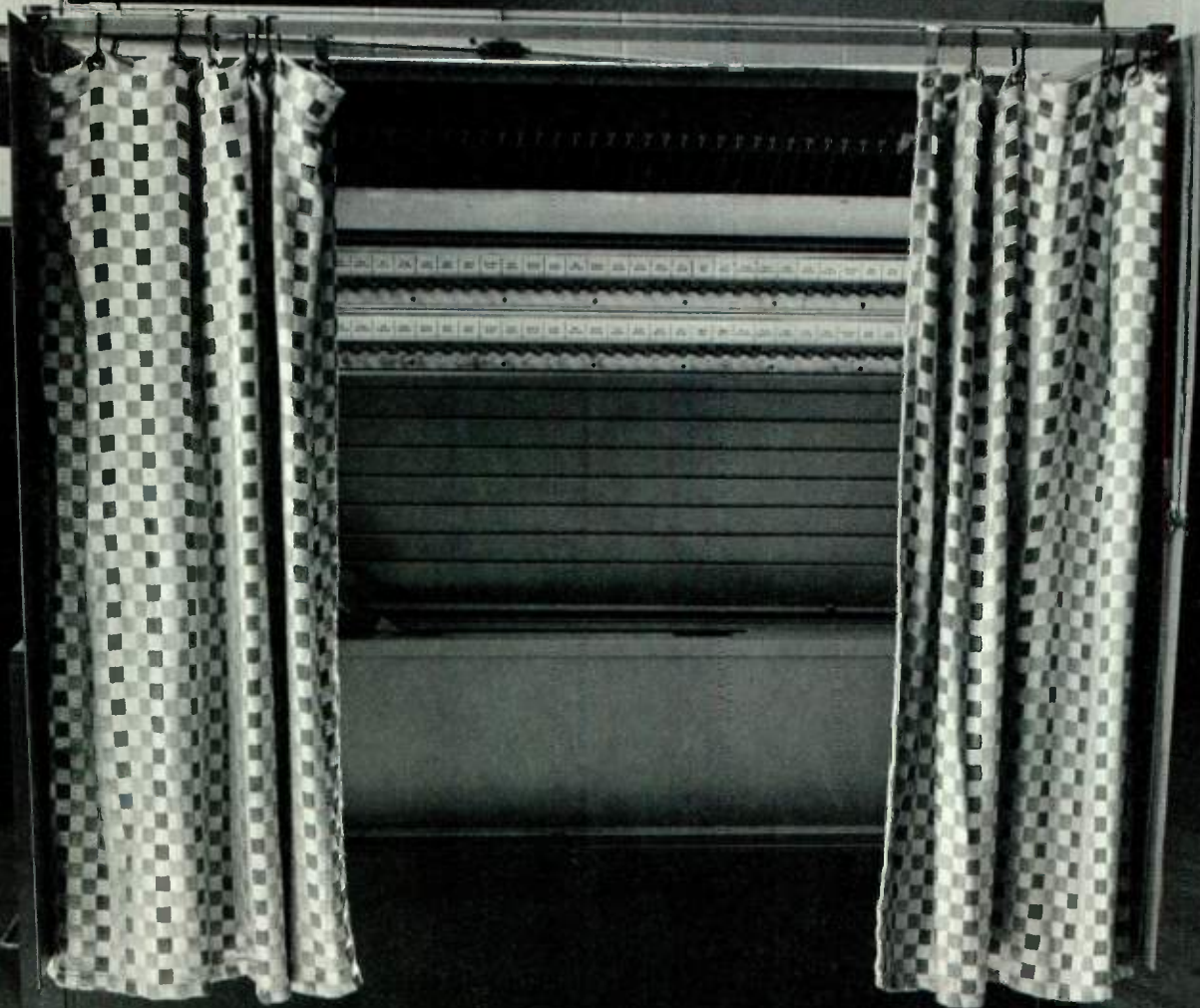
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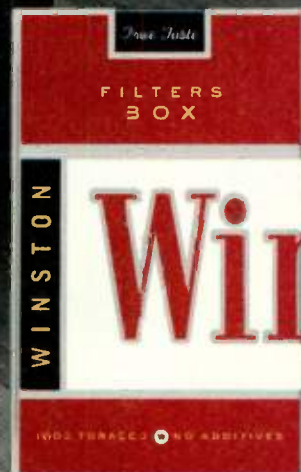
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**W**HEN HE FIRST RAN FOR PRESIDENT, BILL CLINTON TOLD audiences that a fast-paced world required them to “make change your friend.” Early in 1992—before the first of the scandal stories hit his campaign—Clinton elaborated. “Even in a society that supposedly worships new things,” he told me in Little Rock, “actually accepting something that roils what’s familiar and threatens the established order simply because it’s a different contestant for power, is an incredibly hard thing for most people to accept. They resist it, often at all costs. But eventually of course, most of what’s new wins.”

I recalled that conversation when we asked David McClintick to explore the work of Matt Drudge, the maestro of the Internet report that has given the president such fits. But it’s not just President Clinton who wishes Drudge didn’t exist. A fair number of journalists fear Drudge, too—if only because he’s the latest new star in an expanding universe of news outlets. For us, and for all consumers of information, the question is: Why should we care? Is Drudge’s work accurate and revealing enough to claim our precious time? Or is he a hyperventilating purveyor of rumor and gossip whom one can—and should—safely dismiss? McClintick addresses these questions at page 112.

While Drudge is a lightning rod for criticism, *The Washington Post’s* David Broder is journalism’s icon. When he moves, as he has in a series of articles slamming the president, it’s news. Learn about Broder’s estimable work and his views on the need for media restraint at page 128.

## WHAT WE STAND FOR

**1. ACCURACY:** *Brill’s Content* is about all that purports to be non-fiction. So it should be no surprise that our first principle is that anything that purports to be nonfiction should be true. Which means it should be accurate in fact and in context.

**2. LABELING AND SOURCING:** Similarly, if a publisher is not certain that something is accurate, the publisher should either not publish it, or should make that uncertainty plain by clearly stating the source of his information and its possible limits and pitfalls. To take another example of making the quality of information clear, we believe that if unnamed sources must be used, they should be labeled in a way that sheds light on the limits and biases of the information they offer.

**3. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:** We believe that the content of anything that sells itself as journalism should be free of any motive other than informing its consumers. In other words, it should not be motivated, for example, by the desire to curry favor with an advertiser or to advance a particular political interest—unless those motives are clearly disclosed.

**4. ACCOUNTABILITY:** We believe that journalists should hold themselves as accountable as any of the subjects they write about. They should be eager to receive complaints about their work, to investigate complaints diligently, and to correct mistakes of fact, context, and fairness prominently and clearly.

Some of those who led the way in reporting about Bill Clinton when he first ran for president—including David Maraniss of the *Post*, Jonathan Alter of *Newsweek*, and Ronald Brownstein of the *Los Angeles Times*—join Dee Dee Myers, the president’s first White House press secretary, to critique their Clinton coverage and to consider how they might report differently in the future. See page 133.

If Drudge is slammed for excessive hype and breathless discoveries that are sometimes derivative or simply wrong, the same phenomenon exists elsewhere. At page 102, Katherine Rosman explores the career of Bonnie Fuller, the magazine editor who has turned up the sexual heat at *Cosmopolitan* and is now bringing her brand of “creative” (meaning often invented) journalism to *Glamour*, long the most respected of the women’s books.

As Fuller bends traditional rules, so too, it may seem, does the new leadership of the *Los Angeles Times*. But at page 96, D.M. Osborne explains why breaching the wall between business and edit need not compromise journalistic integrity. In other words, as Osborne and Steven Brill (in “Rewind,” at page 33) report, it is possible to serve both readers and the bottom line without dumbing down or creating a world in which stories run only if advertisers acquiesce. Having been on both sides of the business/edit divide (at print publications and as the head of Court TV), Brill has the standing to argue his point, which I think you will find compelling.

Some publications, in part because of an ownership structure that minimizes the need to consider the financial concerns of outside shareholders, commit large resources to the pursuit of complex stories. The tale of two hero journalists at *The New York Times*, charged with investigating the possibility of germ warfare, can be found at page 65.

Peek into another nook of political journalism at page 50, where Warren Mitofsky, formerly CBS’s top pollmeister, describes how reporters barter in early exit-poll returns hours before the public can know an election’s outcome. And, at page 54, check out Jennifer Greenstein’s examination of those ubiquitous but not necessarily reliable projections about where web usage is headed.

That’s just some of this month’s offerings. I believe you’ll find the entire mix stimulating and fun to read.



MICHAEL KRAMER  
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

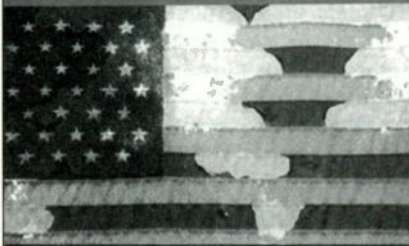
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THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE INFORMATION AGE

NOVEMBER 1998 • VOLUME ONE • NUMBER FOUR

## FEATURES

### COVER STORY

#### 112 Town Crier For The New Age

BY DAVID McCLINTICK

Some think he's a crafty conveyor of cybergossip, a mischief-maker on a grand scale. Others praise him for challenging the powers-that-be of the establishment media and championing the freedom of information dissemination. Either way, the one-man news bureau named Matt Drudge is on the beat—and he can't be ignored.

#### 92 Chasing Grief

BY ABIGAIL POGREBIN

In the aftermath of the crash of Swissair Flight 111 off the coast of Nova Scotia, the victims' families converged at the airport from which the plane had taken off. The press, desperate to capture the human side of the story, was there, too.

#### 96 The Devil Might Be An Angel

BY D.M. OSBORNE

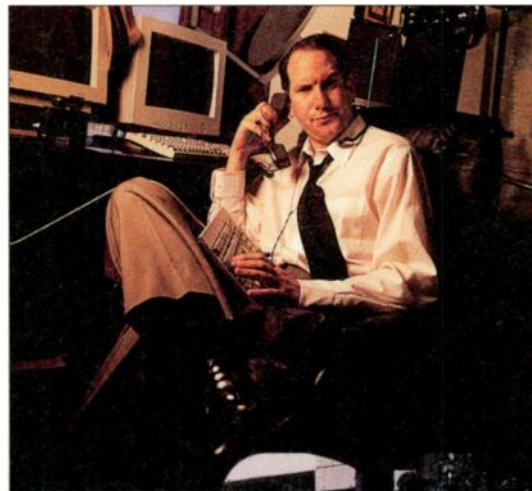
When *Los Angeles Times* publisher Mark Willes, a former cereal marketer, placed business executives alongside editorial managers to develop new features, critics bemoaned the sure-to-be-lost editorial independence. But as the experience of marketing whiz Kelly Ann Sole has shown, the Cassandra-like predictions have not materialized so far.

#### 102 The Secret Of Her Success

BY KATHERINE ROSMAN

With a savvy mix of sex, beauty, fashion, and celebrity coverage, Bonnie Fuller has climbed to the top of the women's magazine field. Now she takes the reins at *Glamour*, the most journalistically responsible of the lot. Truth may be the first casualty.

ON OUR COVER: Matt Drudge photographed for *Brill's Content* by E.J. Camp on September 15, 1998, in a studio near his Hollywood home. Inset: David Broder by Tom Wolff.



112  
Internet  
rabble-rouser  
Matt Drudge  
works from  
his cluttered  
apartment in  
Hollywood.



92

Searching for the human story after the crash of Swissair Flight 111, the media spend most of their time standing around, waiting.



96

Kelly Ann Sole (above), general manager for the business section at the *Los Angeles Times*, is on a crusade to find new ways for the paper to connect to its readers.



102

Bonnie Fuller (below), fresh from rejuvenating *Cosmopolitan*, is turning her attention to *Glamour*.



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## 128 David Broder: Still The Class Of The Field

BY MICHAEL KRAMER

Consider this *Washington Post* columnist the un-Drudge. The dean of political columnists, a recovering Clinton fan, muses about the role of character in politics, but cautions the media to resist pronouncing anyone unfit to be president.



Washington Post veteran David Broder is the journalist other journalists turn to for guidance.

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133 President Clinton on January 26, denying having had "sexual relations" with Monica Lewinsky.



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# COLUMNS AND DEPARTMENTS

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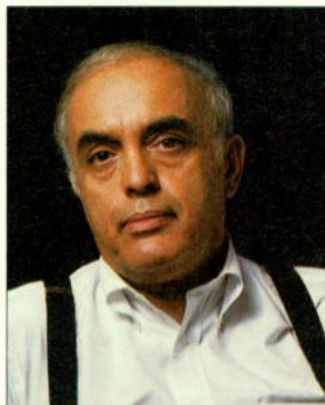
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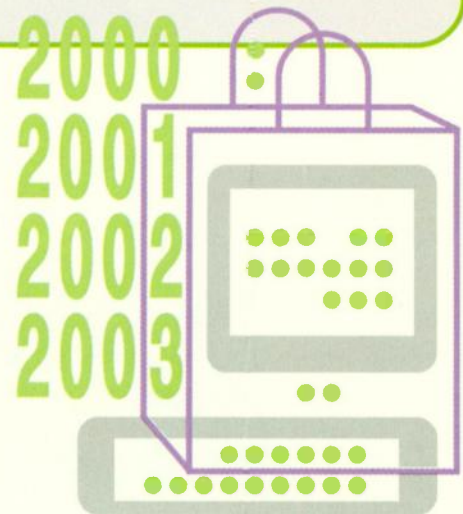
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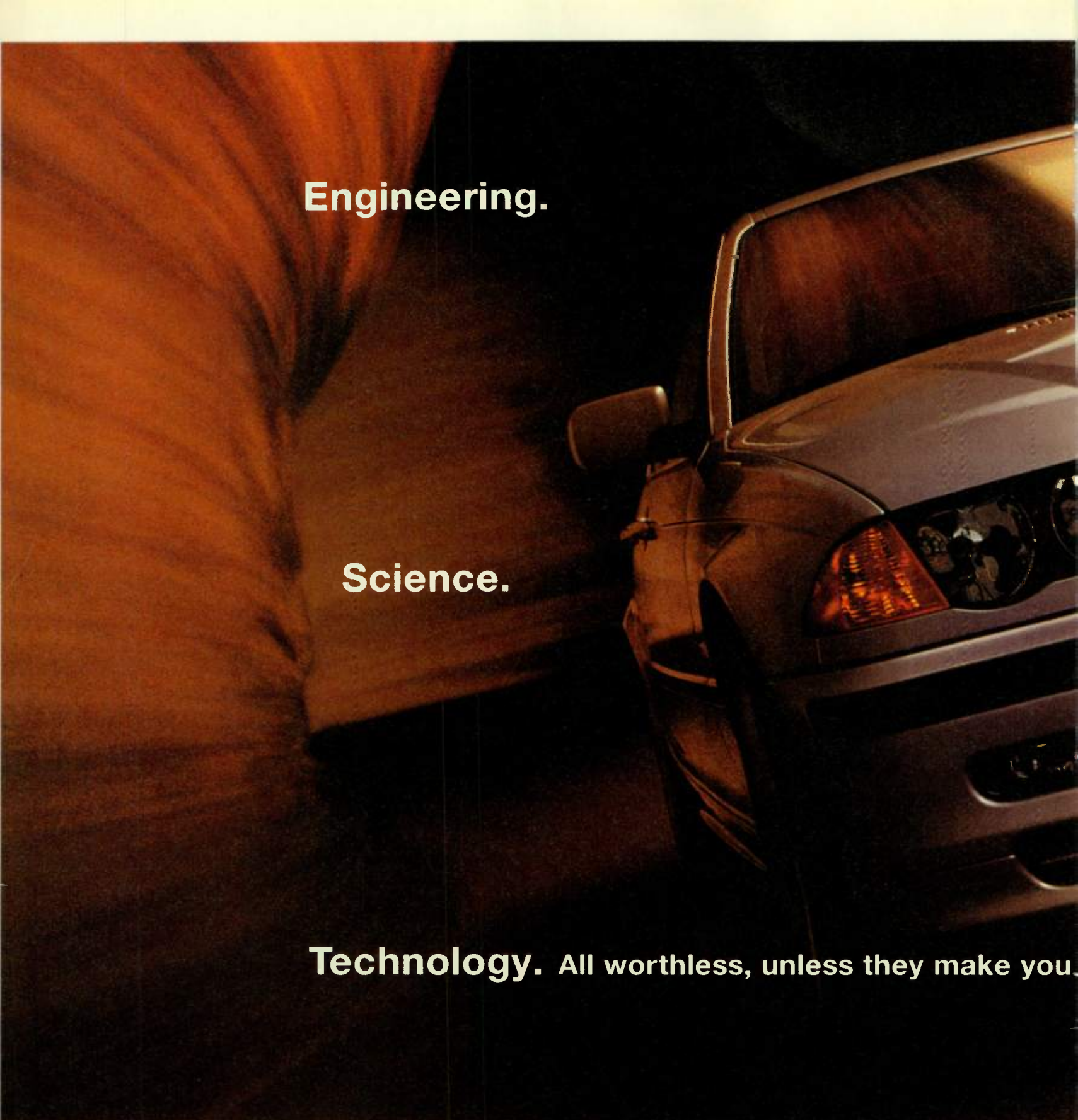
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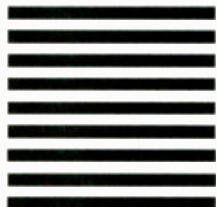


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## Opening Up The Gates

A good deal of the mail sparked by our September issue focused on senior writer Elizabeth Lesly Stevens's cover story on the Microsoft public relations machine. Much of the response was positive, but some wasn't. One letter writer to find fault with it: Microsoft's Mich Mathews, who oversees the company's image-making efforts. The bulk of her e-mail is printed below, but several paragraphs were cut for space. The entire message is available at our AOL site (keyword: brills) and at our website ([www.brillscontent.com](http://www.brillscontent.com)). At both sites, we have also posted a letter from David Lawsky, a Reuters reporter who chides us for ignoring some key reporters on the Microsoft beat in our "Credentials" department. But it wasn't just what we wrote in the September issue that prompted strong reactions. Filling 14 pages with correspondence proved especially popular. The editor of a small Kentucky weekly, for example, described as "refreshing" our commitment of so much space to "the grievances of your readers and your subjects."



### EMBARRASSED SUBSCRIBER

Let me first state that I am a proponent of the intent and overall message of your magazine. I have no problem with your decision to illustrate the public relations machine behind Bill Gates and Microsoft ["Making Bill"]. However, I am completely disgusted with your decision to publish a 21-year-old mug shot of Bill Gates on your September cover. It was a shameless and self-serving attempt to generate publicity and newsstand sales. Even worse, the content of your article in no way linked or justified the publication of this 1977 mug shot.

I am today embarrassed to be an original subscriber to your magazine. I hope you do better work in the future.

JIM FIELDS  
(via e-mail)

### THEN AGAIN...

I've been a subscriber since issue one. The first issue was a real page-turner, to be sure. But to see Bill Gates on the cover of issue two, backed by an insightful and hard-hitting article about Bill Gates and the Microsoft media-manipulation machine, made my week. Hats off to Elizabeth Lesly Stevens for digging in where others fear to tread. It was assumed that the *LA Times* discovery of internal memos regarding the "astroturf" campaign was only the tip of the iceberg. Thanks for letting us see the rest of the story.

GREG WILSON  
Webmaster  
Microsloth, <http://microsloth.org>  
(via e-mail)

### A SOLID INVESTMENT

Exceptional! *Brill's Content* is one of the smartest business investments I made this year. As a public relations practitioner in one of Philadelphia's largest PR firms, I find your magazine not only a gust of needed fresh air but also a valuable public relations tool.

I thought Elizabeth Lesly Stevens's piece, "Making Bill," was a fascinating case study of strategic PR. In fact, the same day I received my issue in the mail, I read "Over The Keyboard Medicine" [ClickThrough] and was amazed—and grateful—to find information that excellently applied to a new business proposal we were working at that very moment. After that, it was simply a bonus to read about other news media in the Philadelphia market ("Diagnosis: Libel" and "Did A Radio Host Go Too Far?").

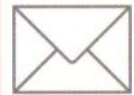
As a well-satisfied customer, I have dutifully talked up your publication to my colleagues and gently insisted that they should get a subscription of their own.

KIRK PARSONS  
(via e-mail)

### REDMOND REACTS

It should come as no surprise that I disagree with many of the conclusions in your September cover story on Microsoft's public relations. From the beginning, I was concerned that this was not going to be a fair and balanced study of Microsoft's PR. I decided nevertheless to cooperate with Ms. Lesly Stevens, spending many hours on the phone and preparing e-mails in response to scores of questions. I hoped that if we were open and honest, she might gain a better understanding of how things really work at Microsoft. In the end, we ended up with exactly what I feared: A story that reflects Ms. Lesly Stevens's original bias and paints Microsoft's PR efforts as somehow nefarious and coercive. I have no interest in disputing each of the many issues on which we disagree. However, I would like to offer several general comments, and point out a number of factual errors in the article. Additionally, I want to address an inaccuracy in one piece of information that was inadvertently provided to the author, Ms. Lesly Stevens.

Several things struck me as I read



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## CORRECTIONS

Due to an editing error, a photo caption on page 40 of the September issue incorrectly identified *Glamour* advertising staffer Deborah Blangiardo as the person wearing a Ralph Lauren coat in an ad that appeared in *Glamour*'s July issue. The person pictured was actually a model.

Due to a production error, staff writer Ted Rose was identified in the same issue as

previously having worked as a producer at the Cartoon Television Network. In fact, he was a producer at the Courtroom Television Network. (The two networks have never been confused before to our knowledge.)

Finally, in the article "Not The First Time," the name of the Massachusetts town of Somerville was misspelled.

We regret the errors.

Ms. Lesly Stevens's piece. The first was that it is clear [that she] has little knowledge of public relations, a function basic to almost all U.S. corporations. Many of the things she pointed to—and implied were somehow extraordinary—are the daily tools of PR in every company: Keeping track of what reporters write. Working hard to make sure reporters get the information and access they need to information and senior company executives. Raising a question when we think a journalist didn't fully disclose a potential personal conflict of interest when writing a piece about Microsoft. Even trying to put Microsoft in the most positive light. Is it really surprising that this is what Microsoft's public relations efforts are focused on? I think most public relations professionals—and journalists who understand and even see value in what we do—realize that this is what PR is all about.

I also was disappointed by Ms. Lesly Stevens's repeated use of unnamed—and often inaccurate—sources. In your statement of "What We Stand For" at the front of your magazine, you assert that to ensure quality information, "We believe that if unnamed sources must be used, they should be labeled in a way that sheds light on the limits and biases of the information they offer." I can't think of a single example where you provided justification or context for using such sources, whose information—much of it inaccurate—tarnished the overall quality of the article.

As to issues of factual error, let me address a few of the more glaring errors:

- On page 102, you say, "Gates was not telling the truth about how he had come across the photo" from his 1977 arrest for a traffic violation. That is not correct. Bill did not say that he found the photo on the Internet. In his speech to the National Cable Television Association, he explained that he had recently come across the photo, and that it was the kind of thing that exists on the many websites that have sprung up about Bill. Your reporter connected the dots between those two statements to draw a conclusion that was inaccurate. In your excerpt from the transcript of Bill's speech at NCTA, you left out the context in which he made these remarks, which

would have explained this to readers.

- At least one other publication—the *National Enquirer*—ran the mug shot of Bill, which, I should add, we gave them when they asked for it. So it's not true, as the article says, that no publication ran the photo or that "Microsoft has kept access to it tightly under its own control."

- You imply that Bill was not telling the truth about his 1977 arrest, saying "Gates may have not owned up to what transgression has landed him in jail." There was nothing more to that incident than what I, and the Albuquerque police, told Ms. Lesly Stevens: that Bill evidently ran a stop sign (he doesn't recall the exact nature of the violation, but that's what the Albuquerque police think it was for), and that because he did not have his driver's license with him, he was fingerprinted and photographed for identification purposes.

- Despite a clear statement by me that the information was inaccurate, you chose to go ahead and report, based on unnamed sources, that Microsoft employs 500 public relations staffers (page 103). I wish it was so, but it's simply not true. You also reported, without citing a source, that Waggener Edstrom, our lead PR firm, employs 200–300 staffers on Microsoft's account (page 104). This also is wildly inaccurate. The fact that we declined to provide your reporter with proprietary information such as this does not give *Content* license to print erroneous statistics.

- Writing about the reports that are used to track the media's extensive coverage of Microsoft, you quote another unnamed source (page 103) saying that "Every item that gets written about, [Microsoft PR] is tracking, attending, paying attention to..." The article also says that, according to this unnamed source, "Gates hones in on trouble spots in the spreadsheet reports and routinely demands that any negative press be managed better and fixed." This was an exaggeration on both counts. It would be impossible, nor would we try, to track every article written about the company. We do make note of key articles that, for one reason or another, need follow-up. To report that Bill Gates "routinely demands" that negative articles be "fixed" is just plain wrong. Sure, Bill reads news

coverage about Microsoft and occasionally tells me when he thinks something needs follow-up, but the way this was phrased suggests a CEO who is obsessed with micromanaging Microsoft's PR efforts. As I told Ms. Lesly Stevens, Bill spends the overwhelming amount of his time meeting with customers and product groups at Microsoft, and exploring the frontiers of computer technology.

- On page 104, you reported that Bill hosted a retreat at Hood Canal for Wall Street analysts. This is incorrect. There has never been an event at Hood Canal for financial analysts. The retreats were for journalists and industry analysts.

- Also on page 104, you once again rely on an unnamed source to report that Waggener Edstrom "devised 37 separate media contingency plans" for the launch of Windows 95. This is not true.

- On page 104, you reference an unnamed source to the effect that [Waggener Edstrom] "once cited on its website the ability to quote from Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* as a requirement for advancement." This is wrong. The book in question was *Marketing Warfare*, a business book that was hot in technology circles in the late eighties.

- On page 106, you assume that [Bill] Gates or Pam Edstrom were the source for a [1983] *People* magazine article that indicated Bill was an Eagle Scout. Neither Bill nor Pam recalls ever saying Bill was an Eagle Scout. For the record, Bill did reach the rank of Life Scout, a step below Eagle. You also conclude that Gates and Edstrom misled the *People* reporter regarding the quality of Microsoft's software code, its popularity in Japan, and the amount of Microsoft's revenue in the early days. I provided Ms. Lesly Stevens with extensive information to refute all of these points, yet she chose to ignore it all, failing to offer readers the opportunity to evaluate the information for themselves.

- On page 108–109, Ms. Lesly Stevens attempts to build the case that Microsoft's "public relations prowess" is so influential as to overshadow competitor's products, even if their products are better. The article quotes a former Microsoft employee, Rick Segal, as saying that IBM's competing operating system, OS/2, "was superior in every way" to Windows. Quoting Segal, the article





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suggests that even people at Microsoft believed this, which is simply untrue. And consumers certainly didn't believe it either, if you look at the popularity of Windows compared to OS/2. For example, a major drawback of OS/2 was that it couldn't print and did not provide full support for the most popular applications programs. As I told Ms. Lesly Stevens in e-mail, Windows succeeded on its merits, because it filled a technology vacuum that OS/2 did not.

•On page 112, you quote an unnamed source as saying that all Microsoft has to do is "offer up Bill and people will come and write down what he says, whether it's newsworthy or not." You then say that "once Gates declares a Microsoft product important, the press generally treats it as such." Both statements are nonsense. Certainly Bill is a highly regarded CEO and a leader in the industry but, believe me, there is no shortage of reporters willing to question and challenge what he says. Nor is there a shortage of reporters willing and ready to criticize our products.

•It was 1994, not 1995, when Steve Ballmer suggested that Bill write a syndicated newspaper column (page 112).

As to our own error in fact, I owe both Ms. Lesly Stevens and *InformationWeek* an apology for providing inaccurate information regarding Microsoft's efforts to get to the root of an issue involving the performance of Windows NT code that was the subject of an *InformationWeek* article. During research to provide Ms. Lesly Stevens with details about this, I was given erroneous information by our PR agency, which I inadvertently forwarded on to her. I take full responsibility for the error. In e-mail to Ms. Lesly Stevens, I wrote that "An IT trade (*InfoWeek*) got what they thought was a hot tip from a customer who learned that by manipulating NT server code, you could boost system performance significantly. This would have been a huge story and so the reporter tipped us that he was passing it on to the magazine's labs to verify. This wasn't necessarily a bad thing, but of course the development team was worried that the implication would have been that MS had overlooked an obvious defect which, if caught, could have helped customer performance. So the development

team set to work trying to replicate the customer experience, in tandem with *IW* labs. This was an around-the-clock effort and ended up being shown to be a function of some idiosyncrasies in a particular computer BIOS (i.e., a hardware issue) not the OS itself. The story reflected this and was accurate."

That statement was correct, except for part of the last two sentences. While this was an "around-the-clock" effort, the exact cause of the performance gain "phenomenon" was never actually determined; a hardware BIOS idiosyncrasy was one of the speculated causes. Microsoft was never able to replicate the phenomenon and therefore never definitively concluded that it was a hardware issue. Microsoft posited this scenario to *InfoWeek* as one potential idea (among others), but it was not verified by tests.

That said, the sidebar on page 105 referencing the *InfoWeek* situation was a misleading picture of the information I provided Ms. Lesly Stevens. I provided her with several examples that reflect the work we do on a daily basis in PR at Microsoft. In providing this information, I was attempting to be open and forthright, as well as to educate Ms. Lesly Stevens about our PR efforts. Yet Ms. Lesly Stevens turned these examples around to suggest that we unduly or inappropriately influence news coverage of Microsoft. She edited the information I gave her to create her own account of the two examples, yet made it appear that the whole sidebar were words I had provided her. The worst example of this is the wording in the final paragraph of the sidebar (which appears to be mine but is Ms. Lesly Stevens's) that implies Microsoft made a "PR recommendation" to *InfoWeek* that it alter its story on the NT code. No one at Microsoft ever made any such recommendation, and to suggest otherwise is offensive both to me and to the journalists at *InfoWeek*.

MICH MATHEWS  
General Manager  
Microsoft Public Relations  
Redmond, WA

**Elizabeth Lesly Stevens responds:** Ms. Mathews complains that her "open and honest" dealings with *Brill's Content* yielded nothing,

and that I simply stuck to some imagined "original bias." The story as it was published in August was precisely the one I first outlined to Ms. Mathews in March—an examination of Microsoft and Mr. Gates's public relations strategy and image-management from the earliest days of the company to the present. Ms. Mathews cooperated somewhat in the reporting of the story because by doing so she secured the opportunity to influence and help shape the final story. In this, she certainly succeeded, and I was quite pleased to be able to include Microsoft's viewpoints so extensively in the story.

I certainly agree with Ms. Mathews that PR is a perfectly legitimate—if little-examined—part of any company's business strategy. Given how serious a competitor Microsoft is in every other area of its business, it is of course no surprise to anyone that Microsoft takes its PR seriously. That it takes it more seriously, and is more savvy, than many other large corporations is certainly not my observation alone, but that of several leading technology reporters at major publications, some of whose analyses on that point appear, on the record, in the story.

The article did provide context and qualifications of the information provided by sources who declined to be identified by name. For example, the story cited four separate sources in an effort to approximate the total staffing level of Microsoft's PR operation. Two sources indicated the total amounted to "about 500," the story stated, while "two other sources not as close to the company" pegged their estimates at about 400. Ms. Mathews's comments regarding the staffing-level estimates were included in the original story. In fact, for nearly all the points raised by Ms. Mathews in her letter, her comments or those of someone else representing Microsoft were included in the original story. Ms. Mathews cannot expect her objection alone to invalidate the opinions or information provided by one or more other sources offering a different view.

The only issue Ms. Mathews raises that calls for detailed explanation is her account of Mr. Gates's release of his own mug shot. As stated in the original story, the mug shot itself is of marginal interest, but the machinations of Microsoft PR to blunt our possible use of it show Microsoft PR—the focus of our story—in action.

Mr. Gates misrepresented how he had come to obtain his own mug shot as he presented it in a speech in May, just days after offi-

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cial in Albuquerque alerted Mr. Gates's attorney and Ms. Mathews that *Brill's Content* was about to get access to the public record. Ms. Mathews's allegation that *Brill's Content* selectively edited Mr. Gates's comments to misrepresent what he said is absurd and demonstrably false.

The transcript of Mr. Gates's speech, as provided by CNBC/Dow Jones Business Video archives, shows that Mr. Gates took 12 sentences to introduce and dispense with his mug shot. *Brill's Content* quoted fully seven of those sentences in the original story.

Here is the full excerpt: "It is kind of amazing, all the things how they—that are out on the Internet. In fact, there is a lot about—out there about Microsoft. A lot out there about me. Some of it is not very nice. You know, people who do not know me, saying things that are too nice. And some people saying things that aren't—are not so nice. In fact, I found this recently. This is actually a mug shot of me at age 21. And what had happened here is that I was down in Albuquerque, working on personal computers. And I got a speeding ticket. And I had forgotten to take my license with me. And sure enough, this is—this is the kind of neat stuff you can find out on the Internet."

Indeed, reporters on the scene understandably took this to mean that Mr. Gates said he had found the mug shot on some roguish website. "Gates even included a mug shot of himself, which he said he found on the Internet," wrote the *New York Post's* Jon Elsen in his next-day story. Elsen says that Microsoft never contacted him to correct this impression. Indeed, look at how Mathews handled my query about where on the Internet, exactly, Mr. Gates had found the mug shot he presented in his May speech.

**Q:** I saw in the *NY Post* that Mr. Gates had run across an old mug shot of himself on the Internet. I cannot locate such a photo on the Internet. What is the address, and who posted it?

**A:** Bill was probably referring to his own site up on Microsoft.com. He showed the mug shot during his NCTA speech in Atlanta I believe. You will find the picture in the slides (from a May 12 e-mail exchange between me and Ms. Mathews).

Whatever transgression led to Mr. Gates's arrest and mug shot remains unknown. As reported in the original story, the case file is missing, and the Albuquerque Police Department's mentioning a stop sign violation

as a possible cause remains just undocumented speculation not based on any record or knowledgeable individual. Mr. Gates's public explanation that he had been arrested for speeding without a license is also unverifiable. Mr. Gates had been arrested on that charge two years before the mug shot arrest, but that earlier, minor offense was not serious enough to result in a mug shot being taken. And, again, any petty crimes or misdemeanors committed by Mr. Gates 20 years ago are of only marginal interest. However, Microsoft PR's strategic handling of the mug shot earlier this year was germane to the original story.

I did not "assume" that Mr. Gates or Pam Edstrom were the source of any inaccuracies that appeared in a glowing 1983 *People* magazine profile of Mr. Gates. As stated in the original story, Landon Jones, Jr., who wrote that 1983 story, said the questionable information had been provided to him by Gates, Edstrom, or senior Microsoft officials. The conclusion that *People* had been misled on several factual points was made by (and credited to) Stephen Manes and Paul Andrews, in their well-regarded 1993 book *Gates*. Furthermore, Ms. Mathews's comments on the episode were certainly not ignored, as she states in her letter. She is quoted in the story as correcting two factual errors and otherwise defending the factual accuracy of the 1983 *People* story.

The story's source for the anecdote detailing Waggener Edstrom's 37-part media plan during the Windows 95 launch remains certain that the information was accurate, adding that the plan was outlined by [Waggener Edstrom] senior vice-president Colleen Lacter at a September 21, 1995, workshop on new-product launches held by the Public Relations Society of America's Puget Sound chapter. Lacter confirms she was a panelist at that event, but says that she did not discuss such a media plan, which she maintains did not exist. Also, the story's source for the anecdote regarding *The Art of War* remains quite certain, having copied down the unfamiliar book's title and author from the [Waggener Edstrom] website so that the source could then purchase that specific title. I apologize for not including Waggener Edstrom's denials of these two points in the original story.

Finally, the original story should indeed have said that Mr. Gates's *New York Times* Syndicate columns began in January 1995. Mr. Ballmer's suggestion that Mr. Gates write such a column was made, as Ms. Mathews notes, in 1994. When I asked Ms. Mathews's

deputy about retreats Mr. Gates held at his vacation home for "analysts," I was not specific enough, assuming that the deputy, as he confirmed the retreats, understood that I meant financial analysts. I regret that error.

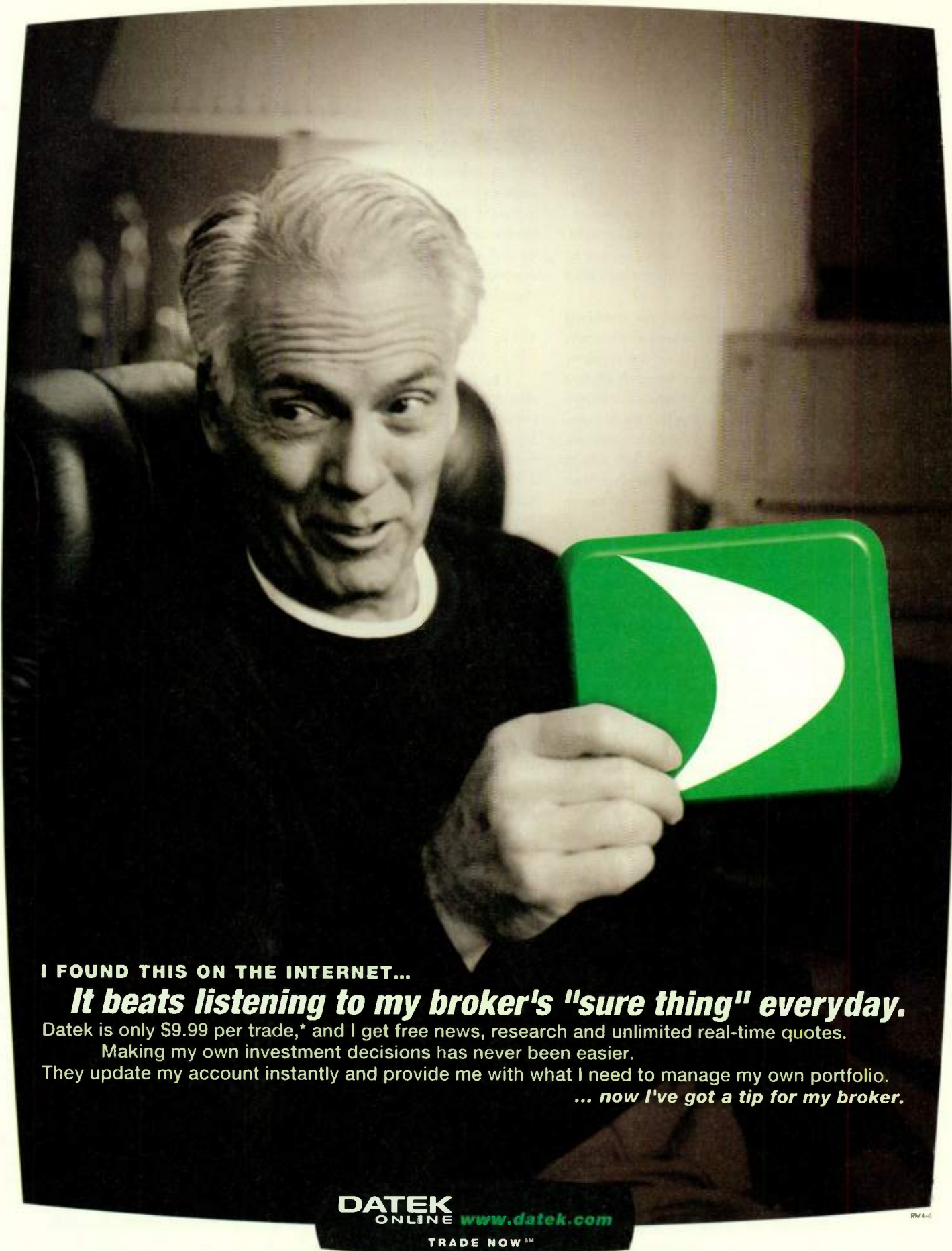
## INFOWEEK OBJECTS

I'm writing to express our extreme displeasure with the reporting procedures you used recently in a magazine that prides itself on uncovering sloppy editorial practices and policies of other news media.

In your September 1998 issue, your reporter Elizabeth Lesly Stevens writes in the article "Win The War By Winning the Battles" that in March, *InformationWeek* was coerced by Microsoft's PR team into changing the angles of a story we were writing to keep us from reporting about a bug that we found in Microsoft's Windows NT operating system. Neither Ms. Lesly Stevens, nor anyone else representing *Brill's Content*, contacted anyone at *InformationWeek* to seek our input regarding this accusation (a practice taught in Journalism 101). If someone had contacted us, they'd have learned that the information supplied by Microsoft PR and reported by *Brill's* is patently false.

We still contend, first of all, that there is a defect in Windows NT Server that, if manipulated, produces the performance boost we described in that article. Microsoft developers did *not* work "in tandem" or "around-the-clock" with *InformationWeek* on this story, as you report, and we did *not* report that the idiosyncrasy was caused instead by certain hardware platforms. Most important, Microsoft and its PR team had absolutely no influence over the outcome of our story. Your reporting that we were coerced in any way is offensive and preposterous. The fact is, our lab tests uncovered a performance boost brought on by manipulation of this defect in Windows NT Server, and we reported and published that information. In fact, we contend that Microsoft PR was of little help in our reporting process.

We understand that mistakes can be made, even by a so-called media watchdog. But the reporting of this false



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information was the result of a reporter not following the simplest of journalistic practices: Making a phone call to *InformationWeek* to verify facts. We insist on a correction of this error and an apology to *InformationWeek* for portraying us in an extremely unfavorable light.

BRIAN GILLOOLY  
Editor, *InformationWeek*

**ELS responds:** I erred in not contacting *InformationWeek* for a response to Microsoft's description of its efforts on the Windows NT story. And given that Microsoft PR now says that some of the information it provided was incorrect, I regret that my not contacting *InformationWeek* resulted in inaccuracies appearing in the original *Brill's Content* story. It's a good example of why reporters should always contact for comment anyone involved in a story.

The sidebar that included Microsoft's description of events was an effort to allow Microsoft PR the opportunity to describe in its own words how it goes about its business and measures its success. The actual errors in *Brill's Content* were Ms. Mathews's quoted assertion that Microsoft PR worked "in tandem" with *InformationWeek* test labs, and that the adjustment to fix the problem was a "PR recommendation."

However, *InformationWeek* complains that our story stated that Microsoft PR "coerced" *InformationWeek* to "chang[e] the angles of a story...to keep us from reporting about a bug...in Microsoft's Windows NT operating system." This is not the case. The Microsoft-provided example of its PR team at work shows simply how it dealt—successfully—with what the company regarded as a potentially damaging story. In spite of *InformationWeek's* assertion in its letter that "there is a defect in Windows NT Server," the actual story the magazine printed in its March 30 issue (accessible on the Web at [www.techweb.com](http://www.techweb.com)) cites three possible culprits—only one of which would be the fault of Microsoft. As *Brill's Content* notes in the original story, Microsoft PR asserted, after considerable effort within the company to examine and attempt to replicate *InformationWeek's* testing, that the cause of the problem was another company's hardware, not Microsoft's software. I believe Microsoft PR cited this story to *Brill's Content* as an example because the March *InformationWeek* story did include this other

possible culprit, and did not criticize Microsoft for covering up the glitch intentionally, as the company originally feared. "We felt that without Microsoft involvement, the story could imply that the company was knowingly holding back on information that customers could use to improve their NT experience," noted Marianne Allison, executive vice-president of Waggener Edstrom, one of Microsoft's PR agencies.

### SHE DIDN'T MEAN IT THAT WAY

I'm writing this letter with regret that my comments were taken out of context in "Making Bill" in the September issue. When Ms. Lesly Stevens researched her story, I provided a larger context of public relations practices and history to aid in her evaluation. Every business, government, nonprofit, and celebrity entity does PR—or attempts to do PR—using the same tools as Waggener Edstrom. Waggener just uses the tools very effectively and creatively. In my discussion to provide points of contrast, I referred to some extreme examples from history of 'successful' efforts to move perception, but I never compared Waggener or Microsoft to the Third Reich. Looking at Microsoft's PR and marketing efforts in an isolated fashion ignores the larger story: the relationship of PR to news and how the public, then, all too often accepts the resulting "news" as TRUTH.

POSY GERING  
(via e-mail)

**ELS responds:** I disagree that Ms. Gering's comments were printed out of context. As quoted in the story, she was making a historical point about the power of strategic public relations—including FDR and the New Deal as well as the Third Reich—and the story made clear that she was not criticizing Waggener Edstrom or Microsoft.

### NO PROBLEM HERE

Having read the quotes attributed to me in your article about Mr. Gates and Microsoft, I wanted to offer some quick feedback. I was pleasantly surprised at the professional nature of both the interview and the follow-up process. In reading the article, I was pleased that my quotes were accurate

and there wasn't a "spin" put on my words. I appreciate the fairness. Rare and refreshing.

RICK SEGAL  
(via e-mail)

### NOT TOO DEEP

I'd like to commend Elizabeth Lesly Stevens for her excellent story on Microsoft's PR muscle. Unfortunately for me and perhaps for readers, her characterization of my role as a poor, hapless victim of Microsoft's evangelical "terrorists" was a bit shallow...The "whole truth" was that thousands of IBMers and non-IBMers had joined an informal online group I founded named "Team OS/2," to use the truth of their personal experience to combat Microsoft's ruthless domination of the operating-system market. We had not only attracted much media attention, but also the serious personal attention of Bill Gates [and other senior Microsoft officials]. They were well aware, I'm sure, that numerous influential columnists and journalists...were "defecting" from the Windows camp, using OS/2, and writing and speaking favorably of OS/2—often as a result of the efforts of Team OS/2. I believe that providing such additional context...would have provided readers an even more compelling view of the human drama that unfolded as Microsoft desperately but deftly navigated what could have meant the loss of their chance to permanently establish their operating system monopoly.

Let me nonetheless congratulate *Brill's Content* for carrying an article that represents a giant leap forward in documenting at least some of the creative amorality that has characterized Microsoft's brilliant but unethical approach to manipulating the media into serving Microsoft's goals.

DAVID B. WHITTLE  
(via e-mail)

### NO FAN OF KEITH

Keith Olbermann's reflecting on our missing moral compass ["Blame Me, Too," Talk Back] is a bit like Bill Clinton's recent apology for his lapse of judgment. If Cornell graduates actually listened to this self-righteous hogwash, they are probably still scratching their mortar boards.

Tell me if I'm mistaken, but isn't that the same Keith Olbermann on MSNBC every night still presiding over one more tedious panel on the freshest (and the stalest) morsel in the Clinton-Lewinsky gossip? It's amazing, isn't it, how money is the perfect bromide for the moral dry heaves. Giving two pages of your September issue to Olbermann's pointless and self-serving convocation speech suggests that you were taken in by this shameless hypocrisy.

DON R. GREGORY  
Valhalla, NY

### DIG DEEPER

Your article, "Over The Keyboard Medicine, [ClickThrough]" on the best health information on-line, gives undue attention to a vitamin store's web page called Ask Dr. Weil. Rather than credit the page as a source for "credible alternative medicine" (whatever that is), you should have dug a bit deeper.

While you say that the site is maintained by Time Inc. New Media and Dr. Andrew Weil, the article fails to inform us that The Vitamin Shoppe pays for this promotional page exclusively. Such funding is no wonder, considering Dr. Weil's absurd suggestions such as the one that advises those suffering from prostatitis to (purchase and) take up to 6,000 milligrams (100 times the RDA) of vitamin C a day!

JEFF STIER  
New York, NY

**Editor's note:** The Ask Dr. Weil page is indeed wholly sponsored by The Vitamin Shoppe, a fact we should have mentioned in our story. We appreciate Mr. Stier's letter. The organization with which he is affiliated, the American Council on Science and Health, has its own website at [www.acsh.org](http://www.acsh.org).

### AND VINEGAR, TOO

Thank God for *Brill's Content*.

It is only a secondary matter that your articles are vital, timely, prescient, insightful, moral.

More important, suddenly I have a sense that editors and writers across America will do a bit better, that journalists are responding to your efforts to prick their conscience.

More important than the quality of

your own effort is that suddenly everyone else's effort is destined to improve as we move onto the front burner the questions of accuracy, accountability, reliability.

Please don't moderate your refreshing attitude, which is so full of piss and vinegar.

ANDY JOHNSON  
Jacksonville, FL

### MAKING IT CLEAR

In your September Q&A ["The CNN Nerve Gas Retraction"], Steven Brill asked Tom Johnson, the CNN News Group chairman, "So Pam Hill's resignation was demanded?" Johnson responded: "Pam Hill's resignation was demanded."

By way of clarification, I would like to point out that my resignation was not requested. Rather, I spontaneously offered to resign, in a conversation with Tom Johnson and Steve Korn, the chief operating officer, nearly a week before the offer was accepted.

PAM HILL  
Former senior vice-president and senior executive producer, CNN & Time

**Editor's note:** Upon receiving Ms. Hill's letter, we contacted Tom Johnson. His response: "Pam Hill is correct. I misspoke. She did volunteer her resignation."

### AN ILL TAILWIND

I was very disappointed in your article on the Tailwind controversy. You accepted CNN's retraction at face value and printed a really boring interview about who got fired rather than investigating the retraction or giving any space at all to April Oliver and Jack Smith's rebuttal to the Abrams report. An examination of the competing claims in the Abrams report and the Oliver-Smith rebuttal would have been far more interesting, enlightening, and in line with your proclaimed mission than the interview you published. This is the biggest story of the year on your beat, and you didn't cover it.

BRENDAN HALPIN  
Boston, MA

### A JOKE TO HIM

I expect most members of the chattering class to be self-indulgent, narcissistic fakes. However, I think that Mr. Brill has

given those of us in the flyover a new reason to loathe the mainstream press. I take issue with his article, "What I Learned Inside The Barrel" [Rewind]. The reek of disingenuity wafted to my already fairly desensitized nostrils within the first two paragraphs, when Mr. Brill recounted his impending sense of doom in releasing the "Pressgate" story [July/August]. Please. Do you mean to suggest that, on the New York, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles axis upon which you and a few thousand other media elitists whirl like gibbering Paolos and Francescas, you would attract criticism for attacking Ken Starr? I suspect you have not been crossed off any of the cocktail party lists you first gained access to while making the justice system a spectator sport.

Nice try Mr. Brill, but the truth is you are neither a shill for the elitist left, nor a coherent journalist for the evaluation of the media. You are just another boring liberal newsmen, desperately searching for a crusade that will bring you some kind of relevance. You'll have to get a lot more clever than attacking Judge Starr.

WILLIAM GEORGE BATCHELDER IV  
Columbus, OH

### A GOOD LESSON

It was interesting to read Steven Brill's account of the turmoil he went through during the first week of the magazine's premiere. Brill's main point was right on: every journalist *should* have to go through what he went through. Most celebrities and all politicians have to endure the unfair accusations, biased reporting, and McCarthy-like questioning (Tim Russert really did step over the line there) that Brill found himself subjected to. At least the allegations, even if untrue or misguided, were relevant to the magazine and dealt only with Brill's professional life, a luxury other newsmakers would welcome with open arms. Perhaps if all reporters found themselves on the other side of the interview tape, they wouldn't fill the papers with the personal trash and unconfirmed rumors we see today that get printed under the ridiculous excuse that "the public wants to read it."

MATTHEW ANDELMAN  
(via e-mail)

## [ LETTERS ]

### KICK THE HABIT

Congratulations on a GREAT magazine! "Kick" the tobacco advertising and you will have a WINNER!

EMERY TAYLOR  
(via e-mail)

### AT ALL COSTS

I just received my *Brill's Content* and I'm writing in response to your article "Killer On Line One" [Decisions]. I appreciate your questioning the media and the ethics of getting a story at all costs, which, in this case, could have been someone's life. Thanks for bringing this story to light.

Mark Ferem  
(via e-mail)

### KUDOS FOR SLOAN

*Brill's Content* and Allan Sloan of *Newsweek* deserve credit for touching on an issue I think is of great importance to investors: the restriction of reporters from conference calls conduct-

ed by publicly traded companies ["Crimes and Misdemeanors," *The Notebook*].

I admire Mr. Sloan for admitting in the September issue that he has fudged his way onto conference calls. He is right to do so. Such calls "are public meetings, and the idea that you can let analysts in and not reporters is not sensical," as he explained.

In fact, I think it more than just contradictory to restrict reporters; it is wrong. The story by Elizabeth Lesly Stevens stated that "the information analysts get from the companies doesn't really differ from what the reporters get." That is not true. The analysts-only conference calls do provide critical information that cannot be found anywhere else and the public, as well as reporters, should be allowed access to this information.

Many analysts also enjoy far closer relationships with company executives than I could ever dream of (especially those analysts at investment banks doing work for the companies being covered). That often makes their

questions even more important. Mr. Sloan said he does not ask any questions when he sneaks onto a conference. He's no dummy. Any smart journalist knows when to shut up.

JONATHAN S. HORNBLASS  
(via e-mail)

**Editor's Apology:** The story referred to in the letter above dealt with the practice of reporters posing as Wall Street analysts or corporate-finance executives to gain access to briefings held by corporations for the financial community. The story featured *Newsweek* financial writer Allan Sloan as one journalist who said he had engaged in the practice.

The story's intent was to spotlight a little-known news-gathering technique, and the headline overstated its significance as an ethical controversy. We thought we were doing it in a tongue-in-cheek way, but we seem to have failed badly in conveying that lighthearted tone. Indeed, to some readers, we seem to have conveyed the impression that we thought Mr. Sloan was guilty of some kind of crime. Editor in chief Steven Brill, who edited



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this article and approved its publication, has known and respected Mr. Sloan for many years and has the highest respect for him. The magazine, Mr. Brill, and senior writer Elizabeth Lesly Stevens apologize to Mr. Sloan for unintentionally describing his work in a way that could be misread so badly.

### GO ASK ALICE

Judge Starr's defense of his office's background discussions with reporters ["Letters to the Editor," September] suggests that he has finally tumbled through the looking glass. Starr asserts, correctly, that prosecutors must provide the public with information regarding their investigations, to (in Eric Holder's words) "assure the public of the firmness and fairness of the criminal judicial system." Starr then asserts, hilariously, that the way to do this is by transmitting these assurances anonymously through the media. This inspires confidence? Would you feel more confident in your state's attorney general if he apprised you of ongoing investigations by spraying graffiti

on highway overpasses at midnight?

The prosecution has leaked to the press for as long as the two institutions have coexisted, but it is bizarre to see Starr's office produce a 19-page memo at the taxpayer's expense glorifying this rather disreputable practice. Despite Mr. Brill's heroic efforts to convince readers otherwise, I doubt Starr's conduct is sanctionable. However, it seems that a man investigating the president of the United States would attempt to hold himself to a higher standard of media relations than that which existed in the frontier West.

RICHARD P. JOHNSON  
(via e-mail)

### THE COOKIES CRUMBLE

Esther [Dyson] may have a big rep in the computer biz, but she clearly doesn't know much about how the Web works ["Privacy Matters," On-line/Off-line]. All those details must be too low-level for her to worry about. Her article is riddled with technical mistakes.

"Every time you log on, a digital record of

your movements (a 'cookie') is created."

Incorrect and misleading. Cookies are created and updated by individual web servers (and not all of them) when content is transmitted from the server. They are passed back to that server (and not to other servers) when other content is requested.

Thus the server that runs [www.animeigo.com](http://www.animeigo.com) can't access the cookies created by [www.brillscontent.com](http://www.brillscontent.com). This is a common misconception about cookies. There are many good pages that explain the truth about cookies; if you want a URL or two, let me know.

Cookies cannot be used for data handoffs. Period. Typically, data handoffs are done using encoded URLs or hidden form fields. The only way cookies can be used for inter-site tracking (as opposed to intra-site tracking) is when some of the content on each page comes from a single server common to all the sites. Most typically this is from the server displaying the ads (for example, from [doubleclick.com](http://doubleclick.com)). But in this

(continued on page 139)



## [ REPORT FROM THE OMBUDSMAN ]

BY BILL KOVACH

**Y**OUR LETTERS, E-MAIL, AND PHONE CALLS THESE past two months make it clear that *Brill's Content* is reaching a lot of people eager to become more skilled in "reading" the media so they know more about how the news is obtained, processed, and delivered. Even when you complain or express disagreement, your messages are usually cast in the form of questions about why or how certain things are done. This sort of healthy skepticism is the most important tool a citizen in today's media-driven world can have. It is also the most important friend a good journalist can have. You'll notice that I wrote "skepticism" and not "cynicism," which many people seem to think are the same but which are, in fact, worlds apart. I was surprised to learn, when teaching a class a few years ago at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, that even some graduate students did not differentiate between the two. Just to be clear, I take a skeptic to be one who doubts and questions but who is open to explanation and discussion. A cynic simply wants to state a conclusion, usually in dismissive terms. While I'll acknowledge the cynics and maybe suggest that their comments be published elsewhere in the magazine, it makes sense to me to use the space in this column to deal with questions raised by the skeptics. The following items were the subject of your questioning complaints.

**Opinionated Columnists.** Several of you have expressed concerns or complaints about columnists James Cramer ("The Money Press") and Esther Dyson ("On-line/Off-line") that suggest some confusion exists about what a columnist is and how columns differ from the other bylined articles that appear in the magazine. Similar confusion has plagued newspapers since the early part of this century when they first began to strive for more objectivity in their news reporting. Shortly after World War I, Herbert Bayard Swope, who was the executive editor of *The New York World*, created a special page for columns of opinion opposite the editorial page (the op-ed page), separate from the impartial news articles that appeared

elsewhere in the paper. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, opinion pieces made up a good part of the news report, including stories on page one.

Opinion columns were then and still are considered important to any publication seeking to help the public work its way through the issues, events, and debates that drive a self-governing society. They are designed to help readers sort through the meaning of the day's news by providing the insights and conclusions of writers who possess special knowledge and experience of particular subjects.

Few activities of contemporary life are as important and dynamic—and, to many of us, as confusing—as those about which Dyson and Cramer write—new communications technology and economic trends. The two are especially knowledgeable for the very reasons that they are deeply involved in these areas: They each have personal, professional, and financial interests on which to base their opinions and draw their conclusions.

This deep involvement has prompted readers such as David Graf to write of Esther Dyson's investments: "Even

though it is disclosed, isn't this a serious conflict of interest since the casual reader has no easy way of knowing what kind of investments are being made by Dyson?"

But Steven Brill's conflict-of-interest policy, which states that articles "should be free of any motive other than informing its consumers—unless those motives are clearly disclosed," is designed to protect against this and applies to column writers as well as other writers. In order that the reader is aware of these interests, both Dyson and Cramer disclose far more information about those interests than most other columnists writing today. That includes disclosing the kind of investments Graf asks about. Brill's guidelines require that columnists disclose their own financial investments in any matter about which they write in any significant way. Those disclosures allow you, as consumers of the information, to exercise your own healthy skepticism when considering their opinions and conclusions. And when you have a doubt or a question, to challenge their conclusions or opinions.

Even the best columnists can sometimes become so convinced by experience that their opinions take on a messianic

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## REPORT FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

quality, which may be why many people believe the patron saint of column writers was a man named Simeon Stylites. Saint Simeon, who lived in Syria during the fourth and fifth centuries, is considered the first of the so-called pillar-hermits. He preached and debated ecclesiastical politics from atop a 60-foot pillar. Devoutly committed to this argumentation, he never left this platform for 20 years, sustained until his death by food and clothing carried to him by his disciples.

**Altered Photos.** The altering of one photo of Bill Gates that appeared on the magazine's September cover, in which the Albuquerque Police Department's arrest placard was raised to fit in the picture frame, has prompted questions about the altering of pictures in *Brill's Content*.

Debates, often heated debates, among journalists about the alteration of photographs have been going on for decades. It is an argument that probably will never end. "Seeing is believing" is answered with "you can't believe your eyes" arguments. The latest technology engages consumers of nonfiction information in the debate. Some of the best photographers "manipulate" the shooting, development, and printing of their work to crop out what they consider extraneous detail, to sharpen contrast, and to emphasize points of interest. But many readers know that it is possible with digital technology to create people, places, and events that never existed. So the question becomes more insistent: What to believe of what you see?

*Brill's Content* tries to deal with this challenge in several ways. Among the more important guidelines that control the magazine's use of photographs:

1. Photos used should reflect the truth.
2. Retouching should be done only to alter minor points about the photo and should never be done to alter facts or change anyone's appearance.
3. Any changes in a picture are to be clearly noted in the picture caption.

It is this third point that lets you, the consumer, decide whether you can trust what you see and read in *Brill's Content*. In the case of the Bill Gates photo, the alteration was noted in two ways: It was spelled out in a caption on the table-of-contents page, and an unaltered copy of the picture was run on the same page to show that the alteration on the cover did not change the picture in any meaningful way.

**Anyone There?** An e-mail message from Gregg Teehan summarizes a question several of you have asked about the journalism shorthand: "Could not be reached for comment—What does this phrase (and its brethren) really mean?"

At many news organizations the decision to use such a phrase is left to the reporter's discretion. Like many practices that grow out of the deadline pressure inherent in the news business, this one depends on an editor's trust in a reporter to make a good-faith effort to justify using the characterization. Some news organizations, often on the advice of lawyers worried that written rules can be used against them in legal proceedings, avoid spelling out what efforts reporters must make before declaring a person unavailable for comment.

The guidelines on "getting fair comment" at *Brill's Content* are clearly spelled out with this introductory admonition:

"In this company, the single worst thing a reporter can do is to attribute an act or thought to someone without getting that person's specific comment about whether that act or thought happened."

The guideline then goes on to detail the kind of effort a reporter must make in order to meet that rule, including trying to reach the person through friends and colleagues and leaving detailed messages about the questions being asked.

"No one we write about" the guideline concludes, "should ever be surprised about what we say because we will have either asked them about it or left an explicit message that we want to talk to them about it."

*Brill's Content's* policy is the most comprehensive of any I've found. It could be made a little better for the reader with the addition of the advice Robert Kaiser sent to the staff of *The Washington Post* when he was managing editor, advice that adds an element of letting the reader in on what particular efforts have been made.

"I said we should do away with the phrase altogether," Kaiser explains in a telephone interview. "Just tell the reader what happened: How many calls were unanswered; did not respond to a message left at the office; no one answered knocks at the door of the home or office." This simple reportorial approach allows the reader to decide whether a sufficient effort was made or whether the reporter was taking a shortcut at someone else's expense.

**Gone But Not Forgotten.** I should have paid closer attention when referring to the motto, "Get it first but first get it right," in my September column. I wrongly identified the news service the motto was created to guide. It was the International News Service of the Hearst company. INS no longer exists, but several old hands wrote to set me straight. One of them, Len Saffir, of Boca Raton, Florida, says the full quote was, "Get it first but first get it right and write it right." ■

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## Back From The Abyss

In the Information Age, media owners' vigorous pursuit of profit may actually be good for consumers.

**S**UPPOSE YOU HAVE YOUR MONEY IN A MUTUAL FUND OR a pension fund. You get your quarterly report and find that the fund did worse than the Dow and every other comparable measure for that quarter. You call the fund manager and he explains the performance as follows: "I know we didn't do that well, but we were invested in several companies where the CEOs care about things other than profits and the stock price. In fact, they don't try to maximize shareholder value but they do try to do a lot of good for their community. And they're people of great integrity."

You'd probably be inclined to tell the fund manager that if some CEO wants to be charitable or win civics awards, he should do it with his money, not yours. It's not that you're not community-minded. It's just that when you invest in stocks you're doing it to make money.

Of course, the scenario is far-fetched; no fund manager would dare offer that explanation and no CEO in a public company would ever declare that shareholder value isn't his highest priority. But then what's the CEO of a company supposed to do when the business he's in also claims to have a higher calling?

On page 96 of this issue there's a story about Kelly Sole, a woman who is part of Times Mirror Company CEO Mark Willes's effort, he says, to add shareholder value by making the *Los Angeles Times* more appealing to its readers. Indeed, in this year's annual report, Willes promises his shareholders that although earnings per share grew nearly 50 percent in 1997, "we still hope to grow earnings per share in 1998 by 20 percent."

Because Sole works on the advertising side of the paper, and because Willes, a former vice-chairman of the General Mills cereal company, has actually admitted to wanting his editors to care about what readers want to read and about accumulating readers whom advertisers will want to reach, there has been much worrying out loud among journalists that this might endanger the paper's editorial integrity. Our article establishes that so far there is no evidence that Willes has done more than try to get more people to read his flagship paper (and, in the process, get more people to advertise in it). Nonetheless, these are legitimate concerns. It's not so much a matter of kowtowing to advertisers by slanting stories in their favor as it is an issue of whether the *Times* ultimately will kowtow to readers. Pandering

to one's customers is what every business is supposed to do. But journalism is also supposed to have as its mission telling readers not just what they want to know but what editors think they should know. In other words, the local newspaper or the network or local newscast is, at least in theory, supposed to lead as well as follow. That's what makes a former cereal company executive's vow

to produce a consumer-friendly newspaper a dicier prospect than a promise to produce consumer-friendly cereals.

It could be worse. Suppose Willes really could know exactly what his customers liked and disliked about his paper, day by day, page by page. Suppose, for example, Willes had a way to tell exactly how many people read each article in the *Times*. Or even how many read through the fifth paragraph or over on to the continued page. Or whether stories about white crime victims were more popular than stories about nonwhite victims. Or which reporter was read by the most readers. I'm not talking about focus groups that provide some sense of this, but real, hard data. Every day. Every article. Every paragraph.

Arguably, it would be Willes's obligation to increase shareholder value by acting on that data. Why have a Moscow bureau if it costs, say, a million bucks a year and only 1 percent of the readers read more than a third of the stories it generates in a given month? Why station a bunch of reporters in Sacramento if readers are turned off to government and politics and the reporters can be redeployed to cover the celebrities that readers supposedly do want to read about? Why have a labor reporter if only 5 percent of readers read his output last month and 60 percent of them were people below the demographic target, anyway?

That, of course, is the kind of calculus that many newspapers seem to have been doing for a long time anyway, even without this hard data. But imagine a true shareholder value



WTLV's coverage of Hurricane Bonnie seemed designed to rattle viewers, not inform them.

guy like Willes armed with that data. Imagine what the paper might ultimately look like if he simply followed the numbers.

Actually, it takes no imagination at all. Just turn on your local television news at 11 P.M. tonight. Television has that data, or at least what claims to be that data—the Nielsen ratings. And they're available to every station manager, purporting to tell him how many people in which demographic groups watched what.

As I was reading the draft of the article about Kelly Sole late one night this summer, I happened to be watching WTLV, the NBC affiliate in Jacksonville, Florida. The station is owned by the Gannett Company, which started out as a newspaper company but has long since expanded to own 20 television stations around the country. Gannett, too, is publicly held. CEO John Curley's letter to shareholders in the annual report begins with a paragraph about the company's record revenue and profit and lists "consistent profitability," "high margins," "strong cash flow," and "disciplined focus on increasing shareholder value" as the company's four characteristics since going public in 1967. Maybe so, but what I saw on WTLV that night was as far from journalism as it gets. It

was more of a game of three-card monte than an effort to inform people, let alone lead them.

It was August 26, the night that Hurricane Bonnie hit North Carolina and Hurricane Danielle was forming far off the east coast of Florida. What Jacksonville viewers got, beginning at 11 o'clock was, by my count, 16 of 23 minutes (plus 11 minutes of commercials, promotion, and banter) of hurricane coverage, including lots of live video from North Carolina—where Bonnie was a relative dud of a hurricane. Following these live shots we were treated to warnings to stay tuned because "Danielle is just around the corner....She could be headed our way." Which, of course, she wasn't. But we didn't find out until the last 30 seconds of the broadcast, when we were told that we'd have to tune in two or three nights later to find out whether Danielle would hit Jacksonville. In between, we were:

- shown footage of people being evacuated from a hurricane two years ago;
- taken to a Red Cross shelter of the type we would have to go to if Danielle came and we needed to evacuate our homes;
- shown video of the "wall of water" that a "storm surge" like Danielle might produce;
- shown a map of those neighborhoods around Jacksonville that might have to be evacuated;
- given a primer on how to videotape our homes to make a record of their contents before they are washed away.

Again, Danielle was nowhere near (and never came anywhere near) Florida or anyplace else in the United States, and Bonnie had long since passed. This was no news.

Nonetheless, at 11:25 the anchor was still keeping the come-on going, declaring just before a final commercial break, "Will she strike? Find out...later as our hurricane coverage continues."

Imagine if a Gannett newspaper's front page teased and

scared its readers that way, only coming clean with the actual news deep into the paper.

The only other news that night on WTLV was a report on a sex scandal involving the police chief of a small town near Jacksonville, and a shorter report on the murder—in March—of someone who had been buried in a "shallow grave," with video from the gravesite. (What made this news was that now a \$10,000 reward had been posted.) There was also a 15-second story on alleged deaths from Viagra, 15 seconds on the re-opening of the Martin Luther King, Jr., case, 15 seconds on the Northwest Airlines strike, ten seconds of lottery results, and five minutes of sports. That was it. No news from the Florida governor's race. No news from Russia or the stock markets. Nothing about the Jacksonville schools, which had opened that week. Nothing about the Republican Senate primary, which was six days away. Nothing about the controversy over a land development plan that made the front page of *The Florida Times-Union* the next morning, and nothing about an office-building development initiative for downtown that made the front page of the paper's metropolitan section.

WTLV general manager Kenneth Toning points out, rightly, that it is unfair to judge a newscast on one night's content, and that with only a "twenty minute window for news we have to prioritize" and "two storms in the South will occupy most of that window." Toning says that prior newscasts that week offered interviews with the school superintendent and coverage of local development issues. "I will tell you," he adds, "that we focus much more on local issues than anyone else," and "our style is more contemporary with more live shots."

Toning also maintains that he tries to pack major news and sports and weather "hits" into the first 12 minutes of the newscast, so as not to tease viewers, and that if the weather was teased that night, "it would be unusual....Part of what we try to promote is that we don't tease you."

**A**CTUALLY, IT'S UNFAIR TO SINGLE OUT JACKSONVILLE or WTLV because that newscast is probably little different in method and content (and maybe better if it really doesn't typically tease the top news, sports, and weather) than the one you watched last night. Local news is generally the opposite of journalism that cares about its customers. The information you've stayed up to get, such as the weather, is withheld to keep you watching as long as possible, while you are entertained with video of crime scenes, weather emergencies, or similar material that has all the content value—but also all of the raw and almost sordid appeal—of rubbernecking at a car accident.

Television news was once much different. But that was when those who ran the TV networks and their local affiliates were owner-founders, not managers of publicly held corporations that have to promise anonymous shareholders profit maximization. They made good money, but many also worried about public service and their standing in the community, factors that today's public-company CEOs can say they care about, and even do care about in the abstract, but which they can't responsibly act on if they are going to keep their pact with Wall Street. On Wall Street,

(continued on page 36)



In The Times Mirror Company's 1997 annual report, profits as well as journalistic values were stressed.

The average person  
works 44 years.

How would you feel about  
being below average?

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(continued from page 34)

making good money isn't enough. A CEO has to make more each year to keep the stock price growing. We all demand that when we, or our pension funds, invest.

At journalism seminars, academics and editors often debate what the key events were in what is perceived to be journalism's turn downward. It was the death of Edward R. Murrow. The arrogance bred by Watergate. The tabloidization of TV's syndicated shows. The spread of newspaper chains. O.J. Monica. My answer is different. For me, the turning point was when companies that do the news began to sell shares on the stock market, primarily so that the founding families could realize the value they had created.

## Journalism's turning point was not Watergate or O.J. It was when companies that do the news began to sell their shares on the stock market.

Going public on Wall Street is a completely natural and predictable process of capitalism, and the founders (or the generation that followed them) shouldn't be faulted for it. But in the process they gave up their right to do anything other than maximize profits. To be sure, some of the best of these companies—such as The Washington Post Co., The New York Times Co., and Dow Jones & Company, the publisher of *The Wall Street Journal*—set up stock voting structures that allow the founding families to maintain disproportionate control and thereby fend off unhappy shareholders if they fail to maximize shareholder value. The result is arguably good for journalism but, ironically, exactly the kind of undemocratic management entrenchment that these newspapers would probably editorialize against were it done on Wall Street by a widget company. Yet ultimately, even these family-controlled companies will have to bend to the will of Wall Street now that they are public, because as stock-owning family members multiply with each generation, or simply as these companies bow to the pressure of money managers to keep their own stock up, they will become increasingly focused on shareholder value and increasingly distant from the founders' other values. (That, in fact, is a process that probably describes in rough terms the state of The Times Mirror Company itself and its founding Chandler family.) The Sulzberger family that still controls The New York Times company but no longer owns a majority of the shares, can, luckily, still decide that they want to employ heroes like Judith Miller and William J. Broad (see page 65) to spend weeks or months working on stories that are hugely important to the world but might not be justified on a short-term cost-benefit analysis. But sooner or later that control and that ethic will slip away.

My point is that, in the short term, if NBC's parent, General Electric—run not by the benevolent Sulzbergers but by Jack Welch, the man widely regarded as the world's best corporate manager—is going to keep its promise to shareholders, it *should* gear its Tom Brokaw report to the news that draws the highest ratings. And it *should* make sure its *Dateline NBC* pro-

ducers know which segments attract the biggest audiences so that they can go get more of the same. And it *should* do all Monica all the time on MSNBC. This does not make Welch a bad person; it makes him someone who is keeping his promise to his shareholders. Ditto Curley and Gannett when it comes to programming the news on WTLV. However, as we'll see below, it may be that this is only a short-term calculus and that the same market forces that push Welch or Curley in this direction today could push them the opposite way before too long, as the Internet and other dynamics of the Information Age take hold.

Doctors, medical care, and HMOs offer an enlightening parallel. A doctor who practices for himself or with like-minded partners can spend as much time as he likes with a patient, even if that is not the most cost-effective use of his time. And he can order tests that he suspects the patient may not be able to afford because either he will eat the cost or some insurance company will. But once the doctor becomes the employee of a corporation, especially one with millions of public shareholders, he

or his bosses are obligated to make his time as cost-effective as possible and to look at those tests from a cold cost-benefit viewpoint. In other words, profits may bump against other values—the patient's health or state of mind—that we as a society care deeply about. That's why the government is stepping in to regulate those decisions when it comes to HMOs. But in a country with a First Amendment, the government can't step in to regulate editorial decisions so that profits aren't always the dominant value. We can depend only on the willingness of those involved to sacrifice the profits that they have promised shareholders—or on the marketplace to change.

It really doesn't do much good for journalists (who themselves would no doubt grouse if their own pension funds scored below the Dow) to wring their hands about this or demand that their managers be selfless. The managers really don't have a right to be, because they've promised the people who bought their stock that they would do whatever it takes within the law to maximize profits.

Does this mean that Willes is bound to take the venerable *Los Angeles Times* in the same direction as WTLV sooner or later? Probably not. For the major difference, in business terms, between a newspaper and a television channel has to do with the numbers that drive each business. Willes and his colleagues can—or at least should—rationalize covering stories that attract a small fraction of readers because what a paper cares about is its cumulative readership. If I buy the paper for its sports and you buy it for its gardening column and someone else buys it for its coverage of the school system, we all are part of its overall circulation number; for now, absent the kind of data that drives television, we're all part of the circulation numbers that an advertiser whose ad appears on the page opposite the Bosnia reporting has bought. On television, the advertiser on the sports show only pays for those viewers, just as the advertiser on a Bosnia documentary only pays for those viewers (which is why you haven't seen many Bosnia documentaries lately.)

Similarly, were Willes to overreact to the research of Kelly



Sole and her colleagues that says readers want “news-you-can-use” personal-finance information in the business section more than they want stories about international monetary policy, he’d risk losing the small number of high-demographic readers who might want that monetary policy coverage and would drop the paper were it not included. And that reader is part of the demographic data that boosts the paper as a whole, because that reader is typically known only to advertisers as a reader of the paper as a whole. A television channel, on the other hand, would get the benefit of that particular viewer watching a report on international monetary policy only for the show or the segment of the show watched by that viewer.

In short, newspapers (and magazines, too) run on information that is not nearly as economically efficient as television, and they run on a premise that is not nearly as efficient—that lots of people will buy the whole package in order to consume various parts of the product, rather than buying the specific parts separately. If the newspaper or magazine data became much better, and advertisers could know what Willes certainly would want to know—exactly who is reading which pages of the paper every day—the subsidy that the weak links (the not-so-popular articles) enjoy would be unmasked and perhaps eliminated. For now at least, the best Willes or anyone can do with their limited information is nip away at what seem to be the least cost-effective stories and areas of coverage.

Another way to put it is that a newspaper, unlike a specialized newsletter or a special-interest magazine, is a “bundled” product. All of it—sports, finance, foreign news, the gossip column—is bundled together and sold to readers and advertisers as one product. (Advertisers may buy into one particular section, but they are sold the readership of the entire paper.) Television, on the other hand, is the ultimately unbundled product. Customers click on and off to exactly what they want to watch—and advertisers get all of the information about viewership in a similarly unbundled package.

It’s because of the protection afforded the less-popular features in the bundled newspaper that Willes and his colleagues can afford to—indeed, should—carry that mix of stories. And it’s for that reason that newspaper companies like Gannett or The Washington Post Co. that also own television stations can and do pay more attention to the quality of the news in their papers than they do to the quality of the news carried by their television properties.

**A**LL IN ALL, IT LOOKS LIKE A PRETTY GLUM PICTURE: Journalism/media companies that are publicly held seem forever doomed to have inferior television journalism and will only grudgingly do good print journalism. But it’s really not that dark a picture at all. For while that may be the snapshot today, it may be that the same forces of the marketplace are destined to change all of it for the better.

One of the premises of this magazine is that consumers of the Information Age are going to get smarter and more demanding and, indeed, more willing to reward quality as they adjust to the vast new choices of the new age. Here’s how that could happen.

First, let’s consider a media product that’s even more unbun-

dled than television: on-line media. Interactive really means having unlimited choices when it comes to picking through what you want to read or watch and rejecting it in favor of something else the moment it stops satisfying you. Moreover, on-line advertisers can get even more unbundled information than that offered by Nielsen; they can find out exactly how many people read the page that has their ad on it. This would seem to mean that the only on-line media that will survive economically will be the ones that produce the pages with mass popularity. But that’s wrong, because what advertisers really care about is how many people see their ad and buy their products. And on-line advertising, unlike television, allows advertisers to know that, too. Advertisers can now typically know how many people click on to read an ad, and then how many people buy the product featured in the ad.

Second, the idea of “mass” in the Internet world of countless websites is not the same as it is, or was, when there were a handful of broadcast television stations.

Taken together, these two factors—the ability of advertisers to know where their ads are working and the need to hold viewers’ attention amid a menu of endless choices that makes truly mass audiences almost impossible to achieve—means that if anything is going to work on the Web economically, it’s going to have to be appealing enough to a certain group of committed viewers that they’ll stay with it and at the same time be the kind of people who will want to buy the products that are being advertised. A sports news site, for example, better not tease viewers the way my local New York stations do (“Did the Yankees win tonight? Stay tuned!”) or they’ll click to a place that doesn’t. A financial news site had better offer sophisticated, reliable information if it wants to attract and keep the sophisticated viewers who will buy products from financial advertisers. And a site that offers weather news will die quickly if it spends time trying to scare people before telling them the real weather.

**I**N SHORT, THE NEW INFORMATION AGE SPAWNED BY THE Web is creating a demanding, indeed spoiled, world of media consumers. And that may be our way back from the abyss, especially if as consumers we realize—and exert—the power we now have.

Which brings us back to Jacksonville. Whether the Web and television will ever merge onto one screen may be debatable. But it is not debatable that the Web and television are competing for the attention of viewers. And as using the computer gets easier, and as bandwidth gets more abundant so that dialing up a weather website becomes as easy as clicking a remote control, WTLV is going to be forced to act like it really cares about giving its viewers the straight story. If not, Gannett is going to pay the price on Wall Street.

What mystified me most watching WTLV that night as I read about Kelly Sole and Mark Willes is that television channels would dare to abuse their viewers so blatantly in an age when they have so many choices. True, WTLV is doing well in the ratings race in its market at 11 P.M. In fact, WTLV is viewed in television business circles as something of a phenomenon. Recently, its 11 o’clock news pulled almost even with the CBS affiliate—owned by The Washington Post Co.—which has long been dominant in town.

But together the three major television broadcast channels in Jacksonville have gone from having 68 percent of all television viewers in Jacksonville at 11 o'clock five years ago to 42 percent this past summer, while WTLV has gone from having 23 percent of all people watching television at 11 o'clock in 1993 to 18 percent this past summer. In other words, WTLV has been using their Nielsens to win the short term, day-to-day battle, but they are losing the war. Sooner or later, Wall Street will realize that and reward them only if they do the opposite.

It seems obvious that before too long a real market-oriented, shareholder-obsessed businessperson running television stations like WTLV—a real Mark Willes, if you will—might wake up and decide that the daily Nielsens aren't what should be

consumers remain dumb and undemanding, media products that assume they are dumb and undemanding will not have the free ride they have enjoyed in the roughly two decades since they became Wall Street investments.

In that same world of vast, unbundled choices, what Willes and all of us should realize is that a community newspaper—whether the community is Los Angeles, Peoria, Wall Street, or your town—has the chance to remain something truly different and extremely valuable. It can be the one unbundled product that brings the community together and speaks credibly to all its various elements. He's right to want to add more to make the paper more broadly appealing so that people don't retreat completely into the narrow worlds of their unbundled narrow

## In a world of seemingly limitless media choices, local TV news that depends on consumers being passive idiots may have trouble surviving.

guiding him. For over the mid- and long-term they are going to guide him into oblivion, as customers grow increasingly cynical about the horrible, customer-unfriendly product he is providing, whereupon they'll turn even more to cable, to the Web, or to other alternatives. Someday soon someone like Willes might take over a local television station and declare loudly that "We're going to be different. We know that what you really want first at eleven o'clock is the weather, so we're going to give it to you—and give it to you straight. And then we're going to tell you what's happening in your schools and at the zoning board and at City Hall and, yes, in your police precincts and at local theaters and restaurants. Maybe we'll charge more for commercials at the beginning when we flash the weather because that's when most of you are watching, and maybe we'll do other things to change the way business used to be done. Maybe we'll also lose total viewers, but, as on the Web, we'll make it back by having a more committed group of customers who are more disposed to buying the products of advertisers who are with us."

If on most nights WTLV's Toning really is, as he says, trying to pack news and weather into his first 12 minutes, he and others may already be on the way to doing that.

In short, we are heading into a world of seemingly limitless media choices. And the local TV news that depends on consumers being passive idiots who are just going to keep taking reports of hurricane threats that aren't really there should have trouble surviving in that environment.

Indeed, in a world of countless choices, simply trying to keep up with every competitor's effort to dumb things down, to scare people, or to tease them into staying tuned a bit longer seems like it can't be a winning strategy for everyone. With 10, 50, 100, or 500 channels, let alone 500 channels competing someday alongside a million websites available on the same screen with the same clicker, won't all be able to succeed doing that. They'll have to do something different and better, which, indeed, is something we can already see happening with local cable news channels and some of the better cable networks. Unless, in the face of a new world of infinite choices, media

products. But he'd be making a mistake if he didn't understand that part of the "uniqueness" he's selling is the ability and willingness of editors to decide what's important for people to know. Indeed, the community is paying his editors to lead as well as follow, to go find the

stories they didn't know they needed to know (and could, therefore, search for on the Web), whether it's a scandal at the zoning board or a war crime or nuclear proliferation threat on the other side of the world.

Will that play on Wall Street? Well, it turns out that the most valuable newspaper properties on Wall Street are those that have kept that faith—*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. And in the future they may be even more valuable if they continue to do seemingly un-Wall Street things like cover issues that don't attract mass audiences or even large numbers of their own readers. In print, and ultimately on the Web, they'll be the bedrock sources that people will depend on. I'm so convinced of this that if I were writing any of their annual reports or shareholder prospectuses (or if I were writing my own if I took this magazine public), I would preach the virtue from a long-term shareholder standpoint of eschewing short-term cost-benefit calculations that compromise good journalism. In short, journalistic integrity not only can be good business; it has proven to be good business.

So, yes, Willes should cut costs where he can, attract new readers wherever he can, and demand productivity from reporters who sometimes like to equate demands that they serve their readers with assaults on journalistic integrity. But if he's as smart as many people say he is, he'll also not forget that while that reporter in Moscow or Sacramento may not produce numbers in the short term, having them there is what gives his product long-term value, especially in a world of limitless but watered-down, dumbed-down media choices.

In fact, Willes is at least already talking the talk in, of all places, his company's current annual report. "We are increasingly convinced that if we use our growing financial strength appropriately," he writes to his shareholders, "we can help improve the performance of society. Doing so will make us more relevant and exciting to our readers and advertisers, which, in turn, will help us be more successful financially." Yes, that sounds like a platitude. But if you want to attach numbers to it, try comparing the equity value of *The New York Times* to that of the *New York Post*. ■

THE  
REVOLUTION  
ISN'T OVER,  
IT'S JUST  
BEGUN.



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# the notebook

## CONTROVERSY

# “A NIGHT TO SHUDDER”

## How the evening news shows covered the Starr report

**W**HEN THE HOT POTATO THAT IS THE STARR REPORT landed at the TV networks on the afternoon of September 11, many reporters found themselves reading lurid passages on the air in the rush to deliver the news as it came in. At the usually tame CNN, congressional correspon-

dent Candy Crowley read one of the most shocking—and most talked about—passages from the report verbatim: “On one occasion, the president inserted a cigar into [Lewinsky’s] vagina.”

For the evening newscasts a few hours later, producers were confronted with the task of condensing the contents of a 445-page report into a half-hour or hour-long show. One of the thorniest issues was how much sexual detail they should provide. MSNBC anchor Brian Williams told viewers the report had “stories we literally can’t repeat on the air.”

*Brill’s Content* selected six categories in which to compare their choices. The shows’ opening lines set the tones, which ranged from

### **CBS** EVENING NEWS WITH DAN RATHER

**ANCHOR’S OPENING LINE:** “A defining day for the future of President Clinton, special prosecutor Ken Starr, Congress, and the country.”

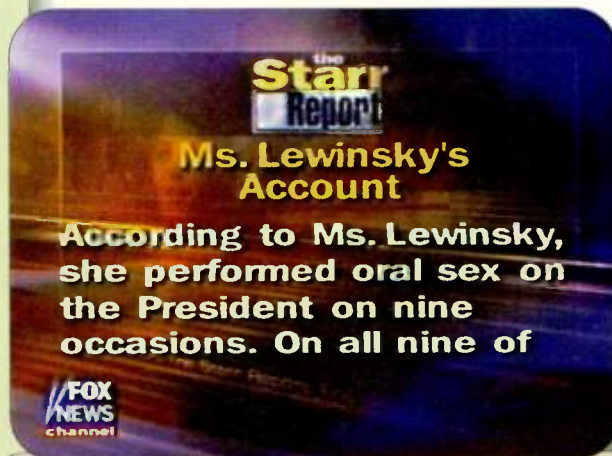
**SUMMARY:** Led with the soap opera-ish details of the Clinton-Lewinsky relationship, including their endearments (he called her “sweet”; she called him “handsome”) and Lewinsky’s testimony that she “never expected to fall in love”; continued with a sober recitation of the charges and of Clinton’s lawyers’ rebuttals.

**SEXUAL CONTENT:** Not very explicit; mentioned that “a cigar was used as a sex toy” and that the stain on Lewinsky’s dress matched the president’s DNA.

**OTHER NEWS:** Four brief stories including reports on Russia, Richard Holbrooke’s troubled nomination as U.N. ambassador, and tropical storms in Houston and New Orleans.

**FUNNIEST MOMENT:** Bob Schieffer describing the report being unsealed: “It had been advertised as steamy, and you could almost see the steam rising as the boxes came open.”

**NUMBER OF PLUGS FOR WEBSITE:** None.



A Fox News graphic from September 11 quoting from the Starr report (left); CNN’s Judy Woodruff and Wolf Blitzer that same evening (right).

### **ABC** WORLD NEWS TONIGHT WITH PETER JENNINGS

**ANCHOR’S OPENING LINE:** “There has not been a day like it.”

**SUMMARY:** An evenhanded explanation of the charges with lots of analysis; led with Clinton’s confession and avoided sexual details.

**SEXUAL CONTENT:** Not at all explicit; mentioned that one sexual encounter “occurred while Mr. Clinton was on the phone with a member of Congress”; did not mention cigar.

**OTHER NEWS:** None.

**FUNNIEST MOMENT:** None.

**NUMBER OF PLUGS FOR WEBSITE:** One.

### **NBC** NIGHTLY NEWS WITH TOM BROKAW

**ANCHOR’S OPENING LINE:** “It is a night to remember, and a night to shudder.”

**SUMMARY:** Outlined Starr’s charges, the president’s rebuttal, and congressional reaction. Featured an “In Depth” segment on the First Lady.

**SEXUAL CONTENT:** Moderately explicit; “the president told the grand jury that he never touched Lewinsky’s breast or other intimate parts of her body.”

**OTHER NEWS:** Brief stories on the stock market, Russia, and floods.

**FUNNIEST MOMENT:** A segment on forgiveness: it outlined a five-step program to achieve forgiveness and included an interview with a representative from The International Forgiveness Institute.

**NUMBER OF PLUGS FOR WEBSITE:** One.

dramatic to dull. Sexual explicitness varied widely, as did decisions about how much of the day's other news to include. Some of these shows stumbled on unavoidable ironies, or just stumbled, while trying to convey the sexual nature of the report without offending viewers. But however carefully the shows' scripts were worded, most broadcasts directed viewers to their websites, where they could see the full text of the report—unedited for television.



**CNN SPECIAL—INVESTIGATING THE PRESIDENT: THE STARR REPORT**

**ANCHOR'S OPENING LINE:** "This has been a stunning—some might say shocking—day in Washington."

**SUMMARY:** A thorough, highly legalistic explanation of each charge in Starr's report, with so much analysis it became repetitive.

**SEXUAL CONTENT:** Not very explicit; anchor Bernard Shaw warned viewers about "language some of you may find offensive" before correspondent Jonathan Karl quoted President Clinton explaining in his grand jury testimony that "If the deponent is the person who has oral sex performed on him, then the contact is with, not with anything on that list, but with the lips of another person."

**OTHER NEWS:** A brief look at the stock market.

**FUNNIEST MOMENT:** None.

**NUMBER OF PLUGS FOR WEBSITE:** One.

**FOX NEWS CHANNEL—SPECIAL REPORT WITH BRIT HUME**

**ANCHOR'S OPENING LINE:** "The Starr report alleges perjury, obstruction of justice, witness tampering, and abuse of power by President Clinton, all in an effort, it says, to cover up his relationship with Monica Lewinsky."

**SUMMARY:** Laid out the accusations and White House rebuttal at great length; evenhanded and dull, but refreshingly so.

**SEXUAL CONTENT:** Moderately explicit, but excerpts from the report were edited to eliminate certain words, as in this passage that flashed on the screen: "He touched her...both through her underwear and directly....On one occasion, the president (used) a cigar (to stimulate her)."

**OTHER NEWS:** Four brief stories, including one about two babies being named after Mark McGwire.

**FUNNIEST MOMENTS:** Brit Hume read from a statement by Congressman Sonny Callahan, who was on the phone with Clinton while Lewinsky performed oral sex on the president, according to the report: "I can say unequivocally and without hesitation that I had no knowledge that I was sharing the president's time or attention with anyone else."

**NUMBER OF PLUGS FOR WEBSITE:** None.

**MSNBC—THE NEWS WITH BRIAN WILLIAMS**

**ANCHOR'S OPENING LINE:** "The Clinton presidency is tonight badly crippled by Ken Starr's report."

**SUMMARY:** A fair hearing of Starr's charges and the White House response—even emphasizing, which most reports didn't, that Whitewater wasn't in the report—but with a decidedly negative, doomsday spin.

**SEXUAL CONTENT:** Explicit and extensive; Williams said it was "a huge report that we cannot even broadcast over the air," but later read at length from the highly detailed footnotes: "On nine of the ten occasions, Ms. Lewinsky performed oral sex on the President....On four occasions, the President also touched her genitalia. On one occasion the President inserted—and we will leave out the item and the act already alluded to in this broadcast—to stimulate her."

**OTHER NEWS:** Two brief stories: a 30-second story on the crash of Swissair flight 111 and a Wall Street roundup.

**FUNNIEST MOMENT:** An ad during the first commercial break for Berns Tobacco of Fair Lawn, N.J., which included shots of boxes filled with cigars.

**NUMBER OF PLUGS FOR WEBSITE:** Two.

*By Jennifer Greenstein, Kimberly Conniff, Leslie Heilbrunn, Dimitra Kessenides, Rachel Taylor, and Ari Voukydis*

ETHICS

## HOW WOULD YOU HANDLE THE DILEMMAS THAT JOURNALISTS FACE?

Here's how 5,655\* visitors to the Newseum, the museum of news in Arlington, Virginia, said they'd handle a hypothetical situation based on the case of a 1992 *Dateline NBC* segment in which the network simulated a truck explosion to illustrate a story on design flaws in General Motors trucks.

**Y**OU'RE A PRODUCER OF A network newsmagazine. You've learned about a teenager who died in a fiery crash. A design defect in his pickup is suspected. Telling his story might save lives. But after repeated attempts, you can't get one of these trucks to explode. It isn't good TV without riveting video.

### WHAT DO YOU DO?

28%

**A** Scrap the story. The truck won't blow up. Maybe it's safe.

14%

**B** Rig the pickup to explode. The story is important. Video is crucial.

56%

**C** Rig the explosion video, but admit that it's a "simulation."

\*Numbers current as of Sept. 16, 1998.

RUMOR MILL

## SIGNED, BORIS YELTSIN

**I**N MOSCOW, RUMORS ARE TAKEN more seriously than rubles. So the world took notice on August 27 when CBS News reported that the long-rumored resignation of Russian President Boris Yeltsin was now one step closer to becoming fact. Citing "sources within the Kremlin and close to the Yeltsin family," CBS News correspondent Richard Threlkeld said Yeltsin had signed a resignation letter earlier that day. "That resignation is not dated and will await the confirmation of his prime minister-designate, Viktor Chernomyrdin," cautioned Threlkeld. The midday report helped fuel a 357 point drop in the Dow Jones Industrial Average. The next day, the CBS report was cited by news outlets such as *The New York Times* and *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

But, as everyone now knows, Chernomyrdin never became prime minister (Yevgeny Primakov did)—and, as of this writing, Yeltsin's resignation has yet to materialize. What happened to the resignation letter? Threlkeld argues it existed but that his report fell victim to Russia's ever-changing political reality. "We were—and are—absolutely convinced that the scenario was true," says Threlkeld. He adds that three previously reliable sources confirmed the report before it aired and a fourth confirmed it after the fact. "[W]e have not only a Deep Throat, but a Full Throat, a Sore Throat, and a Strep Throat," wrote Threlkeld in a statement to *Brill's Content* after the *Village Voice* questioned Threlkeld's reporting.

Threlkeld does own up to one serious journalistic lapse: He never sought comment from the Kremlin before filing his story about Yeltsin's resignation. Threlkeld calls his mistake a violation of Journalism 101. "[I]t was



Boris Yeltsin may or may not have signed his resignation letter.

very busy, and everybody thought somebody else was doing it," he wrote. "No excuse, just a fact." Hours after CBS News aired its report, the Russian president's press office called it "false and fabricated."

At least one of Threlkeld's Moscow colleagues says the Kremlin was more reliable than CBS News on this story. "We felt and still feel that these were and are rumors," says Thomas Rolski, ABC News Moscow bureau chief. "That's why we did not go with that. We were, I admit, slightly surprised that CBS went as far as CBS did."

But isn't there a chance that Yeltsin did sign a resignation note, as CBS reported? "In this country," says Rolski, "there is a chance of everything."

—Ted Rose

(continued on page 44)

# Meet the personalities behind our new line of Natural Sweaters.

Starting at the top, that's our black sheep.

Black Welsh Mountain, to be exact. It's the only *completely* black breed grown in the British Isles.

Its wool is thick, fluffy, utterly beautiful. (Some English squires raise Black Welsh just to decorate the lawns of their country houses.)

So, you can see why we chose it as one of the four breeds that go into our new Lands' End® Natural Sweaters.

The others – in the snapshots next door – are Cheviot, Jacob, and Suffolk. (Take a ba-a-a, fellas.)

The fact is, each sheep has its own character. Which we've tried to capture by making each Natural Sweater from the wool of just one breed.

## A credit to its parents

By "natural," we mean the wool is exactly as Mother Nature created it.

We don't bleach it or dye it. The color is the sheep's own color.

For example, our Cheviot sweater is white, because a Cheviot sheep is white. And our Jacob sweater comes in a mix of brown and white, for the same reason.

The colors are subtle. A Cheviot's white is nothing like the white of a Suffolk.

For that matter, no two Cheviot sweaters are *exactly* the same. There are minor variations, just as there are in the sheep.

(Our sheep aren't cloned, needless to say.)

## Knit one, purl a flock

For the knitting, we go to a fine old mill in the English Midlands.

The knitters give our sweaters



a classic, timeless look – equally at home on the Scottish moors 50 years ago, or in your backyard next week.

And they knit each sweater to the exact size: M, L and so on.

(Some manufacturers *cut* their sweaters to size – which is why their sweaters don't fit or wear like ours.)

Maybe we should have illustrated our Natural Sweaters with big, colorful photos.

But frankly, we'd rather save that for the Lands' End catalog – where we can do these sweaters justice. Besides, we want you to read about all our other fine clothing – and the *neighborly* way we do business.

You see, you can call us at any hour. There's always a friendly soul on hand to answer questions, take your order – or just schmooze.

Get right down to it, there's nothing quite like shopping at Lands' End. Nobody's been able to clone *that* either.

Photos courtesy British Wool Marketing Board.  
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(continued from page 42)

INTERVIEW

# CNN LOSES CONTROL

**O**N THE NIGHT OF PRESIDENT Clinton's TV confession about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky, CNN's Charles Feldman hit the Los Angeles celebrity haunt Mortons to get post-speech sound bites. There he found Arsenio Hall—the comedian who put a saxophone-playing candidate Clinton on his talk show—and asked to interview him for a live news special.

What was supposed to be a group interview with Hall, Ben Stein (the writer and actor), and Diane Warren (the songwriter), never cut away from Hall. Among his comments on the President: "When I met him he was blowing a saxophone. Now he is a saxophone."

Then when Feldman asked, "Arsenio, you helped get him elected. He was on your show. So what do you think..." Hall went on a tear. "I'm so

sick of people f-----g with me, blame me for everything," he ranted. He then let loose a whirl of commentary on Hillary Clinton, John F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe, and Lewinsky, whom he called "a fat intern." Finally, the control room in Atlanta told Feldman to wrap up the interview, he says. Neither Stein nor Warren had a chance to speak.

CNN executives cut the interview when the special aired again later that night because Hall had used an obscenity, says CNN spokesman Steven Haworth. Feldman says that Hall apologized for using profanity, but Feldman sees nothing wrong with the rest of Hall's behavior. "It's not up to me to decide what somebody says is proper, especially an artist like Arsenio," he says.

Stein thinks Hall's behavior was outrageous. "He turned his comments about Clinton into an advertisement



Arsenio Hall, whose interview with CNN spun out of control.

for himself," he says, adding, "The moment [Hall] started jumping around, [Feldman] should have taken the microphone away." Hall refused to comment for this article.

Feldman says that it's not always easy to control a live broadcast. In fact, he says, Hall's spontaneity is what makes live TV news so effective.

—Rachel Lehmann-Haupt

MARKETING

# Consultant's Study Touts Clients, Snows Press

**O**N AUGUST 18, THE CORPORATE management consulting firm Shelley Taylor & Associates issued a press release about a study analyzing the websites of 50 of "Silicon Valley's hottest and most successful technology companies." Included was a list of Shelley Taylor's top ten corporate websites (including those belonging to Sun Microsystems, Inc., Cisco Systems, Inc., and Apple Computer Inc.), as well as ten from the bottom third of the list (including those belonging to Pixar and Yahoo!).

The study, "Missing Links in Silicon Valley," prompted stories in *The Wall Street Journal* and the *San Jose Mercury News*, and on CNET's News.com, among others. Each story listed examples of the top ten websites and, using data from the study, analyzed

what made them successful.

What the study didn't disclose—and what none of the articles mentioned—is that at the time of the study's release, five of those top ten websites belonged to Shelley Taylor clients.

"I guess we never thought of it because all of our research is completely independent," says Shelley Taylor, founder and managing director of the firm.

Only the *San Jose Mercury News* made any connection between the top ten websites in the Shelley Taylor study and Shelley Taylor's clientele by noting that the firm works with Cisco Systems. The paper also mentioned that the firm markets this type of research, along with its web consulting services, to corporate clients. "I didn't necessarily think a commercial relationship of that type made the information in their

study any less relevant," says *San Jose Mercury News* staff writer Stephen Buel.

As stories about the study appeared in the press, Shelley Taylor & Associates called all of the companies named in the study and invited them to a \$350 per-person "briefing" on how to improve their sites. Attendees were given an executive summary and the chance to buy the complete study for \$1,500 (minus the \$350 attendance fee). Between 10 and 15 companies, some of them already clients, had purchased the report as of mid-September.

*Wall Street Journal* staff reporter Don Clark, who wrote his paper's story on the study, declined to comment. CNET News.com staff writer Jim Hu says he examined the study, but it was a busy news day and "We figured this was something important to just put up."

—Noah Robischon  
(continued on page 46)





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(continued from page 44)

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

# BIG TOBACCO'S NEW BEST FRIEND

BY MARY ANN AKERS

**A**FTER YEARS OF BEING CRITICIZED in the media for a litany of sins, the tobacco industry couldn't be expected to look upon the press as an ally. But when Congress considered ending a key tax exemption for the industry this spring, it was the newspaper and magazine industry that leapt to Big Tobacco's defense.

In May, House Republicans proposed erasing the tobacco industry's tax deduction for advertising. (Like all businesses, the tobacco industry is allowed to deduct the costs associated with marketing its products.) The Republicans thought they had an easy way to pay for programs to reduce teenage smoking and drug use that were part of the tobacco bill then being discussed. They'd also get to look tough on the tobacco industry.

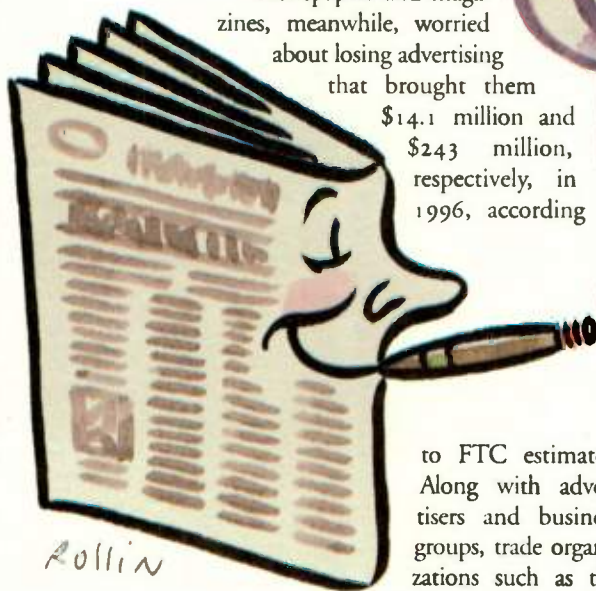
"I really liked the idea," says Representative Deborah Pryce, an Ohio Republican who led a task force in charge of writing a tobacco bill for the GOP leadership. "It just made a lot of sense."

The repeal would have cost the tobacco industry an estimated \$1.6 billion a year, raising the possibility that the companies might spend less on advertising. With cigarette manufacturers shelling out some \$5.1 billion on advertising and promotion in 1996, according to Federal Trade Commission estimates, many businesses stood to lose if the advertising tap ran dry.

Opposition to erasing the tax deduction took root within the advertising industry and spread from there throughout the business community and newspaper associations. "These advertising associations out there, they went crazy," says one source familiar

with the lobbying blitz. "They called everyone who is an advertiser and had them talk to the newspapers."

Newspapers and magazines, meanwhile, worried about losing advertising that brought them \$14.1 million and \$243 million, respectively, in 1996, according



to FTC estimates. Along with advertisers and business groups, trade organizations such as the

Newspaper Association of America, the National Newspaper Association, and the Magazine Publishers of America shifted their lobbying machines into high gear.

Members of Congress were approached by a variety of organizations. For example, Pryce was lobbied on the issue by the Ohio Newspaper Association, whose members include her hometown paper, *The Columbus Dispatch*. Her spokeswoman, Candice Perodeau, confirms that the newspaper association "did raise their opposition to elimination of the deduction."

Some smaller newspapers, where publishers and editors often are one and the same, took the case directly to the members of Congress without relying on associations or other lobbyists. Representative Scott McInnis, a Colorado Republican who served on the tobacco task force with Pryce, says

he was approached by "an editor" at a newspaper in his home state, but declined to name either the editor or the paper.

Potential lost ad revenue was "a concern," acknowledges George Gross, executive vice-president for government affairs at the Magazine Publishers of America. But he and the newspaper trade organizations insist money was not the core issue. "We get next to nothing of their advertising,"


says John Sturm, president of the Newspaper Association of America, which represents the business side of newspapers. "In our case, it is a matter of strict principle." He explains that "We are concerned that if Congress changes the deductibility for one product...if other products or services become disfavored in some fashion, they will use this weapon against other products or services as well." In addition, Sturm argues, the legislation would have encroached upon First Amendment free-speech rights.

"Of course there's an economic issue here," says one lobbyist who represented publishers and advertisers. But, like Sturm and Gross, the lobbyist says the "main issue" had to do with potential First Amendment violations and avoiding the use of tax law as an instrument of social policy.

Had Congress repealed the advertising deduction, says tobacco industry spokesman Scott Williams, there would likely have been "an immediate court challenge." In the end, though, that wasn't necessary. After the media lobbying, the provision was quietly dropped in June.

Newspapers and magazines seemed reluctant to take credit: According to a search of the LEXIS-NEXIS database, none of them wrote about their role in helping the tobacco companies. ■

(continued on page 48)

A photograph of Vanessa Williams in a radio studio. She is sitting at a desk, wearing a white button-down shirt and a dark skirt. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. To her right is a professional microphone on a stand. In the foreground, on a small table, is a glass of milk and a plate with a burger. The background is dark, suggesting a studio setting.

Beauty is not only skin deep. That's why I drink ice cold milk with my meals. It has calcium to help prevent osteoporosis. And when I'm not doing movies, albums or theater, I make time for my biggest fans: X-ray technicians.

got milk?

VANESSA WILLIAMS © 1998 NATIONAL FLUID MILK PROCESSOR PROMOTION BOARD

World Radio History

(continued from page 46)

## INVESTIGATION

# KCBS Takes Heat For An Accurate Restaurant Story

**B**EHIND THE KITCHEN DOOR," a KCBS-TV exposé on dirty restaurants that aired in Los Angeles last November, featured profoundly disturbing undercover video of rat droppings and roaches, rancid meat and vegetables, and cooks who licked their fingers and smoked while preparing customer meals. Through a California Public Records Act request, KCBS gained access to restaurant health inspection reports conducted from July 1995 through July 1997. The "startling findings" disclosed by investigative reporter Joel Grover: About 10 percent of Los Angeles County's 20,000 restaurants "failed" the inspections, and another 20 percent consistently received poor scores—below 70 on a 100-point scale.

The report prompted closures and cleanups at 400 restaurants, an overhaul of the inspection process, and a new letter-grading system. KCBS, meanwhile, received a commendation for "intrepid reportage" from the Los Angeles City Council. "It sort of took on a life of its own," says Grover.

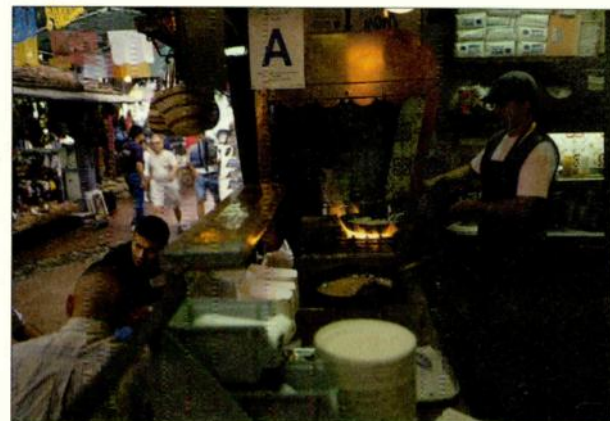
In the most recent development, the owner of Juanita's Mexican Cafe claims his eight-table restaurant in downtown L.A. was wrongly included on a list of the "failing 2,000" that KCBS posted on its website. Edward Flores says he was shocked to see Juanita's listed with an average score of

53.5 because, like all of the other restaurant owners implicated, he had never been given an inspection score.

Before the KCBS series (which did not mention Juanita's), inspection scores had never been disclosed to restaurant owners or the public, confirms a Department of Health Services spokeswoman. "The inspector would just give his general impression of the restaurant," this official says. "When they had violations, he would tell them to fix it." Nevertheless, as KCBS producer Adam Symson explained to Flores and other restaurant owners who called with questions, number-crunchers within the health department had graded the reports according to an internal formula.

Still, Flores was convinced that Juanita's mark on the KCBS website was incorrect, and demanded a retraction. KCBS stood by its numbers, prompting Flores to file suit against CBS and the health department, a move first reported by the *Los Angeles Times*. Flores claims the list, which KCBS took down early this year, continues to cost Juanita's \$5,000 a month in lost business.

Flores's lawyer, Steven Haney, argues that the health department provided KCBS with scores rating the performance of the inspector, not the restaurant. In a May 6, 1998, letter, CBS assistant general counsel Sandra Williams rejected Haney's claim:



The owner of Juanita's Cafe, shown above, disputed its poor grade in a health department restaurant report made public by KCBS.

"Contrary to your assertion, the scores used by KCBS-TV in its stories were maintained by the Los Angeles County Department of Health for the purpose of evaluating the cleanliness of restaurant kitchens." In a statement prepared for *Brill's Content*, Williams described KCBS's reporting as "fair and accurate."

Indeed, by tabulating violations cited on the two Juanita inspections included in the KCBS report and calculating an average score according to the formula used by the health department at the time, the score posted by the station appears correct. Asked for comment, Flores and Haney change tacks, insisting that even if the score was accurate, it was misleading, noting that in its most recent inspection, Juanita's earned an "A." —D.M. Osborne

## Bookmarks of Gossip Columnists

### Michael Musto

Village Voice

**People Online** ([www.pathfinder.com/people/](http://www.pathfinder.com/people/))—"An informative and juicy geyser of celebrity gossip."

**E! Online** ([www.eonline.com/](http://www.eonline.com/))—"I don't only like [it] because I work for that channel (*The Gossip Show*). It happens to brim with tidbits, live chats, rumors, speculations, and deep dish—all the things that are like air to me."

**newyork.sidewalk** ([newyork.sidewalk.com/](http://newyork.sidewalk.com/))—"It features a variety of Best of New York polls, entertainment ideas, and tips on alleviating the ruthlessness of city living."

**PopcornQ** ([www.planetout.com/pno/popcornq/](http://www.planetout.com/pno/popcornq/))—"Offers comprehensive gay movie info with toppings."

### Ted Casablanca

E! Online

**www.datinghell.com** ([www.datinghell.com/](http://www.datinghell.com/))—"I'm single, over 35, and I live in L.A., ask no more.) It's sort of Helen Gurley Brown meets a more honest Nathan Lane. And you certainly don't have to be a *Cosmo* girl to identify."

**New York Post gossips** ([www.nypostonline.com/gossip/gossip.htm](http://www.nypostonline.com/gossip/gossip.htm))

### Jeanne Wolf

TU Guide/YM

**E! Online** ([www.eonline.com/](http://www.eonline.com/))—"I check it every day to see if I'm on there and also to check out all the other show business news. They have the best."

**Drudge Report** ([www.drudgereport.com/](http://www.drudgereport.com/))—"The smartest thing he did was create that base of links. Drudge proved that if you go to one central source it's easy to cruise from there."

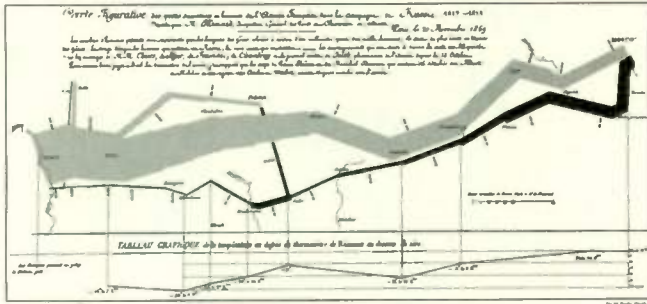
**MX BookFinder** ([www.mxbookfinder.com/](http://www.mxbookfinder.com/))—"It will find any out-of-print or used book."

**weather.com** ([www.weather.com/twc/homepage.twc/](http://www.weather.com/twc/homepage.twc/))—"I travel constantly." —compiled by Michael Kadish

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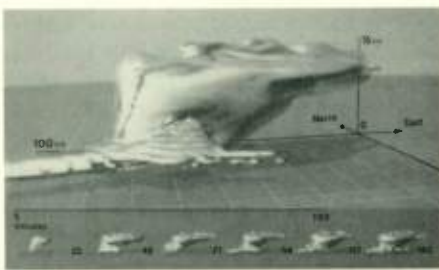
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(continued from page 48)

POLITICS

# EXIT-POLL RESULTS:

The public is the last to know.

By Warren Mitofsky with additional reporting by Noah Robischon

VOTERS WILL HAVE TO WAIT until the polls close on Election Day to find out whether their favorite congressional candidate won or learn who controls the governor's mansion in their state. But early that afternoon, the network exit-poll consortium will open the computer spigot to its members and subscribers. Within minutes, political insiders—politicos and journalists alike—will be buzzing with the results. All this happens despite an agreement among consortium members not to reveal exit-poll projections to the public until polls close.

It is considered bad form to broadcast early exit-poll estimates before polls close because doing so could discourage late voters from casting ballots. However, journalists and politicians consider themselves an elite class that is able handle this potent news without contamination. Throughout Election Day they clamor for it while they protect the citizens' right to remain uninformed. It will happen on November 3, just as it has happened every Election Day since November 1967, when exit polls were first used.

Why should the public care? Because early exit-poll results influence print and broadcast news reporting. They also affect get-out-the-vote efforts by politicians and the spin their consultants put out to the press. They can even affect the stock market.

I conducted many exit polls that were leaked to journalists and politicians. (I started polling for CBS News in 1967, and in 1990 and 1992 conducted polls for Voter News Service, the exit-poll consortium that consists of

*Warren Mitofsky was Executive Director of the CBS News Election and Survey Unit from 1973 through 1990. He is now a polling consultant.*

CBS, ABC, NBC, Fox, CNN, and the Associated Press.) The election results you hear on the networks and read in the newspapers come in great part from VNS, which also counts the real votes when the polls close.

On Election Day, exit pollsters interview voters as they leave their polling places. Throughout the day the pollsters in the field transmit their results to a computer center where the results are combined with those from other precincts. A computer-based model produces estimates of the election outcome each time new data becomes available. These estimates are transmitted to the networks, local television stations, and newspapers that subscribe to the network service. The exit-poll estimates are then leaked by staffers at various news organizations to their many friends and acquaintances in and out of politics. In fact, these exit-poll results are stock-brokered like commodities—used by campaign sources and journalists to squeeze more information from one another.

The practice is commonplace. Who takes part? "It's executives, it's producers, it's reporters, it's lots of people," says David Buksbaum, a former vice-president of CBS News. (Three other people interviewed for this article confirm Buksbaum's assertion, including CBS News senior political editor Dotty Lynch, CNN political director Thomas Hannon, and retired CBS News political director Martin Plissner.) Even Phil Donahue somehow got wind of early estimates for the 1992 New York primary and broadcast them on his afternoon TV show. Fact is, I too have leaked this information. In a business where information is king, those with access to the computer estimates are trading information



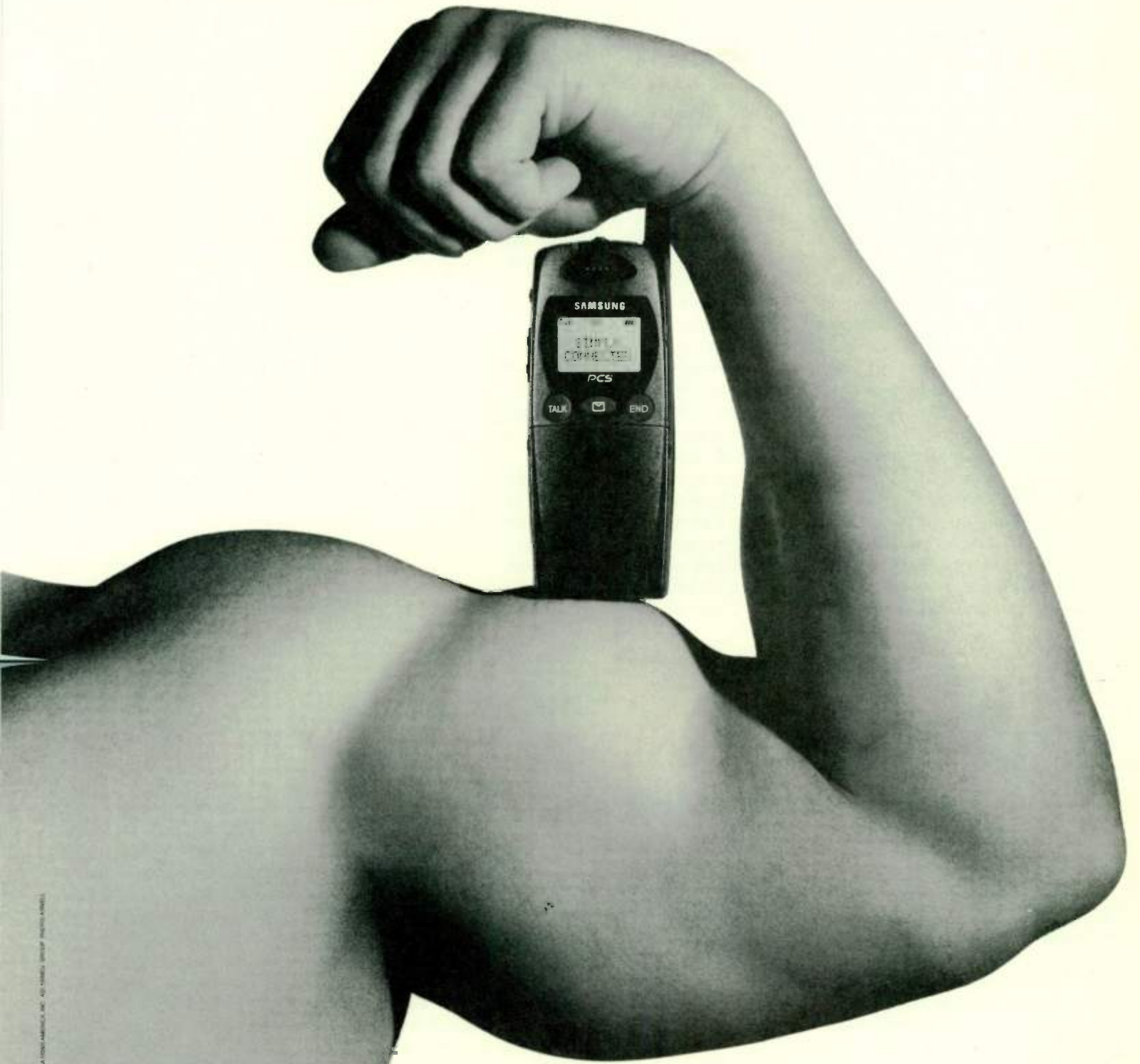
with other journalists, politicians, or other news sources in return for past or future favors.

"One of the things that tends to happen is that your own sources, the people whom you're badgering month in and month out for information... look to election night as a time for some payback," says Plissner.

For impact, consider what happened during the New Hampshire presidential primary in 1992. Early results from exit polls showed that Patrick Buchanan was giving President George Bush a tougher race than had been expected. (President Bush did win.) Shortly after noon on primary day, the results started leaking out. My stockbroker, Jessica Leeds, called at about 1 P.M. and said the news had already reached Wall Street. Up until then, the market had been rising steadily. "Two minutes into the news leaking out, the stock market changed its direction and went another way," recalls Leeds. The market took a downturn and continued to fall the rest of the day. The Dow Jones Industrial Average had dropped 21.24 points when the market closed. The next day on CNN's *Moneyline*, Lou Dobbs said that the markets had been "buzzing with

(continued on page 52)

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**SAMSUNG**

World Radio History

(continued from page 50)

rumors” of early exit polls that sent bond prices lower. And one week later, the vice-chairman of the Federal Reserve Board explained one possible reason for the market drop: “Another hypothesis is that exit polls from New Hampshire started to leak that afternoon.”

In 1980, after the Reagan landslide, members of Congress began calling on the networks to withhold projections until the conclusion of the voting. They did not want even veiled hints about the outcome broadcast to the public. Former congressman Timothy Wirth, a Colorado Democrat, was a leader in this fight; he championed a House resolution formally urging the networks to keep exit-poll results secret until polls closed. (The resolution passed the House on June 26, 1984, and passed the Senate on September 21, 1984.)

Following Iowa’s Democratic caucuses in 1984, before Wirth’s resolution had passed, he was particularly irked at CBS News for announcing Walter Mondale’s win shortly after the caucuses started, because hundreds of Iowa voters learned the projected results before or during their decision-making

process. It was feared but never proven that CBS’s early projection was a self-fulfilling prophecy. Wirth immediately scheduled a hearing on early projections before the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications, Consumer Protection, and Finance which he chaired. Executives from ABC News, NBC News, CBS News, and CNN, who were called to testify before the committee, were taken to task by Wirth.

That hearing took place the day before the New Hampshire primary. On the day of that primary, Reid Collins, then a correspondent for CBS radio, went to conduct an interview with Wirth before which, Collins says, Wirth discussed the early exit poll returns that showed fellow Coloradan Gary Hart in the lead. Hart was indeed the upset winner over Mondale that day in New Hampshire.

Wirth, now the president of the United Nations Foundation, says he does not remember the discussion with Collins. But he says there is a difference between discussing exit-poll results one-on-one and broadcasting them to the public. “Journalists make decisions all

the time about what is news and what isn’t news. That’s one of the things the public asks you to do,” says Wirth. “The public also asks you not to electioneer.” Wirth does not address the hypocrisy of a system in which the political elites are privy to information that regular citizens are deemed incapable of handling.

There’s another problem with early exit-poll information: It’s unlikely to be trustworthy. The first estimates are the least reliable; as more data flows in, the projections become more reliable. And because different groups of voters have historically gone to the polls in larger numbers at different times of the day, a poll leaked at midday cannot provide a trustworthy forecast of the final result, unless that result is a landslide. It would be like predicting the final score of a football game at halftime. It may be correct sometimes, but surely not often enough to be reliable.

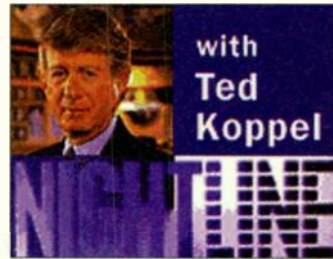
But that hasn’t stopped the insiders from disseminating that information—albeit selectively—with subtle though noteworthy consequences for the public. And the public remains none the wiser. ■

## MISTAKE

# NIGHTLINE’S CANDID CORRECTION

**O**N AUGUST 20, MHAMED Chelaifa, the Tunisian embassy’s charge d’affaires in Washington, D.C., was watching a *Nightline* special report on the U.S. missile attacks in Afghanistan and Sudan when, he says, a report by correspondent John Miller caught his attention. “Sources say [Osama bin Laden] has other training camps in Tunisia, in the Philippines, in Bosnia,” reported Miller. “Those may still be operating.”

The next morning, Chelaifa says, he called *Nightline* anchor Ted Koppel and explained that such “information and accusations [about terrorist training camps in Tunisia] were unrealistic, even surrealistic.” Miller says he got a call from a Washington, D.C., lawyer representing



ABC’s *Nightline* was quick to correct an error about terrorist training camps in Tunisia.

the Tunisian government who voiced similar concerns.

Looking back over his notes, Miller says, he realized a seemingly small but crucial mistake had been made. “A map

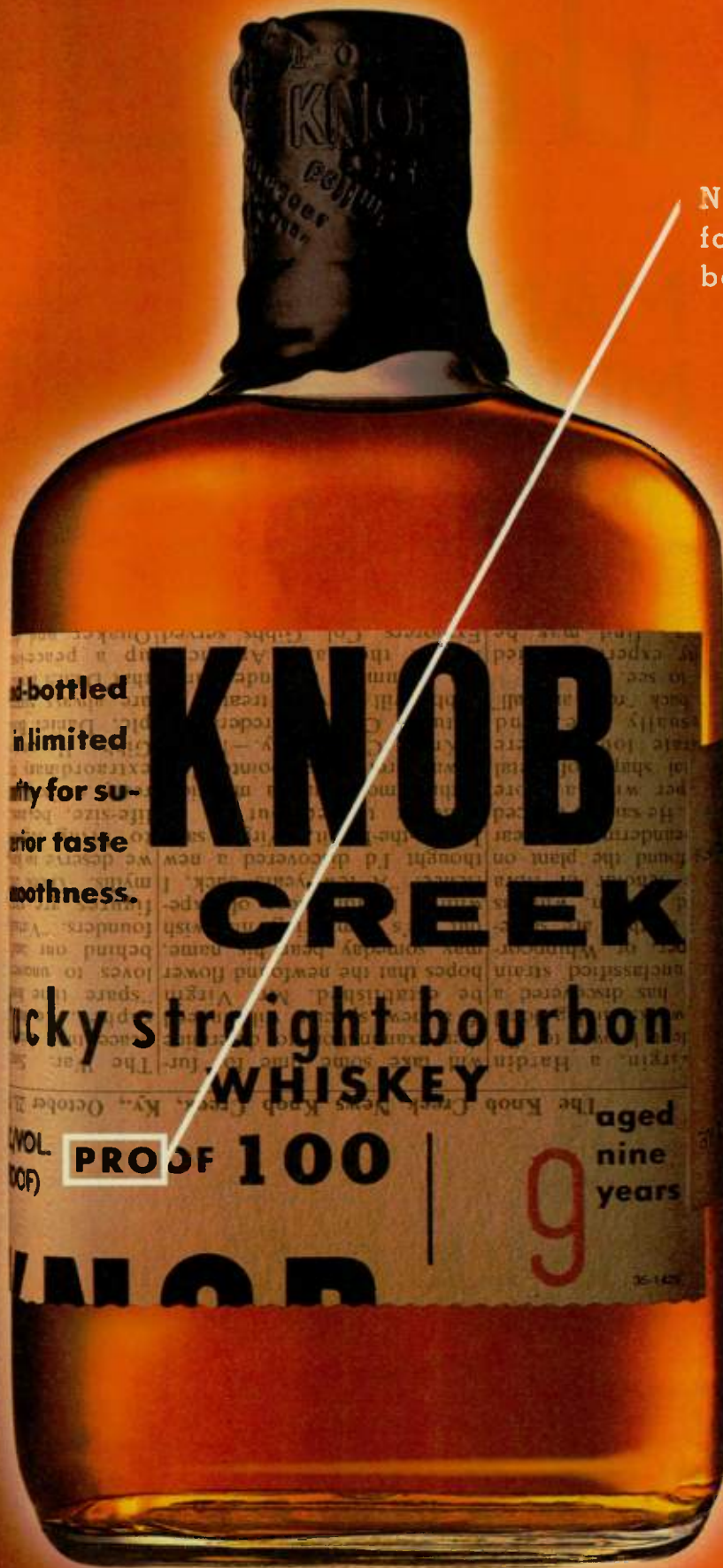
we had used showed [Tunisia] did not have terrorist training camps, they had terrorist cells,” he explains. And while saying that a country has terrorist training camps “almost indicates the government is involved,” he continues, terrorist cells can be found nearly everywhere. “Heck, we have terrorist cells here [in the United States].”

Chelaifa says Koppel—whom he

refers to as “a gentleman”—soon called him back. “He apologized and said he would correct it in his next broadcast,” the charge d’affaires recalls happily. Indeed, the next day, *Nightline* began with an important note: “Our special report last night included the charge that Osama bin Laden operated a terrorist training camp in Tunisia,” Koppel said. “That piece of information, we have now learned, is inaccurate and we’d like to offer our apologies to the Tunisian government.” Koppel declined to comment for this article.

This was “not just a mistake,” continues Miller. “It had a deeper meaning.” And, explains Richard Harris, a *Nightline* senior producer, “Once we realized the mistake, the only thing to do was to correct the record.” —Rachel Taylor





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## HOW MANY? HOW MUCH? WHO KNOWS?

Analysts tell us how many people are on-line and how much they spend there, but research methods vary widely and no one knows which—if any—analysts are right. • BY JENNIFER GREENSTEIN

**O**N JUNE 29, *THE DENVER Post* told its readers that local merchants such as the Twist and Shout music store and Camp Kazoo, a baby-goods manufacturer, were investing in technology that would let them sell their CDs and baby pillows over the Internet. The companies were beefing up their websites even though, as they readily conceded, current on-line sales accounted for a tiny fraction of their business—less than 5 percent for Twist and Shout, less than 1 percent for Camp Kazoo. What, then, was driving them to invest in the Web? The “buzz” about the Internet and about how much consumers will be spending to make purchases over the Web in the next few years.

The newspaper said on-line consumer retailing (rather than business-to-business retailing) would account for \$4.8 billion in sales this year and \$17.4 billion in 2001. Its source for both figures: Forrester Research, Inc., a technology research firm. Those are impressive numbers, but not as impressive as those cited by *The New York Times* in an August 10 story that estimated that on-line shopping would account for \$5.8 billion in sales this year and \$37.5 billion in 2002. The source the *Times* cited for

Staff writer Jennifer Greenstein wrote about Vogue's take on teenage fashion in the October issue.

those figures? Jupiter Communications, LLC, another research company.

Who are these research firms, and how do they come up with their numbers? And whose figures—if any—are correct?

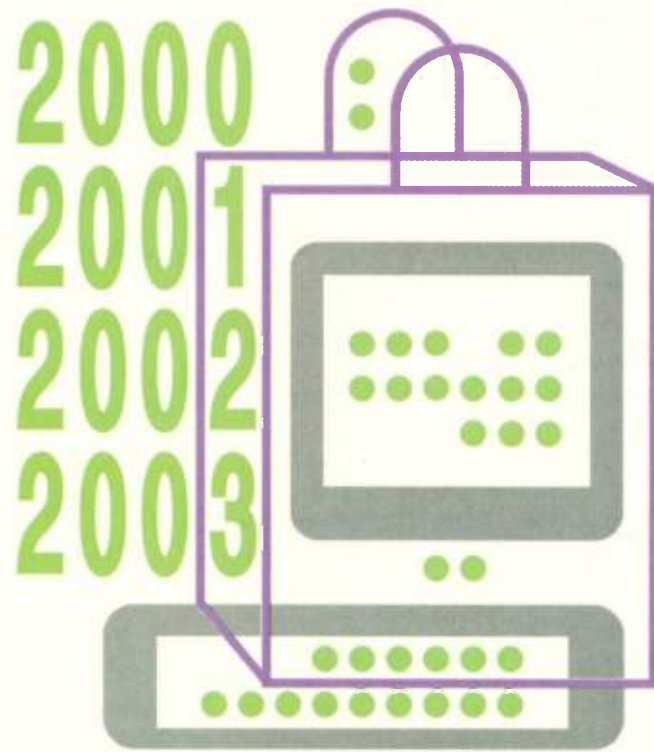
The analysts at Jupiter and Forrester have become the Internet's go-to guys, cited in news stories for everything from their evaluations of America Online, Inc.'s latest strategy to their judgments about whether phone calls over the Internet will catch on with the public. Because of the growth of the Internet in the last few years and the number of companies plunging into cyber-commerce, there's been a demand for analysts—and purported analysts—to explain technical points and forecast trends. “People are thirsty for advice and expertise because everyone's got a confidence problem,” says Gil Fuchsberg, corporate director of new media at The Interpublic Group of Companies, Inc., which owns several large advertising agencies.

Companies like Forrester and Jupiter conduct what they bill as detailed research about the Internet and produce forecasts on dozens of areas of interactive media: How many people will have Internet access in the coming years? How much revenue will a single industry, like travel, earn from the Web? How successful will new Web technologies be? Jupiter and Forrester charge their corporate clients yearly

fees for their reports, newsletters, and analysts' advice. Jupiter also sells its reports individually for thousands of dollars apiece.

New York-based Jupiter, founded in 1986 to study consumer interactivity, has 134 employees. Forrester, headquartered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, conducts research about consumers and the business applications of new technologies. Founded in 1983, it has 300 employees.

How do these research firms arrive



at their projections? *Brill's Content* examined the methods used by Forrester and Jupiter, which are generally seen as the leaders in the rapidly growing field of Internet industry analysis. We also checked out Cyber Dialogue, a younger company that, with the 1997 acquisition of the emerging technology division of research firm FIND/SVP, Inc., is positioning itself to challenge the dominance of the two market lead-

ers. There are almost a dozen other firms that do similar projections, including International Data Corporation; the Yankee Group, Inc.; Media Metrix, Inc.; Zona Research, Inc.; and Relevant-Knowledge, Inc. These firms either haven't yet gained high profiles in the media or don't develop estimates of the two figures we examined: projections for on-line shopping revenue and for the total number of Internet users. Both figures are frequently cited in the media as indicators of the Internet's popularity.

To make projections about what consumers will do, Jupiter and Forrester have mainly relied on interviews with executives at on-line retailers. Both companies also have used a limited amount of consumer research: Forrester began surveying between 100 and 300 consumers for most of its reports in April 1996. Jupiter conducted two or three consumer surveys a year, mostly by pairing up with other companies, including one broad study in 1996 of about 3,000 people. In the last year, both companies have begun surveying consumers on a broader scale. That new research is being incorporated into their projections, but neither company used it to derive their current on-line shopping figures. Cyber Dialogue has always relied on consumer research for its projections about consumer behavior.

Reporters get the best tidbits from these reports for free because media mentions are good for business. "It's definitely the way we market ourselves and build a brand," says Adam Schoenfeld, vice-president and senior analyst at Jupiter. Stuart Woodring, vice-president of Forrester's information technology research, agrees: "The best way we can gain credibility and visibility is to have our analysts talk to reporters." At Forrester, in fact, analysts' bonuses are based in part on how often their names appear in news stories. "It's not that [analysts'] only goal is to get quoted," Woodring says, "but it's one of the ways we establish that they're doing a good job."

Each analyst is informed of the number of media citations he or she should be aiming for. Mainstream publications like *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* typically carry more weight than trade publications.

Reporters, meanwhile, like quoting the forecasts because they give stories a voice of authority. Penny Parker, author of *The Denver Post* story that cited Forrester's forecasts, says she used the figures because they gave the article "a little credibility." Her criterion for selecting Forrester over another on-line research firm was simple: "Which one will call me back?"

Evan Schwartz, an occasional columnist for *The New York Times* who quoted the Jupiter figures in August, says he used them because he needed specific numbers to support his contention that on-line shopping will be big business. "As business reporters, we know that there's a lot of hocus-pocus involved in those numbers, but they're better than nothing," he says. "It's a bit of a trap. You need the numbers, but you know they're not very reliable."

Two weeks after Schwartz's column appeared, a *Times* story by Sana Siwolop cited Forrester's more conservative on-line shopping figures. How should a *Times* reader reconcile those different estimates? "It's all vague enough, in terms of what these groups are trying to do, that people have to just assume that on this day, it's somebody's best guess on where it's going," says Tim Race, the *Times's* Monday business editor.

Projections come with caveats. These companies make predictions three and four years into the future for an industry that is in its infancy. Some of their methods have built-in problems. For example, asking companies to project their sales for the next year has an obvious flaw: Those companies may be inclined to give the information a positive spin, says Donna Hoffman, a professor at the Owen Graduate School of Management at Vanderbilt University and codirector of a research center that studies the commercialization of the Internet. As an executive of a company, "I'm not going to say something that would make me look bad," she says.

(continued on page 56)

## THREE COMPANIES PROJECT DIFFERENT FUTURES

When Jupiter Communications, Forrester Research, and Cyber Dialogue project on-line population and shopping on-line for the years 1998 through 2002, they come up with different results.

ON-LINE SHOPPING REVENUE IN BILLIONS					
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
JUPITER COMMUNICATIONS <b>jup.com</b>	\$5.8	\$9.9	\$15.6	\$24.5	\$37.5
FORRESTER	\$4.8	\$7.9	\$12.0	\$17.4	N/A
cyber dialogue	\$6.2	\$10.8	\$16.8	\$24.8	\$34.7
ON-LINE POPULATION IN MILLIONS					
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
JUPITER COMMUNICATIONS <b>jup.com</b>	63.3	76.0	87.3	98.7	116.3
FORRESTER	51.0	66.0	85.0	99.0	N/A
cyber dialogue	51.7	61.8	72.0	82.2	92.4

Source: Jupiter Communications, *1998 Online Shopping Report*; Forrester Research, *Retail Revs Up*, October 1997; and Cyber Dialogue's *Consumer Online Commerce*, April 1998. Cyber Dialogue's report includes two projections for on-line population, a nominal forecast and an accelerated forecast. Our chart has the figures from the accelerated forecast.

(continued from page 55)

Reports from outside sources that predict Internet shopping will be booming in the years ahead can help lure investors to Internet companies looking for capital. "The ulterior motive for firms, particularly for new media, is the financing need," says Julio Gomez, a former Forrester analyst who now runs a research firm that analyzes on-line banking services and brokerages. "They need to raise money. If there's no one out there talking about how big the on-line market is going to be, they have to make the case themselves to potential investors."

Kate Delhagen, director of Forrester's on-line retail strategies group, concedes it's sometimes difficult to know if a company is giving an accurate account of its projections or financial plans. "They may have some other dynamics going on that may lead them to over- or underforecast. In some cases, it's hard to tell if they're being too aggressive or too conservative," she says. Will companies give rosier answers to make themselves look better? In many cases, says Delhagen, she has found just the opposite. She says that because on-line commerce is so new, retailers from whom she has

sought earnings predictions sometimes answered, "You tell me." Many companies later found they had underestimated revenues, Delhagen says. She is certain that Forrester's on-line shopping projections will prove to be conservative.

Evan Cohen, Jupiter's group director of data research, says consumer data can be untrustworthy as well. "Self-reported spending intention can be notoriously unreliable, especially when it's something new, like will you buy groceries on the Web?" he says. "So we're always cross-checking it" with company information. Cohen says

(continued on page 58)

## ERROR SPACE

Advertisers are profiting from your mistakes.

• BY RACHEL LEHMANN-HAUPT

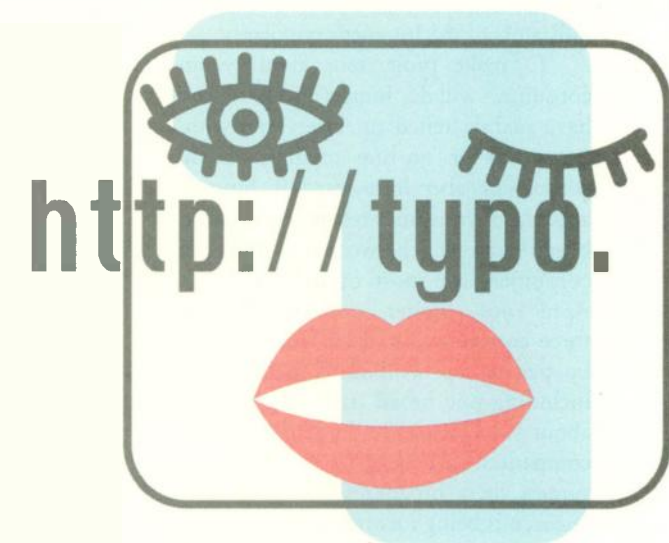
**W**HEN PROGRAMMERS Robert Hoffer and Timothy Kay spent 15 minutes writing a few clever lines of computer code in February 1997, they never thought they would stumble onto a new frontier of ad space. Hoffer and Kay—whose company, Querylabs, Inc., builds web search engines—were up late one night programming when Hoffer accidentally typed "Yahoo.com" into his browser while trying to get to the web directory Yahoo.com. As he waited for the browser's pop-up window to inform him that he had typed the wrong entry, he had an idea.

By adding a few lines of code to his database program, he discovered that he could automatically redirect his browser to the right Web address—Yahoo.com. That same month, the two researchers bought the domain names Yahoo.com and Micorsoft.com for \$100 each and founded a service called Typo.net. Hoffer's mistake had led to a whole new territory in which to stake an ad: error space.

Now typos such as www.playboy.com (for the website www.paybloy.com) or wwwnytime.com (for the on-line version of *The New York Times*, which is www.nytimes.com) takes you via Hoffer

and Kay's program to a page that tells you that you've made an error before automatically pushing you to the correct website—but not before showing you an ad for the on-line sports information service SportsFlash. Hoffer's friend Peter Levitan, the president of New Jersey Online (the company that produces SportsFlash), donated the ad to the researchers' experiment. (Hoffer will not disclose how many domain names he currently owns or how many ads—if any—he has sold.)

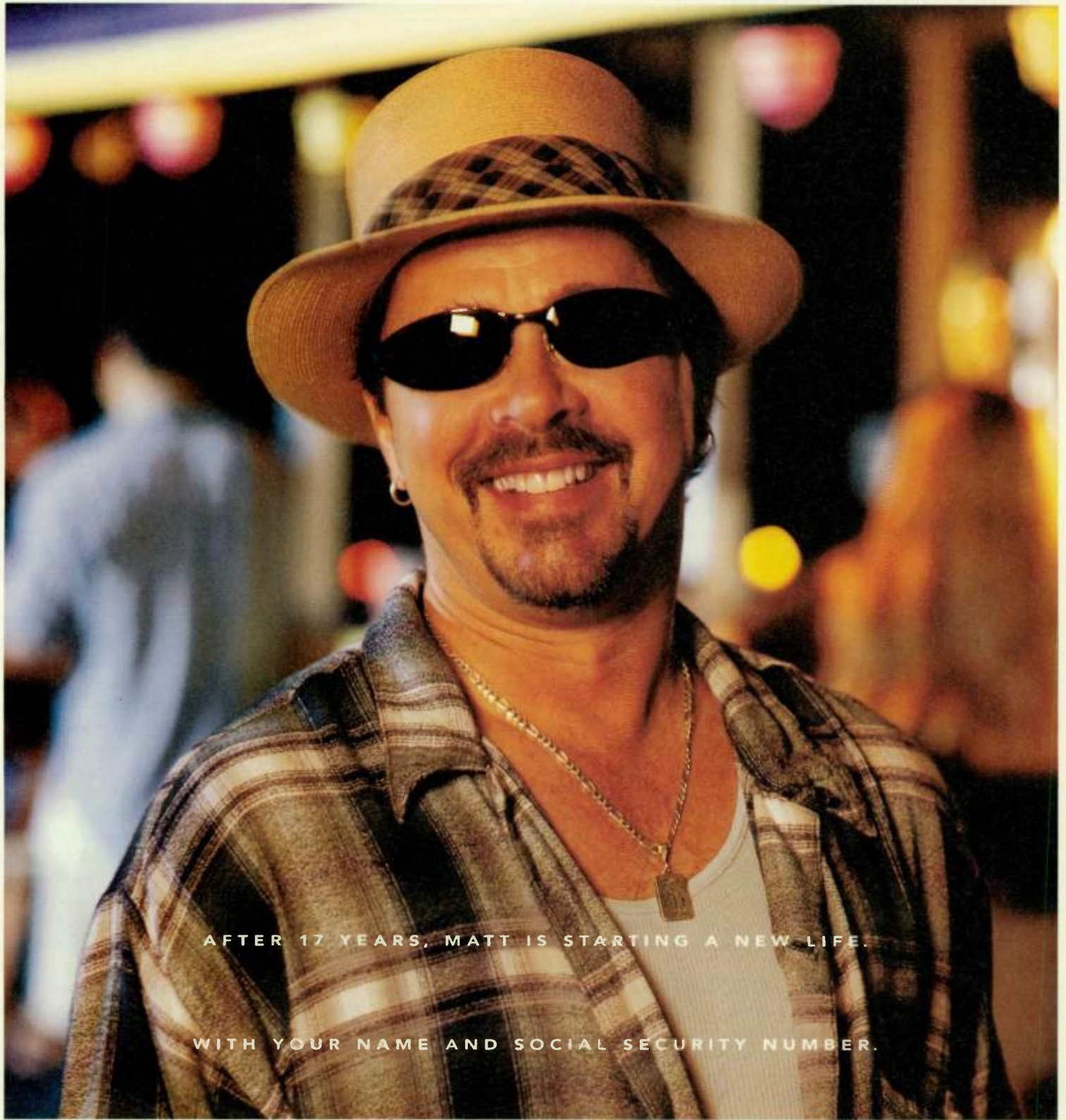
A web consulting firm called Data Art Enterprises has staked its own commercial claim on error space by registering 200 typos—including www.microsoft.com (instead of www.microsoft.com), and wwwcnn.com (instead of www.cnn.com)—that lead to a page of banner ads. Although the company has sold ads to a sweepstakes company and to an athletic shoe company, its site currently shows ads only for one of Data Art's own products, an on-line phonebook and time-management service. That's because Eugene Goland, the company's 28-year-old president, says he has received 20 cease-and-desist letters over the past year from companies such as Microsoft Corporation and CNN expressing concern over trademark



infringement. He also added software similar to Hoffer's that automatically pushes users to the correct sites.

But Goland says he will not stop using the misspelled domain names because his lawyer says he is not breaking the law. His lawyer, Richard Scarola of New York, did not return four phone calls from *Brill's Content*. But Dan Burk, an expert on intellectual property at the Seton Hall University School of Law, and Pamela Samuelson, an expert on intellectual property at the University of California's Boalt School of Law, both say there is no case law regarding misspelled domain names. They agree that, based on similar cases having to do with misdialled telephone numbers, Goland is probably safe as long as he posts a disclaimer saying a user has made a typo and the error-space site is not affiliated with the company in question. ■

ANDERS WENNGREN



AFTER 17 YEARS, MATT IS STARTING A NEW LIFE.

WITH YOUR NAME AND SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER.

Until now, when you gave out personal information on the web you had no idea where it could end up. The TRUSTe symbol gives you the power to find out.

**TRUSTe**  
www.truste.org

TRUSTe is an independent non-profit initiative sponsored by: AT&T, CyberCash, Excite, IBM, InterNex, Lands' End, MatchLogic, Netcom, Netscape, Oracle, Tandem and Wired. ©1997 TRUSTe

(continued from page 56)

Jupiter's figures are also generally conservative. Jupiter predicted on-line sales of travel goods would be \$816 million in 1997. An assessment by Jupiter after the year ended showed the actual figure to be \$911 million. "We feel better that we're on the low side than the high side," he says.

"No methodology is a hundred percent foolproof," says Peter Clemente, vice-president of the Internet strategies group at Cyber Dialogue. The methods of all three companies have drawbacks, but because no one has actual numbers, people will continue to rely on these projections—and reporters will continue to quote them—in an effort to quantify the Web's future. The best way to give these projections the weight they deserve is by understanding how each is formulated.

Keep in mind an experiment Jupiter once conducted: While one analyst studied the gaming industry using the company's usual methods, senior analyst Schoenfeld did what he calls "my back of the envelope projection," using the wisdom he has developed in his four years studying the on-line industry. How did Schoenfeld's educated guesses measure up to the so-called real results? "They were not off by more than five percent in any year," he says.

The following comparisons of how the three firms calculate figures for on-line population and on-line shopping show why they come up with different figures for the same projection.

## ON-LINE POPULATION

**FORRESTER**—Forrester's figures are for the United States and Canada, and count anyone 18 and older who has used the Internet three times in the last three months.

**JUPITER**—Covering the U.S. only, Jupiter's figures account for individuals 2 years and up who have used the Web sometime in the last year.

**CYBER DIALOGUE**—Like Jupiter, Cyber Dialogue's projection is for the U.S. only and the consumers must use either e-mail, the Web, a service provider,

or an Internet newsgroup. Cyber Dialogue's projections are for people 18 and over.

## ON-LINE SHOPPING PROJECTIONS

**FORRESTER**—According to the company's October 1997 report, "Retail Revs Up," the source of its most recent on-line shopping projections, Forrester "interviewed 300 people who made on-line purchases in the last 12 months. We also interviewed 52 merchants from a range of retail categories and executives from companies supporting Internet commerce." Analysts asked executives a series of questions to gauge their current sales and the company's estimates for the future. They say they approached the biggest companies in the market, as well as a few smaller suppliers, to account for about 75 percent of on-line sales. They also consulted Wall Street analysis about public companies and the general business climate, which helped them do "a constant series of cross-checks" to verify that the information a company supplied about itself was accurate, says Delhagen, director of the on-line retail strategies group.

In December 1997, Forrester began doing large-scale consumer research, which it is incorporating into its reports. That data will be used in the next on-line shopping projection, to be published this November. The company surveyed 170,000 consumers asking 66 questions ranging from whether they own a computer to whether they've ever bought a product on-line. Then 120,000 responses were weighted to make them representative of the populations of the U.S. and Canada; 6,100 households were contacted a second time to obtain more detailed information.

**JUPITER**—For the company's most recent on-line shopping report, published in November 1997, analysts started by evaluating the overall retail market. They then conducted interviews with 237 companies that account for 90 percent of on-line shopping revenue, says Nicole Vanderbilt, group director of digital commerce. Companies consulted

included Amazon.com, Inc., Peapod, Inc., Dell Computer Corporation, Gateway 2000, Inc., and L.L. Bean, Inc. Analysts asked about the companies' current sales and projections for future sales. For consumer input, they drew on their 1996 study and surveys conducted by other companies.

Since Jupiter began doing more extensive consumer research last November, it has surveyed 65,000 households four times, posing 15 questions that ask consumers to describe, among other things, what kind of computers they have and how often they go on-line. Fifty thousand responses were weighted to make them representative of the U.S. population. About 200 follow-up questions were answered by 3,000 households, as well as by 2,500 individuals. Jupiter used this data in the on-line shopping projection released in October.

**CYBER DIALOGUE**—Since the company expanded its consumer research surveys in November 1997, it has twice surveyed 2,000 consumers, half of whom are Internet users. Both groups were asked 150 questions to get "a broad, comprehensive perspective on Internet use," says Peter Clemente, vice-president of the company's Internet strategies group. Web users were asked when they started using the Web and whether they ever look for product information on the Web. Nonusers were asked what would compel them to go on-line. Analysts weighted the data to match the U.S. population and incorporated results from Internet questions posed by Yankelovich Partners Inc., a research and consulting service owned by Cyber Dialogue's parent company, Wand Partners Inc.

Cyber Dialogue does not survey companies for consumer predictions because it believes asking consumers what they'll do yields more accurate results. "How better to gauge consumer behavior than to talk to consumers? It's the consumers that drive the market, not the technology," Clemente says. "It doesn't really matter to me how many WebTV devices are shipped. What matters to me is who's going to buy them." ■

# ELECTRONIC DEMOCRACY

Politicians, journalists, and voters now have equal access to election information on the Web. • BY NOAH ROBISCHON



IN THE LAST FOUR YEARS, THE INTERNET has changed the way political news and information is delivered, giving voters equal access to the comprehensive data that used to be available only to politicians and reporters. Today, anyone can log on to websites operated by news organizations, government offices, and nonprofit groups to learn about national and local candidates, their voting records, the money they've raised, transcripts of their debates, and more. For this year's midterm elections, network news organizations such as CNN, MSNBC, ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX, as well as newspapers including *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, are building special election areas into their websites. Each of those organizations outlined its election plans for *Brill's Content*. All are preparing for heavy traffic on election night.

For websites, increased traffic means a jump in advertising sales because ad rates are based on the number of times a site guarantees that an ad will be viewed. According to @plan, a company that does a random survey of 40,000 active adult users of the Internet, on-line political junkies tend to be educated men with above-average incomes. They are 56 percent more likely to purchase books on-line than the average adult Web user and 35 percent more likely to purchase airline tickets on-line. In short, the people who visit political websites are among the most attractive consumers to advertisers.

Candidate advertising, however, is scarce. Web presence isn't generally a

major component of anyone's campaign strategy. (There are some exceptions; see "Still Awaiting the 'Kennedy of the Internet,'" page 61.) Of the commercial news websites examined for this article, only America Online and washingtonpost.com said they were in negotiations with candidates for advertising, although neither had struck a deal. ABC refused to discuss any aspect of its advertising

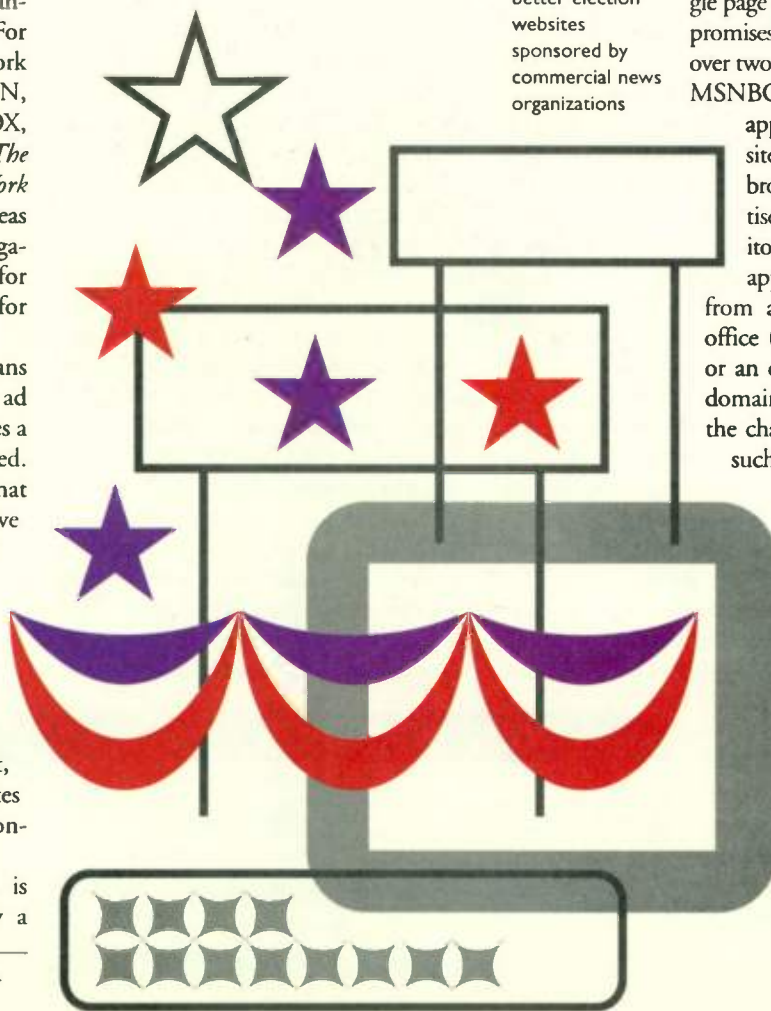


Two of the better election websites sponsored by commercial news organizations

arrangements.

The election sites offered by MSNBC.com and washingtonpost.com are selling special sponsorships to their advertisers. For \$75,000, MSNBC.com will place an advertiser's message on every single page of its "Decision '98" package and promises to deliver 2.4 million impressions over two months. For an undisclosed sum, MSNBC.com will ensure that an ad appears on its website when the website is shown on an NBC network broadcast. The *Post* offers its advertisers the ability to target certain visitors, so that a particular ad will appear to anyone who is visiting from a given domain, a government office (the .gov domain), for example, or an educational institution (the .edu domain). The site also offers advertisers the chance to sponsor certain features, such as polls, and a game where users match political buttons with the era of their origin.

All of the commercial websites' election packages will include breaking news and coverage of certain ballot measures and "key" races—campaigns that news organizations find worthy of national attention. For example, ABCNEWS.com estimates it will provide in-depth coverage of up to 15 of the 435 congressional races, five of 34 Senate races, and all 36 gubernatorial contests. Washingtonpost.com will cover 12 Senate races, fewer



ANDERS WENNGREN

Senior writer Noah Robischon wrote about on-line city guides in the October issue.

BRILL'S CONTENT NOVEMBER 1998



**Project Vote Smart**

than 12 House races, and 12 gubernatorial contests. Although editorial coverage will be limited to key races, each of the sites will have basic listings of all Senate and House races.

With the exception of MSNBC.com and AllPolitics, a joint effort by CNN, *Time*, and Congressional Quarterly, Inc., a news service covering the federal government, election websites will offer visitors shortcuts to information about statewide races by typing in a zip code or clicking on a U.S. map. The resulting pages will list such basic candidate information as bios, campaign finance data, voting records, and contact information.

All of the election news websites are preparing special features to set them apart from the competition. Here are some highlights:

•AOL will compile election coverage from 14 of its content partners, including, ABC News, *The New York Times*, *Slate*, *George*, the Associated Press, Reuters, and nonprofit websites like the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan research group, and The Democracy Network, a nonpartisan site run by the Center for Governmental Studies. Much of this information will be available not only on AOL's proprietary service but on the Web. AOL will also conduct a live event each Tuesday with candidates such as U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer, a California Democrat running for re-election, and pundits like James Carville and Mary Matalin. An alliance with *National Journal's* Cloakroom, an on-line arm of the weekly political magazine, will provide AOL members with a selection of insider campaign coverage that normally costs the magazine's subscribers \$900 per year.

•At cbsnews.com, visitors will be able to flip through a digital version of the network's election-year handbook, which includes facts and figures on all gubernatorial and congressional races as well as on state referenda. For the past 20 years, the handbook, compiled by the CBS News election unit, was distributed solely to CBS reporters and producers; this year most of the book will be available on the website to anyone who wants it.

•Foxnews.com will offer most of the research handbook compiled by its political unit.

•Another handbook will be available from AllPolitics. AllPolitics partner *Congressional Quarterly* publishes a reference guide called *Politics in America*, which includes extended profiles of every member of Congress. A paperback version costs \$55.95, but during the election, portions of the summaries will be available for free, and users will be able to download full profiles from AllPolitics for a couple of dollars each (no price had been set as of this writing). AllPolitics will also feature an e-mail alert that lets users track breaking news on a particular bill or candidate.

•MSNBC.com's Decision '98 site will feature a searchable database of candidate profiles from *Thomas's Roll Call Reports Syndicate*, a Capitol Hill news service, and campaign finance data from the Center for Responsive Politics. MSNBC.com is also planning special features for users of Windows 98 who also have a TV tuner card in their PCs. The combination of television and Internet access could allow users to watch Tom Brokaw deliver national election news while they

track the results of local elections on another part of the TV screen.

•Both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* will cover what they consider key races. They will also provide basic bio data for candidates from Capitol Advantage, a company that publishes a directory of all U.S. Senators, House members, and governors. The *Post* has also created "Early Returns," a daily digest of the election reports from more than 200 newspaper websites.

On election night, all of these websites will get election results from the Voter News Service (VNS), an organization run by five networks—Fox, CBS, NBC, ABC, CNN—and the AP. VNS conducts nationwide exit polls and collects voting results as they become available. Given the time limits on their broadcasts, TV news organizations are able to provide viewers with just a fraction of the analysis they can draw from exit polls. But the websites can offer a more complete analysis of voter behavior.

Much of the background information on candidates available from commercial news sites—profiles, voting records, and campaign finance data—is also available from nonprofit political websites, which are also the best sources for basic explanations of the political process.

One comprehensive nonprofit website belongs to Project Vote Smart, a nonpartisan group that tracks more than 13,000 national, state, and local candidates and elected officials. The site offers candidate bios, campaign finance data from 25 states, voting records, issue positions, and performance evaluations of all national officials and some state legislators. The information is searchable by zip code, and users can sign up for e-mail updates on candidate voting records. This is an excellent



Three nonprofit websites that offer access to information about the elections.

## WEBSITE LOCATOR

ABC .....	www.abcnews.com	The New York Times .....	www.nytimes.com
AllPolitics .....	www.allpolitics.com	CapWeb .....	www.capweb.net
America Online .....	election98.aol.com	The Democracy Network .....	www.dnet.org
CBS .....	www.cbsnews.com	Project Vote Smart .....	www.vote-smart.org
FOX News .....	www.foxnews.com	Center for Responsive Politics ..	www.crp.org
MSNBC .....	www.msnbc.com	FECInfo .....	www.tray.com/FECInfo/
The Washington Post ...	www.washingtonpost.com	Federal Election Commission ...	www.fec.gov



## STILL AWAITING THE "KENNEDY OF THE INTERNET"

starting point to learn about the election process and the candidates running in local, state, and national races.

Another good nonprofit political website is CapWeb, created in 1994 by two Capitol Hill staffers. The site allows users to search its congressional directory by zip code, map, or candidate name to find biographical summaries. The site also provides links to official government websites, making it easy to find the e-mail address of a U.S. senator or the homepage of the Congressional Budget Office.

The Democracy Network, a nonprofit public policy research organization run by the Center for Governmental Studies, is joining forces with the League of Women Voters of the United States to provide information on races in at least ten states. This site is particularly good at explaining ballot measures and directing users to information on organizations that support or oppose each measure.

There is also a wealth of campaign finance data on the Web. Federal campaign finance information is already available on-line from three sources: the Federal Election Commission (the government agency charged with tracking campaign contributions), the Center for Responsive Politics, and FECInfo. All three sites provide the latest data and allow users to sort that data by candidate, donor name, and political action committee. Only CRP and FECInfo allow database searches by zip code and employer. Those two sites also have databases of "soft money" contributions, money raised for candidates that is donated to political parties in excess of federal contribution limits outlined in the Federal Election Campaign Act. The Center for Responsive Politics has the best campaign finance site overall, providing databases on congressional travel filings, White House coffees and sleepovers, and registered lobbyists, including their clients and the amount of money the clients spent.

The FEC's site also offers on-line voter registration. And the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania even has instructions on how to use a voting booth. In fact, about the only thing the Internet won't provide on election day is the voting booth itself. ■

**A**LTHOUGH NEVADA REPUBLICAN Jim Blockey's website is a textbook example of "brochureware," a term Internet campaign analysts use to describe websites that are mere reproductions of printed promotional material, it isn't likely to hurt his congressional campaign. There is no proof to date that a candidate's website has ever had any measurable impact, good or bad, on the outcome of an election. And until a website upsets an election, candidates and campaign planners will not place a high priority on Internet strategies.

Nonetheless, 63 percent of campaigns do have a website, according to a survey of 270 local, state, and federal candidates and their staffers that was conducted by Congressional Quarterly, Inc., which has been researching and reporting on national politics for more than 50 years. Respondents said their websites offered a way to disseminate information such as biographies, policy statements, and position papers on issues. And nine of ten surveyed said the Internet is changing or will change political campaigns. But how it will change campaigns is anybody's guess.

Part of the reason the Internet hasn't achieved measurable results is that candidates aren't using the medium effectively, say Internet campaign analysts. For example, less than half of the candidates use their websites to recruit volunteers or raise money. But a good website doesn't require money as much as good content.

Roy Barnes, a Democratic gubernatorial candidate in Georgia, has one of the best campaign sites on the Web (at [www.barnesgovernor.org](http://www.barnesgovernor.org)). It includes the full text of his position papers on topics like health-care reform, education, and the environment; an up-to-date archive of

newspaper articles on the candidate and campaign, and campaign press releases. The site offers an e-mail list for supporters who want updates on campaign announcements. There is even a fund-raising area that allows people to make contributions to the campaign using a credit card.

The most effective candidate websites cater to voters who want to become more educated about how they should cast their ballots, says Kim Alexander, who runs the California Voter Foundation, a nonprofit website dedicated to state politics. As an example, Alexander cites *The Boxer Cyber-Corner*, a weekly e-mail newsletter

that California Democratic Senator Barbara Boxer's campaign sends to 1,800 people. The e-mailing includes recent articles and campaign updates. "Some people don't want to base their decisions on thirty-second [ad] spots," says Alexander.

Research from 1996 showed that the Internet played a role in the presidential elections, but there is no evidence that it affected the outcome. But 9 percent of voters said they received information on-line that affected their vote—whether from a candidate website or Internet news source—according to exit polls conducted by the research firm Wirthlin Worldwide.

"If you go back and look historically, what happens is that every time there's a new medium, a political leader understands how to use it and essentially dominates their political age," says Phil Noble, president of *PoliticsOnline*, which provides on-line tools to campaigns. Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt used radio effectively, and John F. Kennedy understood television better than any other politician of his era. Noble says, "We're waiting to see who's going to be the John Kennedy of the Internet."—N.R.



## Portal Power Plays

The Net's superpowers are battling to become its key commercial landlords. The winners will determine what we see and buy on-line.

**W**HEN THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE FILED charges against Microsoft Corporation on May 18, it suggested, among other things, that the company should include a competing product, Netscape's browser, along with its own on Windows 98.

But that's like asking Coke to put three cans of Pepsi in each six-pack, Microsoft chairman and chief executive Bill Gates protested. That particular threat to Microsoft is over, but the metaphor deserves to live on in a revised version.

The real threat to consumers from Microsoft or anyone else is not what's in the six-packs, but control over the vending machines via the "portals" that direct people to those vending machines. Much of cyberspace—especially the commercial part that pays the rent to support free content—is akin to vending machines. For our purposes, a vending machine is any site that sells a consumer product or service, like Amazon.com, or any site whose content is paid for by advertising, like CNET. A number of companies—Microsoft, America Online, Inc., and Yahoo! Inc. among them—are furiously trying to become the Net's key commercial landlords, meaning the owners of the space in which the vending machines operate.

But the vending machine owners' goal is not to pass people through to another site but to catch them and sell them something. That is why "portal" is the wrong metaphor: A portal is a passageway. What everyone wants to control is vending machines and access to them, charging revenue-based rent. The problem is that control of cyberspace's vending machines is rapidly getting parceled out to the highest bidder.

In fact, I think the whole concept of portals is overrated, because the more difficult it is to pass through a portal, the less attractive it will

*Contributing editor Esther Dyson is chairman of EDventure Holdings, which analyzes and invests in emerging computer markets around the world.*

become to consumers. Each would-be portal will have to negotiate carefully between being too broad and too specific, between exercising too much editorial quality control and losing value-added branding and personality. The broader a portal gets, the less value it brings to consumers. The more customers the portal attracts to the vending machines—for which the portal can charge those commissions or advertising fees—the less each individual consumer is worth.

There's a finite amount of time and money that people can spend on the Net. While the Net will grow rapidly over the next few years, it's getting sliced thinner and thinner, giving consumers more and more choices. Nonetheless, there is one way that consumers' choices could be sharply limited: If we end up with a situation where there's only one vending machine landlord—that is, a site like a portal that provides space to the vending

machine. In legal terms, that would make that single landlord's vending machine an "essential facility"—the only way to reach that user, since most users rely on one vending machine.

As far as I'm concerned, that's the real issue behind the Justice Department's suit against Microsoft: If there's one power controlling all of the vending machines, that power will have too much control over consumer choices.

For now, the metaphor isn't perfect. Microsoft doesn't actually own the vending machines or the computer desktops. It simply puts software on the desktops. Nothing wrong with that.

But its control of that software could ultimately give it control of the cyber-vending machines, either for itself or for its favored partners.

Currently, it can determine by contract what other vendors, including browsers, show up on a user's screen—although at least some of those contracts have been challenged.



Thus, the government's solution could be: Let the vending machine owners—those who select the “cola” or content—charge consumers directly instead of through Microsoft, say, or AOL. So, instead of paying less for software or an on-line service because it is subsidized by Microsoft or AOL's contracts with merchants and content providers, consumers could get discounts directly from product or content vendors. Of course, the vendors *like* the contracts they have with vending machine owners because the contracts give them a chance to buy a place in the vending machine's limited display space. That's the point of the suit: to avert a potential vending machine monopoly. Microsoft's opponents are, in effect, saying, “Don't allow contracts between the cola companies on the one hand and the vending machine owner on the other. And don't let Microsoft give a favored position to its own vending portal, MSN.com.”

The problem, of course, is that the Net is a tangle of contracts allocating profits and virtual vending space. Why shouldn't Microsoft get its share?

It goes back to the initial question: If you gain a monopoly, even if you gain it fairly, what constitutes abuse of that monopoly? I don't really care much who owns the browser market; I *do* care who controls what I can buy or see—that is, who controls the vending machines.

Back in the real world, the browser market is currently split almost evenly between Netscape and Microsoft's Internet Explorer, and each company is making deals to lease scarce screen space—the vending machine compartments that consumers see by default. So are “portals” such as AOL and Yahoo!. Contracts that might be fine among individual parties become restrictive when one of those parties owns the entire essential facility. No problem now. But if Microsoft's 90-plus percent of the operating-system market enables it to win the browser market, there would be a problem. And if Netscape gains 90 percent of the browser market, it should face the same restrictions that might be proposed for Microsoft. The same goes for AOL or any portal.

#### FRICION ON THE NET

There's an irony here. The United States regulates broadcasting through the Federal Communications Commission in an attempt to maintain a diversity of players. (Some countries regulate broadcasting to limit the diversity of players.) When the Internet came along, many of us cheered. No more scarcity of channels, no more need for government interference; everyone could find a medium to reach whatever audience he could attract.

The Internet has indeed spawned a profusion of new voices—some 37 million web hosts (defined as individual computers that house one or more websites) as of July 1998, according to Network Wizards, a firm that conducts a twice-yearly Web survey. Some reach only small audiences of family and friends or like-minded crackpots, but the system has been working: Giants are consolidating and slugging it out with the proliferation of lone operators; at the same time, new voices abound. The left-wing Campaign for Labor Rights ([www.summersault.com/~agj/clr](http://www.summersault.com/~agj/clr)) competes for attention—but not for

space—with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's site ([www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org)) and with my favorite auction site, Onsale ([www.onsale.com](http://www.onsale.com)). They're all out there on the Web.

But suddenly things are changing. Suppose the Campaign for Labor Rights, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Onsale wind up at the end of a long list of sites where position is determined by contract and payment. Cyberspace is friction-free, yes; you can get anywhere by typing in the URL (uniform resource locator, beginning with “http”). But if you have to select from a limited list or simply push one of a few buttons on the screen...well, that's friction because

**Perhaps, just as we limit the power of our government, we should find a way to shake up control of cyberspace.**

it makes it that much harder for consumers to find the sites that aren't listed first or aren't listed at all.

Of course, such “preselection” makes it easier for the harried consumer who doesn't want to have to type in a URL. He'd rather have a selection to choose from. Short-term, it's a lot more convenient to let Microsoft—or whoever—make things easier by making the choices. There's a delicate balance between letting the user choose for himself and making it easy for him to choose your way.

But this puts us back in the situation of an essential facility, a scarce resource controlled by a single entity, just like the broadcast channels.

In the end, this concentration of control is what troubles me, whether it's the Chinese government, the U.S. government, AOL, Netscape, or Microsoft. The standardization created by the dominance of Microsoft's operating system has been beneficial in the technology world, but standardization is not a virtue in the content world. Let's look at it this way: It is not the market itself that is holy, but its dynamism and ability to foster competition among solutions. When the market starts to foster rigidity just like a government, it should face steady challenges from outside forces.

In some sense, the entity that controls all those vending machines—users' screens, browsers, and portals—is a “government” in cyberspace, supported by an (indirect) tax in the form of the price of the operating system/browser. And, like a government, it should not be making market choices for citizens.

Perhaps, just as we in the U.S. limit the power of our government, we should figure out a way to shake up control of cyberspace every four years. Consider term limits for politicians versus the power of incumbency. We could, for example, set “cyberlimits”: two years for the browser vendors, two years for the hardware companies. (Although how to do this would be a challenge.) In other words, this is not the problem of a particular company, but of a world in which any entrenched position should be challenged. Yes, it may be inefficient in the short term, but the alternative of long-term rigidities would be even worse. ■



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**RANGE ROVER**



# Two Weapons Against Terrorism

New York Times reporters Judith Miller and William J. Broad have carved out a beat in ominous new territory—biological warfare. ● BY ABIGAIL POGREBIN

IT'S AN ANECDOTE YOU COULDN'T invent: Judith Miller, the *New York Times* reporter covering germ warfare, sits down for her lunch interview and washes her hands with a few drops of Purell—the “instant hand sanitizer” that “kills germs without water.”

“It’s paranoid and flaky,” kids her colleague William J. Broad, a Pulitzer Prize-winning science writer for the *Times* and the other half of the duo that has spent most of the year—throughout the Lewinsky deluge—producing major stories on the threat of biological weapons.

It’s a disturbing subject. If would-be terrorists ever succeeded in spraying live smallpox or anthrax germs across a major city, millions of people could become infected before anyone even knew there was an epidemic, much less who started it. Because the nation is not equipped with enough vaccines, antibiotics, or medical facilities to treat the sick and dying on such a massive scale, the devastation would be incalculable.

Broad acknowledges that the germ warfare scenario sounds like science fiction, but he says the threat is real. The Pentagon takes it seriously enough to be vaccinating every member of the U.S. armed forces against anthrax at a cost of \$130 million over six years, and President Clinton asked Congress last summer to add another \$300 million in 1998 to the annual \$1 billion already earmarked to fight bioterrorism. “This is one of the main scary issues of the twenty-

first century,” says Broad.

Miller and Broad’s stories have covered New York City’s emergency procedures for a germ attack, Iraq’s hidden biological weapons program, the White House germ war games conducted to assess the nation’s preparedness, and the failed botulism and anthrax attacks by Aum Shinrikyo—the Japanese cult that released nerve gas into Tokyo’s subways in 1995. The pair has also documented the behind-the-scenes workings of the president’s effort to stockpile vaccines.

“It’s some of the hardest reporting I’ve ever done,” says Miller. Broad agrees: “There’s a lot of digging. There’s misinformation, there’s sensitivity. We’re right on the edge, often, of things that are secret and that governments don’t want you to know.” Because of this, their stories take weeks to assemble—many leads peter out, and often, aspects of the story are unripe for publication.

In their first collaborative report, published in February, Miller, 50, and Broad, 47, described the eerie efficiency of germ warfare: “Unlike nuclear arms, dangerous germs are cheap and easy to come by. Yet their effects on people are potentially just as extensive and grim as those of a nuclear bomb, if slower to act. A microbe that divides every 30 minutes can produce a bubbling vat of offspring



William Broad and Judith Miller have made their niche by digging up secrets that even the government wants to keep buried.

in a week or so. Even a few can be dangerous. Anthrax...can kill a human after exposure to less than 10,000 germs, all of which would fit comfortably on the period at the end of this sentence....It is usually fatal within two weeks.”

In a story published June 19, 1998, Miller and Broad explained why such an attack would be almost impossible to trace. “Malicious strikes are hard to detect rapidly, since deadly microbes might incubate in human bodies for hours, days, weeks, or even months before causing widespread havoc.”

Over lunch, Miller paints a picture of possible devastation even more chilling than what she and Broad have written. “This could destroy the species if we’re not careful,” she observes. “What makes

Senior writer Abigail Pogrebin contributed to October’s cover story on consumer reporting by television newsmagazines.

# HONOR ROLL

**AL FRANK, THE STAR-LEDGER.** Business reporter Al Frank was just back from vacation when, he says, he started “hearing rumblings” about the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The gubernatorial appointees at the transportation and development agency,



Al Frank put an end to political promotions at the Port Authority.

Frank's beat since 1995, had secretly moved to give preferential treatment to up to 15 politically connected candidates for its police academy, putting them at the top of the entrance list. The remaining 65 to 85 slots would be randomly filled from a field of 6,200 hopefuls.

The story, if true, meant the PA was putting politics over public safety.

After two days of research, Frank was still “a few loose ends” short of a scoop. Then, something unexpected happened.

“It was about 6:30 when my pager went off,” says Frank, 47, a 16-year-veteran of the Newark daily. “I recognized the statehouse number. It was kind of surprising because I hadn't even called the statehouse.”

The call was from Pete McDonough, a spokesman for Governor Christine Todd Whitman, who, along with New York Governor George Pataki, controls the authority. Whitman was outraged. The authority board, which had indeed made the decision behind closed doors, had left it off the official minutes that go to both governors following each board meeting. McDonough told Frank that the governor—upon hearing second-hand about the reporter's inquiries—had demanded the agency rescind the policy. Frank's loose ends were all tied up.

As soon as his story hit on September 2, the plan was dead. “As a result of what he did,” McDonough says, “the Port Authority staff understands that if something like this ever happens

again, somebody's going to lose their job.”

—Ed Shanahan

**DENNIS CAUCHON, USA TODAY.** When a story broke in Virginia news outlets on July 30 that two local toddlers had been switched at birth in 1995, it was because one mother, Paula Johnson, had discovered that her DNA did not match that of Callie, her 3-year-old daughter. The University of Virginia medical center had located the family of her biological child, but officials there would not release the name to the public—or to Paula Johnson.

So Dennis Cauchon, a national reporter for *USA Today*, set out to find the family himself. First, he pulled birth announcements from the *Daily Progress*, Johnson's local newspaper in Charlottesville, for the days surrounding Callie's birth, and then narrowed the search by studying public records. His research eventually led him to Buena Vista, Virginia, and the extended family of 3-year-old Rebecca Chittum, whose parents had been killed in a car accident a month before.

After Rebecca's family refused to speak to him, Cauchon had a stroke of luck: A man in the Chittums' neighborhood pointed him to the home of Mary Watts, Rebecca's great-aunt. The woman was sitting on her back porch with tears in her eyes as she stared at a newspaper photo of Paula and Callie, who looked just like a member of the Chittum family. Watts confirmed that Rebecca's family had been contacted by the UVA.

Later that evening, Cauchon was able to call Paula Johnson and tell her the name of her biological child. “It's a very personal thing [to] say, ‘I found your child,’” says Cauchon, whose story appeared August 3. “It's extremely rewarding on a personal level.”

—Kimberly Conniff



Dennis Cauchon's investigative reporting led him to a mother's missing child.

me terrified is I know the people who want to kill us... And now, because of my work with Bill, I know how it's theoretically possible for them to do it.” She's referring to some of the world's most diabolical extremists, many of whom she personally encountered during her 25 years as a Middle East correspondent for the *Times*. “Maybe that's why I'm a little more panicky than Bill. I've been out there in Beirut looking at dead American marines, thank you very much, and I don't ever want to do it again. And certainly not in my own country.”

When it's pointed out that in their articles to date, they have not written about this sense of peril, both reporters answer with the same words: “That's editorial.” Neither wants to cross the line into commentary. Broad thinks readers get the message without having to be told explicitly. “When you launch 3,000- to 4,000-word stories over and over on the front page, the reader can read between the lines,” he says. “They can see that this paper thinks it's important enough to throw a lot of money, a lot of time, a lot of its resources into covering it.”

Terrorism expert Dr. Ehud Sprinzak, recently a fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington, believes the threat of biological weapons is overblown, but he doesn't blame Miller and Broad. “*The New York Times* should not be held responsible for making it a big story when the president of the United States and the secretary of defense are telling us that the question is no longer *if* it will happen, but *when*.” Miller says she does in fact think about the weight of her reporting. “The more you write about biological warfare, the more it gives people ideas. So I think there's an added responsibility not to be melodramatic.”

Broad underscores this point: “One of our mantras that we have said over and over from day one is that there is an awful lot of smoke on this subject and hysteria... We've spent enormous amounts of time—and it doesn't show up in the paper—figuring out where the fire is and what's just smoke. There are people out there who, for all kinds of reasons, maybe bureaucratic, or personal self-aggrandizement, are selling bioterrorism.”

That was the unfair implication, according to Dr. J. Craig Venter, a pio-

neer in gene mapping, in Miller and Broad's August 7 article regarding which scientists were advising the president on preparedness. Venter says he was unfairly portrayed as having a financial interest in advocating vaccine stockpiling. (His company, Celleria, has received government money to identify the anthrax microbe to assist in germ defense.) Venter says he advised the White House out of concern for national security and that it's natural that he would promote his field of science because it's germane to combating bioterrorism. "It's like saying I was a cancer researcher and it was a conflict of interest for urging more interest on cancer research," says Venter.

"I think it was right on the money," says Broad of the article. Adds Miller: "I think it was important for people to know in terms of their understanding of how policy is made...that people in that room with the president had more than a theoretical stake in the outcome of the policy decision."

Many of Miller and Broad's sources contacted by *Brill's Content* say they are impressed with the team's fairness, tenacity, and discretion. "I've never had my trust betrayed by them," says Richard Falkenrath, who works with Harvard's Center for Science and International Affairs. "They unearth legitimately new things—things that the cognoscenti don't even know about."

Miller and Broad joined forces last January after a shaky first impression. Miller had set up an interview with the chief biological weapons inspector at the United Nations, Dr. Richard Spertzel. Foreign editor Stephen Engelberg thought it would help to have a science writer involved to flesh out the technical material. Miller did not want to upset a source she had nurtured. "This was a nervous guy, a guy under huge pressure," she says of Spertzel. "I had taken more than a week to set this up in a way that I thought he would be comfortable."

Then, in walks Broad. At this point, it's useful to recount the scene as a playlet, since that is the only way to capture the way these two talk together—or, more accurately, don't let each other talk.

*Miller: "So he shows up, and there he is in his vest—"*

*Broad: "Sweater vest —"*

*Miller: "And the guy I'm interviewing is in a suit—"*

*Broad: "The funky sweater vest—"*

*Miller: "His funky science reporter look...I was appalled."*

*Broad: "Judy, we're interviewing him—"*

*Miller: "Right. (Guffaw.) And he says, 'You don't mind if I set up here?' All of a sudden, out comes this Toshiba laptop and tape recorders (laughter), and I said, 'Holy—!'"*

*Broad: "Let's make him feel at ease."*

*Miller: "But then, lo and behold, five*

unexpected from two veterans who have built their reputations previously without sharing a byline.

They are an odd couple who seem to have stumbled on a great professional marriage. Each reporter contributes a well-oiled expertise. Miller is steeped in national security and terrorism, author of the 1996 tome *God Has Ninety-Nine Names: Reporting from a Militant Middle East*. Broad is a science writer who has been lauded for his coverage of the "Star Wars" antimissile program. His most recent book is *The Universe Below:*

**"What makes me terrified is I know the people who want to kill us," says Miller, "and now...I know how it's theoretically possible for them to do it."**

*minutes into the interview, our source forgot all about the Toshiba and the tape recorders because—"*

*Broad: "—Because I was a genuine nerd."*

*Miller: "Because he was a genuine scientist." (Broad has a master's degree in science history.)*

Broad won over not just the wary source but his skeptical colleague. The passion they share for this subject overrides their personality differences. He's a "morning person" who lives in the suburbs; she's a "night owl" who dwells in New York City's hip SoHo neighborhood. He functions on very little sleep; she needs "an enormous amount." She's chatty with interview subjects; he sometimes forgets to say thank you. She takes notes on paper; he types on a laptop.

Perhaps because this interview is over lunch, their distinct eating habits come up. "I'm bigger but I don't need to eat," says Broad, who is 6 foot 3. Broad says his partner's appetite must be sated at the witching hour. "It rings like a bell at 1 P.M.," says Broad, "That's when she starts swerving off the road."

"Bill is a Calvinist," says Miller. "He only eats fruit."

"That I buy on the streets of New York City," Broad chimes in, "because I like to get the kind that's covered with bacteria."

The ribbing is constant. But the mutual admiration is unmistakable and

*Discovering the Secrets of the Deep Sea.*

Miller and Broad merged because their subjects have: Science and terrorism ominously meet in the arena of biological weapons. Both reporters have been neglecting their respective beats with their editors' blessings: Miller is supposed to be writing for the culture desk, Broad is a mainstay of the science department.

They have been skipped by editor Engelberg, whom Broad describes at lunch as "the missing person at this table." With admiration, Broad calls him "a slave driver." Miller says Engelberg also adds levity. "When you're under this much pressure," she says, "you need someone who can make a germ joke."

"Judy's a force of nature," says Engelberg. "Bill is one of the best reporters at *The New York Times*....They're both driven by this incredible hunger to really know what's behind the veil, what is actually happening."

David Remnick, editor of *The New Yorker*, who has followed the *Times's* germ warfare coverage, says bioterrorism may not always connect with the public like a Lewinsky scandal, but it clearly has graver implications. "Sex is an issue we all think about, and doomsday is something we try desperately not to think about," says Remnick. "Whether we like it or not, hidden biological weapons threaten the world in a much more profound way than oral sex in the Oval Office." ■

## Check It Out

The *Boston Globe* scandal gives the author a welcome excuse to revisit a portion of his work in search of fiction masquerading as fact.

IN LIGHT OF THE REVELATIONS ABOUT *BOSTON GLOBE* columnists describing people and events whose existence couldn't be confirmed, I decided to go back through columns I have written to see if there might be even the slightest cause for concern. I owed that much to my readers, I told my wife, although I couldn't quite put my finger on what they'd ever done for me.

"All of the columns you've written?" my wife asked. Her tone was not completely enthusiastic. Over the years, my wife has come to believe that I will use almost any excuse to reread my own prose. She claims that she has occasionally heard me in my office late at night cackling away at some ancient witticism of my own, occasionally bursting out with "That's a good one!" or "Now there's a fellow who knows how to write!"

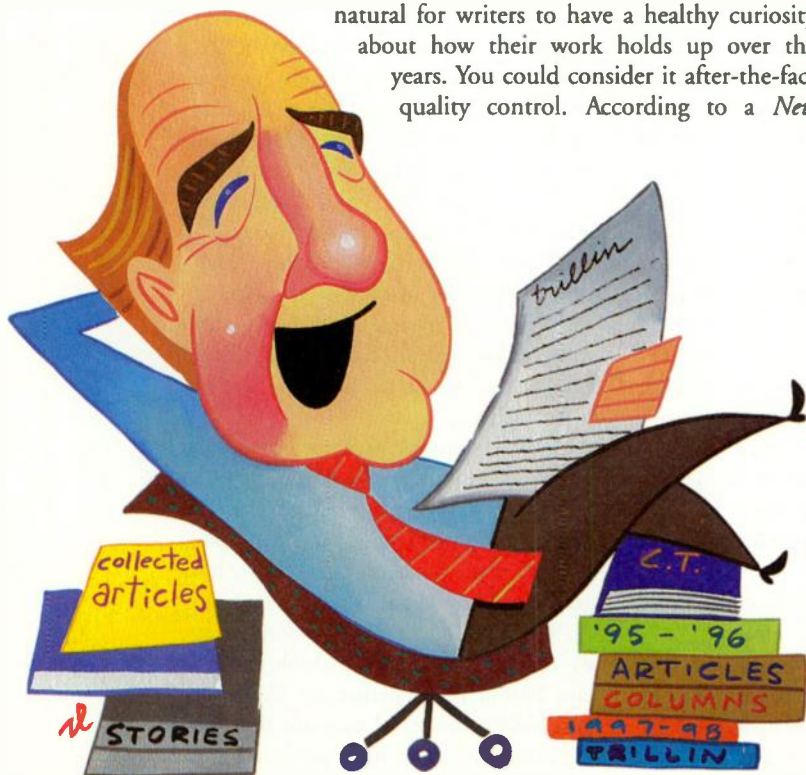
I have tried to explain to her that it's perfectly natural for writers to have a healthy curiosity about how their work holds up over the years. You could consider it after-the-fact quality control. According to a *New*

*Yorker* article that described people reading aloud to E.B. White during his final illness, even White, a man widely admired for his modesty, wanted to hear only his own writing. That made perfect sense to me. If you have limited time, why waste it on strangers?

I had, in fact, decided to restrict my examination to the columns I have written since February 1996, when, after seven years in *The Nation* and ten years in newspaper syndication, the column began appearing in *Time*. I made that decision despite the risk that some might interpret it as a way of skirting two incidents that came to public attention when I first went into the column-writing game, at a time when Jimmy Carter was in the White House. One involved a discussion I had with the *Nation's* then-editor, the wily and parsimonious Victor S. Navasky, whose existence, by the way, is beyond question. Navasky, concerned about some of the quotes I'd been using, asked me if John Foster Dulles had really said "You can't fool all of the people all of the time, but you might as well give it your best shot," and I replied, according to a widely circulated story, "Victor, at these rates, you can't expect real quotes."

The other was precipitated by my quoting a "remarkably prescient" passage in which H. L. Mencken anticipates the first president from the deep South ("...The President's brother, a prime specimen of *Boobus Collumnus Rubericus*, will... gather his loutish companions on the porch of the White House to swill beer from the bottle and snigger over whispered barnyard jokes about the darkies. The President's Cousin, LaVerne, will travel the Halleluyah circuit as one of Mrs. McPherson's soldiers in Christ, praying for the conversion of some North Sodom's most Satanic pornographer as she waves his work—well thumbed—for all the yokels to gasp at..."). After the quote had been reprinted in a number of newspapers, Mencken scholars began saying that they had been unable to find it anywhere in Mencken's writings. At the time, I described their inability to come up with the passage as "yet another demonstration of the limitations of American

*Contributing editor Calvin Trillin is the author of Family Man, published in June by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. He is also a columnist for Time, a staff writer for The New Yorker, and a contributor to The Nation.*





scholarship." I have never felt the need to alter that explanation.

After my examination and rechecking of the *Time* columns, I can report the following:

• In a column on June 10, 1996, the following sentence appeared: "As Immanuel Kant used to say, 'It don't make me no nevermind.'" I now believe, to the point of moral certainty, that Immanuel Kant never said those words, although it should be noted that I have not yet reread all of his work. I regret having assured the people at *Time* that they needn't bother to check the quote.

• On July 15, 1996, in a column on Manhattan restaurants being filled with packs of Wall Street types who wear red suspenders and smoke cigars and argue loudly about brands of single-malt scotch, I mentioned "studies indicating that wearing red suspenders, instead of a belt, lowers your sperm count." I have not been able to confirm the existence of such studies, although I feel constrained to point out that the Wall Street people in red suspenders who have been observed by me in restaurants have never been accompanied by children.

• In a February 16, 1998, column on Hillary Clinton's statement that a "vast right-wing conspiracy" was behind the accusations about her husband and Monica Lewinsky, I quoted "my friend Hobart, the conspiracy connoisseur," as saying, "If she had changed that to 'creepy little cabal,' I might have gone for it." I have not been able to confirm that I have a friend named Hobart, although the creepy little cabal does check out.

• A column dated March 2, 1998, says that Rudolph Giuliani "may be the only Italian in the Greater New York area with no trace of personal charm." This conclusion, while probably true, appears to have been based on no more than anecdotal evidence.

Frankly, what surprised me in this reexamination of my columns was how much of what sounds like it was invented turned out to be true. For instance, Molly, the 11-year-old girl who first stirred my interest in the so-

called v-chip by confessing to her parents that she had been watching Martha Stewart while they were at work, actually does exist, and witnesses confirm that Molly did say, when asked about her impression of Martha Stewart, "She seems to have a lot of time on her hands." It was easy to confirm that a sport called Kabaddi, which requires a player to chant "kabaddikabaddikabaddi..." as long as he is on his opponents' side of the court, was indeed played in the Asian Games in Japan in 1994. There was also no difficulty confirming the existence of a *Washington Post*-ABC News survey that same year indicating that 59 percent of people who have reported encounters with flying saucers preferred Ross Perot to Bill Clinton or Bob Dole in the 1996 presidential election. It almost goes without saying that, as I mentioned in an August 5, 1996, column, Torrington, Alberta, does, in fact, have a museum that seeks to portray scenes of everyday life in Torrington through displays of stuffed gophers.

My wife was not overly impressed by how many unlikely facts in my columns turned out to be true.

"Nobody is meant to take the column seriously anyway," she said.

"Well," I said. That seemed to be the best response for the time being. It's true that when it comes to claims of factual accuracy I have always made a distinction between pieces of reporting and columns that are designed to provide a chuckle or two. But do readers make a similar distinction? During the 15 years I spent traveling around the country to do a series of reporting pieces for *The New Yorker*, the question I was asked most frequently when I ran across people in New York who claimed to be regular readers of the series was, "Do you actually go to the places you write about?" Can those readers really be counted on to take a quote from Immanuel Kant as a joke?

It's difficult to know that, of course, without rereading the *New Yorker* pieces. Yes, all the *New Yorker* pieces. I'm doing that now. I'm having a splendid time. ■

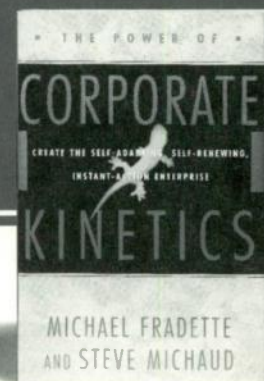
Frankly, what surprised me in this reexamination of my columns was how much of what sounded like it was invented turned out to be true.

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# Too Hot For High School

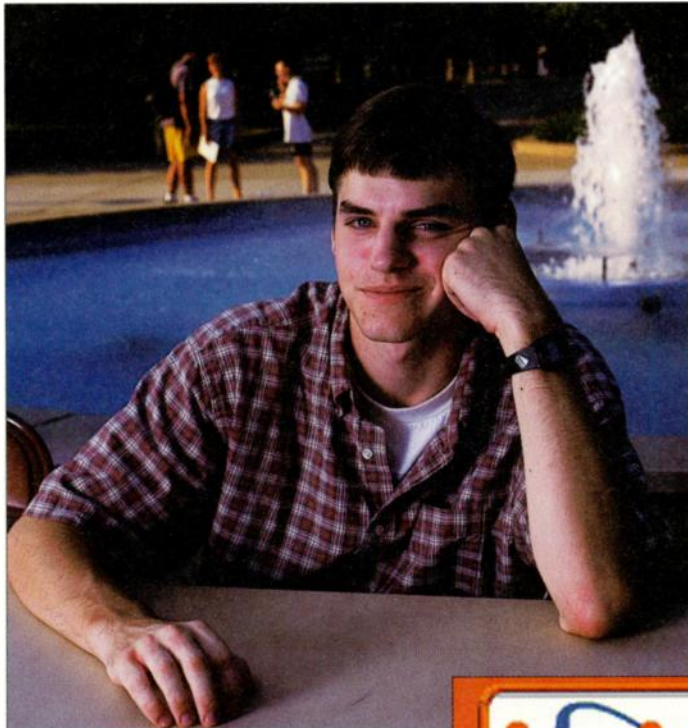
Today's teens are turning to a flourishing website to learn the controversial lessons of life that aren't being taught in the classroom. ● BY RACHEL TAYLOR

**L**ATE LAST YEAR, ADRIAN Holovaty, then a 16-year-old senior at Naperville North High School in Illinois, got a real-life lesson in First Amendment rights. As editor in chief of his high school paper, *The North Star*, Holovaty led a team of five reporters in pursuit of the school's biggest story: a teacher fired after being accused of sexually assaulting a female student. Although the incident was reported in the local press and, insists Holovaty, "everybody already knew about it," Naperville North's principal banned the story from the high school paper.

News of Holovaty's predicament made the pages of *The New York Times* and caught the attention of Parker Stanzone, producer of the on-line high school newspaper *Bolt Reporter* ([www.boltreporter.com](http://www.boltreporter.com)). Stanzone, 30, quickly convinced Holovaty that his story would be a good fit for her website. By November, Holovaty was smiling; his story could finally be read—not just by his classmates, but by teens across the country. What's more, he earned \$25 for his efforts.

*Bolt Reporter* is not ordinary high school journalism. Its pages aren't filled with news of student council meetings or cheerleader tryouts. Instead, this national on-line paper—written entirely by stu-

*Staff writer Rachel Taylor wrote about the quality of educational programming for kids on broadcast television in the October issue.*



Adrian Holovaty's story was published in the *Bolt Reporter* after it was banned from his school paper.

dents—taps into the tough issues that teachers, parents, and perhaps even other teens are often apprehensive about addressing. Offering original stories each day, *Bolt Reporter* tackles serious subjects such as "Pregnant Teens Denied Honor Society Membership," "Abuse of Ritalin Increases Among Teenagers," "Inside the Rave Culture," and "Running On Empty: A Teenager's Bout With Anorexia." As *Bolt Reporter* contributors have started to address these issues with a boldness you won't find in much of the



teen-oriented media, they have built a huge, loyal electronic following.

The key to attracting more than 1.4 million teen readers each month is to find out "what's relevant to the audience, what do they want to talk about, what's on their minds," explains Dan Pelson, the 32-year-old founder of Concrete Media. In March 1997, Pelson's New York-based media marketing company teamed up with SAT preparation powerhouse Princeton Review Online to create a new web property where kids (and advertisers) would want to spend their time (and money). The result was the Bolt website ([www.bolt.com](http://www.bolt.com)), of which *Bolt Reporter* is the most celebrated component.

While Bolt itself is filled with chat rooms, music and movie reviews (with links to buy the music), and heavy doses of articles and advice on sex, teen celebrities, and colleges, *Bolt Reporter* focuses on the often angst-laden concerns of its high school audience.

To reach that crowd, Stanzone relies on a team of ten student editors from across the country, who are each paid \$100 for their work during the school year, and more than 2,000 student reporters (who earn \$25 for each published story). As the site's gatekeeper, Stanzone (the only adult on the *Bolt Reporter* staff) seeks stories that she says "would be interesting to a nationwide audience" and offer "a pulse about what teens think or feel about a certain

issue.” The most popular of all *Bolt Reporter* sections is “Banned on Bolt,” where stories censored by school papers or touching on especially contentious subjects are given a forum. There’s no article too flacid or frank for *Bolt Reporter*, says Stanzione.

With material pouring in from all over the world, how does Stanzione ensure that the students aren’t simply fabricating their articles? According to Bolt’s associate producer, Mike Di Bianco and

ly as he had intended for it to appear in his school’s newspaper. Though, he says, his high school peers “fact checked this [piece] religiously,” once it was in Stanzione’s hands, it went through “no editing, no fact checking that I’m aware of.” Did anyone from *Bolt Reporter* know the story had already been verified? No, says Holovaty. “It never came up.”

To fact check Holovaty’s piece, *Brill’s Content* contacted Daniel Guerin, supervisor of the domestic violence and child

“But they are still teens. They haven’t learned some of the nuances of what is fact and what is editorial opinion.”

Nonetheless, the students interviewed for this article insist the site serves as a valuable resource and provides a forum to address sensitive subjects. Says Scott Girgash, one of last year’s *Bolt Reporter* student editors, *Bolt Reporter* “gives a lot of credit to teenagers for being able to handle mature topics....It helps teens find out things for themselves that they might not want to talk to an adult about or [that] they wouldn’t normally discuss with other people.” One story posted June 15, 1998, “I Think I Might Be Pregnant,” offered a first-hand account of what it’s like to face the possibility of having a child. “I was extremely scared,” wrote the teen author from a Minnesota high school. “Scared of the possibility of being responsible for another life and making decisions that would affect that life....There are just so many dreams that I have and they’d just all be shattered.” Another article, “Interview with a Drug Dealer,” painted a stark picture of the life of a 17-year-old heroin dealer. “It went from coke to heroin for me,” the dealer and user explained to Melanie Leiter of Westport High School in Westport, Massachusetts (whom *Brill’s Content* was unable to reach). “I do four bags a day. I snort and shoot up [heroin]. Diabetics sell the needles to me. I don’t share with anyone, but if I do I bleach them.”

## Bolt Reporter “helps teens find out things for themselves that they might not want to talk to an adult about,” says one teen editor.

the three teen writers interviewed for this piece, she doesn’t. Although Stanzione and Pelson insist freelance fact checkers confirm the teen accounts, Di Bianco, who is responsible for overseeing the fact checkers, concedes that fact checking entails “just contact[ing] the writers, not sources in the article.” Which is exactly what happened when Matthew Boyd, 17, submitted a story about the removal of Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* from his high school’s English curriculum in Leonardtown, Maryland. Stanzione simply “called me up, and she asked me questions about what happened,” says Boyd. “I guess that was the fact-checking part. Then, a couple of weeks later, I got some mail and a check for \$25.”

Holovaty had a similar experience: His story about the teacher accused of sexual assault ran in *Bolt Reporter* exact-

abuse unit of the DuPage County State’s Attorney’s office in Illinois and one of Holovaty’s main sources. While the bulk of the story was accurate, Guerin, who says he never spoke to a *Bolt Reporter* fact checker, disputed one fact in the article. Asked about this discrepancy, Pelson, who originally claimed that all articles are checked independently, bristles. News organizations “should be held to a higher standard of fact checking than we are,” he says. “We’re not a news agency; we don’t claim to be one....We offer teen voices on teen-related issues. We’re not CNN.” Stanzione concedes that fact checking is something “we need to spend a little extra time on.”

Stanzione says she usually selects writers who “are going through journalism programs in their high schools and are being mentored by advisers...[these teens] know what is right, what is wrong, how to fact check, how to tape an interview. Those are the students I want to work with. [They are] professionals; they’re just younger.” To keep in touch with such students and their journalism advisers, Stanzione says she spends much of her time attending journalism workshops and conferences across the country.

Stanzione says she has never received a complaint about inaccuracies in a *Bolt Reporter* article, and Pelson adds that no fact-checking process is ever foolproof. “Teens sign contracts with us saying they won’t be slanderous or libelous,” he says.

THE BOLT REPORTER STORIES generate lots of interest and attract advertisers who are looking for ready-to-spend teens. But most advertising clients—Procter & Gamble’s Always maxipads, AT&T, and Arizona jeans—still choose to make their pitches on the main Bolt website, which is attractive because of its sizable traffic and editorial mix. According to internal records provided to *Brill’s Content*, the Bolt site registered over 1.4 million unique users (different people who visited the site) and 16 million pageviews (the number of times a single page is accessed) in August. (No independent auditor verifies the site’s traffic, though a represen-

Teens weigh in with their opinions of President Clinton.



tative of the internet advertising agency DoubleClick agreed that these numbers sound accurate.) Pelson adds that more than 2,000 new registered users sign up each day, though this too could not be independently verified. Figures for *Bolt Reporter* alone are not available, he says.

These numbers, brags Pelson, trump the results that media giant Time Warner is getting from its new teen property, the print spin-off of *People*. “Look what [Time Warner is] spending for *Teen People*,” says Pelson. “Frankly, we’re reaching more people [with Bolt] than they are.” (*Teen People*, of course, has a paid circulation of 800,000. Pelson’s product is free.)

**Y**ET SOME OF BOLT’S ADVERTISERS, while lured by the site’s demographics, may be turning a blind eye to content they normally find questionable in other media. Such messages include those posted on Bolt’s drugs bulletin board, which opens with a statement that “Bolt does not condone the use of these or any other drugs. But what we do condone is being informed....Chances are you’ll be offered drugs at some point in your life (if you haven’t been already). Doesn’t it make sense to know what you’re dealing with?”

From there, the medicine cabinet is opened, and the drug boards—generated by Bolt staffers, not teens—offer information about everything from nitrous oxide to marijuana to crack. Want to know how to get high off White Out? “[S]oak a rag with the substance and hold it near your nose or in your mouth...” Curious about how LSD makes you feel? Explains Bolt: “You may start seeing or hearing things wrong (illusions—like thinking a tree is Celine Dion), believing things wrong (delusions—like thinking you can breathe underwater) or seeing things that don’t exist (hallucinations—like thinking you see a rhinoceros sitting upside-down on the ceiling).”

Ironically, the United States Office of National Drug Control Policy has chosen Bolt as a site on which to advance its antidrug advertising campaign. John Hale, the office’s deputy campaign director, admits he is uncom-

fortable with some of Bolt’s drug messages but says the site provides critical access to the teen audience. “Are you not present on the places kids are going because you don’t like the company?” he asks. “This particular site is reaching the audience we are trying to reach.”

Concrete Media’s Pelson says such bulletin boards—which offer explicit talk about sex as well, with articles like “Am I Gay, Bi, or What?” and a masturbation quiz—are needed for teens. “Here’s an audience with the highest rate of suicide, with one of the highest rates of unwed pregnancies, with one of the highest rates of alcohol and drug abuse,” he says. “We don’t take the approach here that we can’t talk about these nasty little things.” Besides, addressing controversial subjects “makes good business sense,” Pelson admits. “These are the things that are important to [teens], these are the things that are on their minds.”

Concrete Media is not the only

good, useful stuff to say to them,” he explains. Since the Bolt links were established, both traffic and advertising on Princeton Review Online have “skyrocketed,” Hodas says, though he quickly adds that only some of that can be attributed to Bolt. Asked if it is misleading to package Princeton Review content in Bolt wrapping, Hodas says no. “It’s part of our strategy to be content

Bolt’s “Sex & Advice” section covers everything from drug use to sexually transmitted diseases.



**Addressing controversial subjects “makes good business sense,” Pelson admits. “These are the things that are important to [teens].”**

company benefiting from Bolt’s popularity. So is Princeton Review Online, which, with just a click of the mouse, delivers readers of Bolt’s “College” section straight to Princeton Review content. (Princeton Review has no control over any other Bolt content.) Want to boost your SAT score? Take the “Word Up!” quiz, provided by Princeton Review and accompanied by a direct link to its own site. Want to know the ten most diverse American universities? Check out the rankings compiled by yup, Princeton Review.

Steven Hodas, Princeton Review Online’s executive director, says the Bolt partnership has been a tremendous success, mainly because it has boosted awareness of the Princeton Review name. “The overarching message is to get our brand out there in front of as many millions of people as we can so that they can understand that Princeton Review has

providers,” he says. “This whole idea of different content appearing in different venues is something that makes intuitive sense to [kids].”

The Bolt audience seems to appreciate the messages the site provides wherever they come from. Bolt’s appeal—both on the main site and on *Bolt Reporter*—can be attributed to the fact that it doesn’t condescend to its audience and doesn’t shy away from answering the questions kids are already asking. These kids “have a lot of really complex issues facing them: psychologically, emotionally, physically, academically,” says Hodas. Yet most media companies, he claims, fail to give this audience the kind of attention it deserves. “Bolt shows that if you address that stuff with respect for the audience, in a voice that’s engaging to them and honest and straightforward, they are going to show up over and over again.” ■

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# How Inside Is “Inside Wall Street”?

The investment column is often wrong about takeover talk, but its author and editor say that doesn't matter. ● BY RIFKA ROSENWEIN

**FOR THE FIRST TIME IN** the 23-year history of its “Inside Wall Street” column, *Business Week* this summer ran a story rating the performance of the widely read investment feature.

The article, written by Gene Marcial, the very man who's been writing “Inside Wall Street” for 17 years, concluded that the column has “performed pretty well indeed,” according to the magazine's analysis of the stocks he featured in 1997.

What prompted the venerable business magazine to run such a report card? Marcial and *Business Week* editor in chief Stephen Shepard each acknowledge that the piece, which had been discussed internally for more than six months, came in response to criticism of the column in recent years.

Critics, who include some traders, rival journalists, and investors, have argued that the column is thinly sourced, lacks credibility, underperforms the market, or is just plain wrong in its prognostications. Particularly sharp critiques have been published since 1996 by the *New York Post* and *TheStreet.com*.

“Eventually,” says Marcial, the barbs “got to us.” At Shepard's behest, the magazine decided to prepare a response. Marcial says he was initially opposed to the idea because he thought people would accuse the magazine of “trying to lift our own bench,” but once Shepard decided it needed to get done, Marcial agreed to do it. “No one knew the column as well,” Marcial explains.

Now that *Business Week's* own

*In October, contributing editor Rifka Rosenwein wrote about Sears, Roebuck's decision to buy a correction in The Wall Street Journal.*

analysis has proved that the column's stock picks “have measured up favorably against the market's main yardsticks,” Marcial says he feels vindicated. “Nobody can say [“Inside Wall Street” is] not credible, not relevant,” he says.

Nobody has ever questioned the column's relevance. Just take a look at its sizable following. With *Business Week's* circulation base of nearly 1 million, “Inside Wall Street” exerts enormous influence in the market. A stock highlighted by Marcial more often than not experiences a strong gain on the Friday the column appears.

In fact, *Business Week's* own analysis showed that the column's one-day impact on a featured stock is a whopping average gain of 4.7 percent. The magazine acknowledged that this one-day jump “reflects to some degree the ‘announcement effect’”—in other words, no matter the true value of the stock, the mere fact that “Inside Wall Street” covers it is enough to make its price rise.

Another indication of the column's influence is the fact that, beginning in 1988, at least two employees of one of the magazine's printing plants, and S.G. Ruderman, *Business Week's* radio broadcaster, were convicted on charges related to trading on information they obtained from “Inside Wall Street.” They apparently thought highly enough of the column to act on it before its release to the public. Marcial was never accused of wrongdoing.

All of which points to a tremendous following and thus, arguably, a tremendous responsibility on the part



**BusinessWeek**

Gene Marcial is proud of the influence his column has on the stock market.

of Marcial and *Business Week*. As Shepard himself says, “We're accountable for what we publish. [This self-analysis] was the ultimate in being accountable.”

Was it? *Business Week's* July 6 report showed that over a six-month period, Marcial's picks fell just short of matching the average market return, as measured by the Standard & Poor's

500-stock index. (They came out slightly ahead of the Russell 3000-stock index and the Dow Jones Industrial Average, two other market indices.) At three months, those picks were beating the market indices by a slight margin; at one month, they were handily beating average returns. Shepard considers the six-month record alone “quite an accomplishment.”

Even if that were true—and some critics maintain that this record is not nearly so impressive—should the gains in stock prices be the proper measure of “Inside Wall Street”?

“What is the purpose of ‘Inside Wall Street’?” Marcial asks in his article. “To report the latest information and market talk—usually not yet widely known—that could affect the fortunes of companies and, therefore, the price of their stocks.”

Does that make it a news column? An investment-advice column? Or a Wall Street gossip sheet? Defining the nature of the column is more than just an exercise in journalistic philosophy. Thousands of investors, mostly small ones ignorant of how Marcial gets his information, act on what they read in his column. And they have a right to know what kind of information they are receiving.

Norman Fosback, editor of *Market Logic*, a stock market newsletter, believes *Business Week* did not even measure up to the standards it set for itself in its July 6 analysis. (Fosback is also editor of *Mutual Funds* magazine, which was recently acquired by Time Inc. Time publishes *Fortune*, a direct competitor to *Business Week*.) Fosback argues that, given the one-day impact of Marcial's column and the subsequent drop-off in price gains, the averaging out of the stock price over a six-month period actually reflects a poor performance by the column.

He also points out that average *Business Week* readers cannot even benefit from the "announcement effect" of Marcial's columns. Even in the magazine's own analysis, Marcial acknowledged that the announcement effect of his column "often hits at the opening on Friday. Traders enter their orders before the opening, and if there are lots of buy orders, the specialists or market makers will open the stock at a level above the Thursday close."

As Fosback wrote in a critique of *Business Week's* self-examination: "Pity the poor *Business Week* [reader] who bought after reading his magazine a few hours later."

Then there is the issue of whether *Business Week* missed the boat entirely in its approach to rating "Inside Wall Street." Instead of looking at stock performance, perhaps *Business Week* should have taken a look at how the column does vis à vis the potential takeover deals it discusses almost every week—which are often the underlying cause of a stock's price jump. If the column purports to be "inside" Wall Street, shouldn't its contents be on the mark pretty regularly?

"Anybody can move the markets these days," says a reporter at a competing publication. "That's a cheap thrill. The

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following chart, which reflects a nine-month period (September 1, 1997-May 31, 1998), examines takeovers, mergers, and spinoffs that *Business Week's* "Inside Wall Street" column claimed were likely to happen. It also cites each column's sources for that information. Many, but not all, "Inside Wall Street" columns mention potential deals. *Brill's Content* ended the study in May to allow time for deals to coalesce. The information contained in this chart is current as of September 15, 1998. All quotations are taken directly from Gene Marcial's column.

## CALLS BY "INSIDE WALL STREET"

THE DEAL	THE SOURCE	THE OUTCOME
9/11/97 Joint venture between Monsanto and Archer Daniels Midland	"Rumored to be in the works," according to investment manager Wayne Nordberg.	● Didn't happen.
9/8/97 Rayonier to be bought by "foreign forest-products company"	James Flicker, Lehman Brothers analyst. "He says about nine companies will consolidate. Topping the list: Rayonier."	● Didn't happen.
9/22/97 Reliance Group Holdings may be interested in selling	A "company insider" says the company was approached by a large insurer but was turned down. CEO Saul Steinberg "admits he may be tempted to or forced to sell at the right price at the right time."	● Didn't happen.
9/22/97 TransAct Technologies likely to be taken over	"[T]he likelihood of a takeover is quite high," says Jack Silver, head of SIAR Capital, who holds an 8.3 percent stake in TransAct.	● Didn't happen.
9/29/97 Alaska Air Group may be bought by Northwest Airlines	Alaska Airlines "is buyout bait...for the likes of Northwest Airlines," according to money manager Vince Carino.	● Didn't happen.
10/6/97 ITT Industries looking to acquire	Mario Gabelli says ITT is getting ready for a "major acquisition."	● ITT announced on November 14, 1997, the acquisition of Kaman Sciences.
10/6/97 Reynolds Metals may spin off its consumer products and packaging division	Edgar Wachenheim of Greenhaven Associates is investing in Reynolds because he thinks it will spin off this division.	● Didn't happen.
10/13/97 Bertelsmann or K-III Communications may buy John Wiley & Sons	The companies "are rumored to be interested," according to David Holzer, managing director for equity trading at Breaan Murray.	● Didn't happen.
10/13/97 J.W. Charles may be bought by a larger brokerage house	"[I]t's likely J.W. Charles is on the radar screen of larger brokerage houses seeking acquisitions," says Robert Goldstein, president of Equity Group, and owner of 8 percent of J.W. Charles stock. One analyst says it's now "being wooed" by a Northeast securities firm.	● Didn't happen.
10/13/97 Borders Group may take over Barnes & Noble	"The brass at Barnes & Noble are truly concerned that Borders...may spring a surprise bid in order to become No. 1," according to a hedge-fund manager.	● Didn't happen.



CALLS BY "INSIDE WALL STREET"

THE DEAL	THE SOURCE	THE OUTCOME
10/27/97 Bindley Western Industries has been approached by a "major pharmaceutical company" and four wholesalers	"It's next in line," claims a buyout pro."	● Didn't happen.
10/27/97 Apria Healthcare Group will seek a better offer than the \$918 million bid the company recently received	Although Apria Healthcare got a "surprise" offer on October 13, 1997, "an arbitrageur" thinks the company "will seek a fatter offer from a white knight."	● Didn't happen.
11/3/97 Hilton Hotels looking to buy MGM Grand	"These pros are convinced that Hilton Hotels CEO Stephen Bollenbach has switched his sights to MGM...Bollenbach has been in touch with MGM CEO Kirk Kerkorian, says [an] insider, and more talks are expected."	● Didn't happen.
11/17/97 AmSouth Bancorporation may be bought by First Union	"Some money managers who have scooped up shares are betting that this holding company...will attract First Union."	● Didn't happen.
12/1/97 Viacom likely to sell off Simon & Schuster	According to "investment maven" Mario Gabelli, Viacom "will sell off a plum, specifically Simon & Schuster."	● Viacom announced sale of Simon & Schuster's educational and reference divisions on May 17, 1998.
12/8/97 Sam Zell will take over Transmedia Network	"Insiders believe that Zell will end up owning the company, since he virtually controls it already."	● Didn't happen.
1/12/98 Southern Pacific Funding negotiating to be acquired by a major financial services firm	"A New York investment banker says Southern Pacific officials have been holding 'advanced talks' with high-level brass at a major financial-services firm."	● Didn't happen (but Southern Pacific spokesman confirms company is exploring "a broad range of strategic alternatives").
1/12/98 Lone Star Technologies will be bought by Robert Bass, or Bass will help company merge	"Either the Bass group opts to buy...or the Besses will help Lone Star merge with another company, says one money manager."	● Didn't happen.
1/26/98 PhyCor looking to buy FPA Medical Management	"FPA Medical Management (FPAM) is being bruted about as PhyCor's next target...[A] New York investment manager who has been accumulating FPA shares...thinks PhyCor will approach FPA—if it hasn't already—with an offer of \$1.7 billion."	● Didn't happen.
1/26/98 Mellon Bank to be bought by Bank of New York	"I believe a deal will be done early this year, most likely with Bank of New York," says PaineWebber analyst Ruchi Madan."	● Bank of New York did make an offer, but withdrew it in May 1998.

real test is whether the stories are right."

*Brill's Content* looked at a period in 1997-98 going back nine months from May 1998 to see how well "Inside Wall Street" did by this measure (as of our press time in mid-September 1998). The study found that of 42 deals discussed during the period, only three came to pass as Marcial described them. In three other cases, deals similar to those discussed in the column took place [see accompanying chart]. The *New York Post* performed a similar analysis in 1996 and found that only six deals out of 85 over a 14-month period ever came to fruition.

In response to the *Brill's Content* findings, Shepard says that "we are not predicting that these deals are going to happen. We are just reporting talk—talk that is or will soon be reflected in the stock price." Judging "Inside Wall Street" by its predictive powers "is the wrong test of the column," he says. Marcial is merely "writing about what people [on Wall Street] are talking about."

But even companies that stand to benefit from this talk are not always pleased with what they consider Marcial's cavalier approach to writing about mergers and acquisitions. Often, the stock will drop back within a few days or weeks after the rumors die down, and investors are left feeling burned.

In the issue that hit the stands August 14, Marcial wrote a column saying "the buzz" on J.P. Morgan was that "a much larger European bank has been in talks" to acquire it. That day, the stock jumped more than ten points.

The prior day, the stock had closed at 115 1/8. After "Inside Wall Street" appeared on-line that night, the opening on the stock was delayed the next morning because of order imbalances. It shot up at one point that day to 135 3/8 and closed at 126 7/8. Morgan was besieged by phone calls from all over the world, mostly from journalists picking up on Marcial's column and the subsequent stock movement.

"One had to wonder about the money that unnamed informants could earn by feeding Gene Marcial all sorts of rumors and then trading on the expectation that he might print them in his col-

umn," says Joseph Evangelisti, director of media relations at J.P. Morgan. By August 21, the bank's stock had dropped to 119 3/8. One week later, it fell even further, to 97 3/4, part of a general decline in U.S. bank stocks.

Federated Department Stores, Inc., the subject of a merger rumor (with Mercantile Stores Company, Inc.) in an "Inside Wall Street" column last year, took the unusual step of issuing a press release denouncing the column and asking the Securities and Exchange Commission to investigate it. (A spokesman for the SEC will neither confirm nor deny the existence of any such investigation.) In this case, the company felt the column had artificially depressed the market for Federated stock.

In its letter to the SEC, Federated called Marcial's July 7, 1997, column "an example of irresponsible journalism. There are no Federated-Mercantile merger talks underway and Federated has made no such acquisition proposal." Earlier this year, Mercantile was bought by Dillard's, Inc.

Carol Sanger, vice-president of corporate communications and external affairs for Federated, says the column was "of questionable origin and motive," a view that is echoed by others who question Marcial's frequent use of sources whom these critics claim have strong motives for floating rumors.

As Marcial himself acknowledges, some of his sources are unnamed "investment pros" and "money managers" with stakes in the companies they discuss, and motivation, most often, to see the prices of those stocks rise. Marcial also sometimes refers only to "rumors" or "whispers" when speculating about a possible takeover.

Marcial's citing investors, as opposed to company insiders or advisers, also calls into question how "inside" the information really is, and therefore how reliable it may be. "The sourcing is so vague," says a reporter for a competing publication. "The reader has no idea how close the source is to the deal."

But *Business Week* disputes the notion that "Inside Wall Street" has an obligation to be right about the deals on which it reports. In a lengthy tele-

## CALLS BY "INSIDE WALL STREET"

THE DEAL	THE SOURCE	THE OUTCOME
2/2/98 Ruddick may be taken over by Safeway or Ahold	"Some big investors...believe that, with the likes of Safeway and Dutch food giant Ahold on the prowl, Ruddick soon will be in play."	● Didn't happen.
2/9/98 The Money Store to be bought by a California savings and loan	"One California investment manager says [T]he Money Store is being eyed by a large savings and loan for a buyout....[T]he California S&L shows real interest."	● On March 4, 1998, First Union, of North Carolina, announced it was acquiring The Money Store.
2/16/98 Banc One or U.S. Bancorp may be interested in First Chicago NBD	"First Chicago will be very attractive for companies needing a foothold in the Midwest..' says [money manager Robin Manners] West. Who would be interested? West thinks Banc One might be...Another possible buyer: U.S. Bancorp."	● Banc One and First Chicago announced merger April 13, 1998.
2/16/98 PNC Bank may be taken over, possibly by First Union	"For a buyer looking for nontraditional bank businesses where efficiencies can be increased, PNC is a gem,' says [money manager Robin Manners] West. Potential acquirers?...First Union."	● Didn't happen.
2/23/98 Myers Industries may be takeover target by several major equipment makers and industrial companies	"One stock [Elliot Schlang, managing director of LJR Great Lakes Review] thinks may be takeover bait [is]...Myers Industries."	● Didn't happen.
2/23/98 Renex looking to sell	"Analysts say" Renex talks openly of selling.	● Didn't happen.
3/2/98 Cott could be bought by Cadbury Schweppes	"Who would be interested in Cott? [Forrest] Mervine [a money manager] is betting on Britain's Cadbury Schweppes."	● Didn't happen.
3/2/97 Nike may go after Callaway Golf	"[I]t's a stock with added allure: [George Cohen, managing partner of investment firm Cohen Klingenstein & Marks] thinks Nike may go after it."	● Didn't happen.
3/9/98 Bank Plus likely to be taken over	Deborah Beylus of J.W. Charles Financial Services says Bank Plus is "one savings and loan likely to be gobbled up."	● Didn't happen.
3/9/98 Intelligent Electronics to be taken over by one of "several electronic biggies"	"Whispers are..." that a large electronics company will try to acquire Intelligent Electronics.	● Xerox acquired the company on May 20, 1998, to form Xerox Connect.
3/16/98 Anheuser-Busch may take over Redhook Ale Brewery	Investment manager Vince Carino "is betting that Anheuser-Busch, which owns 25% of [Redhook], will move to acquire the rest" of the company.	● Didn't happen.
3/23/98 United States Surgical believed to be takeover target of Abbott Laboratories or American Home Products	According to "a longtime watcher of U.S. Surgical." A money manager says "'the story makes sense.'"	● Didn't happen.

CALLS BY "INSIDE WALL STREET"

THE DEAL	THE SOURCE	THE OUTCOME
3/30/98 Carl Icahn interested in acquiring Seagull Energy	Icahn has an "appetite for Seagull," according to an Icahn associate.	● Didn't happen.
4/6/98 Citicorp may take over Paymentech	"Whispers are that Banc One is talking with Citicorp and at least one other financial institution to unload [its controlling stake in Paymentech]."	● Didn't happen.
4/13/98 National Insurance Group may split the company and sell off the information services division	"Whispers are that management is thinking of splitting the company and spinning off the information services."	● Didn't happen.
4/20/98 Pioneer Hi-Bred International ripe for takeover	No source cited. "[S]ome major market players have been eyeing [Pioneer] both for its long-term fundamentals and its takeover allure....What's the reasoning behind the takeover theory? For one thing, DuPont has already acquired a 20% stake in Pioneer."	● Didn't happen.
4/27/98 American International Group may be merging with American Express	Investment manager Robin Manners West believes AIG and AmEx are considering a merger.	● Didn't happen.
4/27/98 Gaylord Container could be bought by Weyerhaeuser	BT Alex.Brown analyst Mark Wilde says Gaylord Container is "an attractive candidate." He says Weyerhaeuser could be the likely buyer.	● Didn't happen.
4/27/98 Schlumberger looking to buy Baker Hughes	"Whispers are that Schlumberger...is poised to go after Baker Hughes....A New York hedge-fund investment manager insists that Schlumberger has twice approached Baker Hughes...with an offer."	● Didn't happen.
5/11/98 Global Marine may be bought by Santa Fe International	"One outfit rumored to be interested is Santa Fe International....Santa Fe, owned 66% by Kuwait Petroleum Corp., 'has the critical mass and deep pockets' for a deal, notes one Global stakeholder."	● Didn't happen.
5/11/98 Coventry Industries may acquire Kiwi International Holdings	"According to several investors, Coventry is in talks to acquire three small, low-fare carriers—among them Kiwi International Holdings."	● Didn't happen.
5/18/97 Pittston Brinks Group's home security division could be bought by "a biggie"	"Whispers are that a biggie is poised to pounce on Brinks's home-security operation."	● Didn't happen.

TOTALS

36

DIDN'T HAPPEN

3

HAPPENED

3

SOMETHING SIMILAR HAPPENED

phone interview, Marcial's responses to criticism of his column seem to underline a fundamental ambiguity about the very nature of "Inside Wall Street."

"I don't care if the rumor is true or not," says Marcial. "What I care about is that people are acting on that rumor, and our readers should know about it."

"Some people equate the column with a market letter, where you recommend stock. This is a news column!" Marcial declares emphatically. "I'm just a reporter. If I hear that J.P. Morgan is the subject of rumor and the stock is moving, it is incumbent on me to write about it....The takeover is incidental. To me, it's a story."

If the column only reports what's out there, without concern for the results, then why bother trying to prove with the July 6 analysis that his stock "picks"—as he refers to them—have done well? "The column is not to recommend stocks, but [readers act on it] anyway," says Marcial. "And critics rate it anyway."

"I never say these are gospel truths," he insists. "No one should use this column as an investment tool. They should do their homework and then decide."

"I think [the column is] a public service. Ordinary investors wouldn't know [this information otherwise]. It's an equal opportunity column. It gives information. You can take it or leave it."

Yet, later in the interview, Marcial points proudly to the fact that "a lot of stories written on a company don't move stocks. But my column does." Clearly, investors are not giving themselves a lot of time after reading his column to do their homework.

"I beat all the [market] yardsticks except six months, and [trail] that only by a whisker," Marcial notes. "It's a remarkable performance. I think I'm proud of it."

In a separate interview, Shepard echoes the sense of the column as a service to readers. "If you report that XYZ is talking to ABC, you're performing a public service," says the longtime editor in chief. It is "naive, disingenuous" to argue that takeover talk needs to come to fruition to make the column credible, he says.

"Wall Street moves because of talk. The talk may be right, the talk may not be right," he explains. Either way, "the

talk results in the stock moving,” and it is Marcial’s job to keep readers abreast of this talk.

The dual role played by the column—stock picker on the one hand, news reporter on the other—is reflected in the standards Marcial says he uses regarding sourcing.

“I take some liberties, like [referring only to] ‘rumors,’ that others [at *Business Week*] can’t take,” he acknowledges. “Wall Street is nothing else but full of gossip. Isn’t it unfair,” he asks, “to the ordinary investor who never knew” this gossip, not to print it?

**“I’ll always be accused of being used by my sources,” Marcial says. “I know what I’m doing, and I know if it will benefit people.”**

“Inside Wall Street,” Marcial acknowledges, holds to a “different standard” from the rest of the highly regarded magazine. “It uses information that many other pages wouldn’t use as such. But this is a column.”

*Business Week* senior editor Seymour Zucker, who edits Marcial’s column, agrees that “we do not use the normal three sources, or two independent sources” to verify something in “Inside Wall Street,” the way reporters would be expected to do in a regular news story. “The idea you have to get five people to corroborate—it’s not that kind of column.”

Shepard has a different take, however. He says “the standard [for the column] is basically the same,” and it holds to the same level of integrity and accuracy as the rest of the magazine. Still, he says, each section has its own “peculiarities.” International reporting has different ground rules than Washington reporting, he says, by way of example.

An “ideal” column, Shepard says, identifies a company whose stock will likely rise and states the reason for that potential increase. “Whether it’s true or not, no one can say,” says Shepard. “In that sense, it’s different than the rest of the magazine.”

A staff member at *Business Week* who declined to be identified says others at the magazine regard “Inside Wall Street” as “sui generis”—out of charac-

ter with the rest of the business newsweekly. The column is “sort of informed gossip,” says this *Business Week* staffer; not everyone at the magazine is comfortable with it.

While acknowledging his reliance on unnamed sources, Marcial says the practice “is both a handicap and an advantage.” Often, guaranteeing sources’ anonymity is the only way to get the inside dope, he says. For the delicate task of sifting through all the information that comes his way, “You have to have journalistic seasoning. You have to be the judge of the sourcing.”

While Zucker says he “almost routinely” asks Marcial about his sources and is sometimes amazed at how well-placed they are, Marcial himself asserts that “I am the judge, the final arbiter” of his sources’ veracity.

Arguably, Marcial has the credentials necessary for such judgment. Before coming to *Business Week* in 1981 to write “Inside Wall Street,” Marcial spent more than seven years at the *The Wall Street Journal* writing for “Abreast of the Market” and “Heard on the Street.” The writer, who will give his age only as in the “mid-fifties” and says that he came to the United States “in the late sixties,” had worked as a business writer for the Manila Chronicle in the Philippines. He is the author of *Secrets of the Street: The Dark Side of Making Money* (1995).

In comparing his current work with the *Journal*’s “Heard,” Marcial describes the latter as “more evenhanded. It presents both sides.” And despite his earlier assertion that his is a news column, Marcial contrasts this approach with his own: The column “takes a position, because of the position of its sources.”

This raises the question of Marcial possibly being used by some of his sources to manipulate stocks. “I’ll always be accused of being used by my sources. If you are connoting that I don’t know it”—that would be wrong.

“I know what I’m doing, and I know if it will benefit people,” he says.

“Of course [a source] is using me. Let’s be honest. A reporter is nothing without his sources. I usually mention if the source has a stake” in the company being discussed, Marcial claims. That disclosure, he believes, is enough to warn readers of the source’s vested interest and allow them to take what they read with the proper grain of salt.

As to his own interest, Marcial asserts he has none. He does not own any stock, he says. “I don’t trade to avoid that conflict,” he says, with a pointed barb at those writers who do trade and write investment columns, as well.

Marcial always “tries to identify the stake of the source. He tells the reader where the bias is,” agrees Shepard. “So the reader who is sophisticated will know that [the source] has an interest in talking [the stock] up. He takes that into account.”

In the end, of course, *Business Week*’s ultimate defense of its column is that the market can’t be crazy enough to pay attention to someone who is so off the mark.

“I believe in markets,” says Zucker, who has been editing Marcial since 1984. “The market says Gene does a very good job. If Gene weren’t right more than wrong, then [his column] wouldn’t move the market. If he were just blowing smoke, the market wouldn’t pay any attention.”

A reporter at a competing news organization maintains that Marcial’s influence is based in large part on the solid reputation of *Business Week*. His columns seem credible, this reporter says, because these days, “everyone’s talking to everyone, and the deals he writes about are not far-fetched. The market is hungry.” Besides, almost every time Marcial writes about a company, wire services pick up his column, and reporters at competing publications are obliged to follow up, which creates a momentum all its own.

The column has “enormous appeal to investors,” says Zucker, “because, by and large, the column does give the small investor some way of competing with the inside dope on Wall Street. It gives the inside look.”

Or does it? Let the reader beware. ■

*Assistant editor Bridget Samburg contributed to the research for this story.*

Currency	Rate
Argentina (Peso)	1.0001
Australia (Dollar)	.6515
Austria (Schilling)	.0794
Canada (Real)	.0270
Brazil (Real)	.876
Britain (Pound)	1.67
30-day fwd	1.6644
60-day fwd	1.6615
90-day fwd	1.6588
Canada (Dollar)	1.6543
30-day fwd	.6965
60-day fwd	.6971
90-day fwd	.6975
Chile (Peso)	.6979
China (Renminbi)	.002214
Columbia (Peso)	1.00
c-CzechRep (Koruna)	.000737
Denmark (Krone)	.0299
Dominican (Peso)	1.00
ECU (ECU)	1.00
z-Ecuador (Sucre)	1.00
d-Egypt (Pound)	1.00
Finland (Mark)	1.00
France (Franc)	1.00
Germany (Mark)	1.00
30-day fwd	1.00
60-day fwd	1.00
90-day fwd	1.00
Greece (Drachma)	1.00
Hong Kong (Dollar)	1.00



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# Hardball With A Heart

The editor of a small-town daily recounts four tales from his local pages to show the importance of weighing a tough story's aftermath.

**T**HE TOUGHEST CONVERSATION I EVER HAD over a story involved a teen suicide. A boy had shot himself with a rifle, and the police had given us enough details to write a story. The reporter spoke with several of the boy's friends about him, but the family wouldn't talk.

At the time, the *Concord Monitor* was an afternoon paper with an 11:30 A.M. deadline. At around 11, the boy's family appeared at the office. His parents wanted us to spike the story. I said we couldn't and explained why: A teen suicide is always news in our community. This did not satisfy the boy's father and brother, and the mother had to restrain these large men.

After several anxious minutes, the mother took over the family's side of the conversation. She asked if she could see the story we were planning to publish; I was apprehensive but consented. When she had read it, she asked if it was necessary to say in the lead paragraph that her son had shot himself in the head. We agreed to remove that detail and to make a few other changes that softened the story. The family didn't get what it came for, but it got something. I decided afterward that the mother's suggestions had actually improved the story.

Seldom do you have to edit the newspaper with the family of the deceased looking over your shoulder, but that mother reminded us of several lessons that can be easy to forget under the crush of a daily deadline: How we write a story matters deeply to those involved. Where we play a story influences how readers perceive it. Whether you deal straight beforehand with the people most affected by a story makes a difference.

My job is to decide what is right for readers and to act on those decisions. This is hardball, but, sometimes, it is possible to play it with heart. I don't mean merely granting concessions to the subjects of stories or those close to them. I mean looking beyond internal considerations and asserting the community's interest in knowing the real story, even when



doing so entails telling hard truths or breaking through silence.

Three recent stories from our pages illustrate the point.

Heroin use is increasing in New Hampshire, particularly among the young. Our reporter's assignment was to document the drug's addictive powers, who was using it and in what quantities, and where it was coming from. As usual, we wanted real people in the story—no John Does or Mary Xs.

Our police reporter, Sarah Schweitzer, interviewed several inmates doing time for heroin-related crimes, but her most compelling subject was a 19-year-old heroin addict in a small town near Concord. This young man told Schweitzer he had stolen his godparents' pistols and his sister's car to buy heroin in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 50 minutes down the interstate. He had stopped making child-support payments for his 3-year-old daughter. He had been through two detox programs and had skipped out on a third. He understood the consequences of his addiction, but his craving for the high flushed out any feelings of guilt or remorse.



When teen drug use became a growing problem in New Hampshire, the *Concord Monitor* responded with a riveting report on drug abuse by the heroin addict shown above.

*Mike Pride is the editor of the Concord Monitor in Concord, New Hampshire. His new column on editing a daily local newspaper will appear regularly.*

This man lived with his parents. They did not condone his addiction, but they feared what might befall him if they kicked him out of their house. He was facing several criminal charges, nearly all of them stemming from his heroin use. With the help of a lawyer, his family was trying to get him into a program through which, in exchange for a signed promise to stay clean and enter drug rehab, he could avoid criminal prosecution.

The young man told Schweitzer his story with no strings attached. We could name him in the paper, photograph him snorting heroin, even accompany him to Lawrence on a buy (we declined this last offer, guessing that his suppliers might be less welcoming). Schweitzer interviewed his mother, who was equally candid and hoped that others might gain from reading

**We go to extremes to be fair, particularly with people unaccustomed to being in the news. We might lose a good story; our subject might lose more.**



As the editor of a community newspaper, Mike Pride finds there's often a personal angle to the stories he prints.

about the nightmare her life had become.

Schweitzer finished the story on a Monday. The next morning, she called the mother to read back quotes and double-check facts. When the woman heard that the story opened with the theft of the godparents' guns, she began to get cold feet. She was meeting with her son's lawyer on Wednesday, she said; perhaps it would be best to speak with the lawyer about how publication of the son's admission that he had stolen the guns might affect his case.

Schweitzer came in to tell me the story might be in jeopardy. With other senior editors, we discussed our options. We were almost certain the lawyer would tell the woman to stop the story if she could. We had been down this road a few times before, reluctantly giving up compelling human stories when their subjects backed out. We go to extremes to be fair, particularly with people unaccustomed to being in the news. Our loss—our readers' loss—would be a good story; the subject seemed to have much more at risk.

This time, we decided not to give in. The story was just too important to lose. It would bring home the reality of the local heroin problem in a riveting, personal way. We had the pictures, the story was written—and we were going with it. We would move publication up to the next morning, before the mother's meeting with the lawyer. Schweitzer would inform the mother of this change, telling her that it was the editors' decision. If the woman wanted to speak with one of us, she was welcome to do so.

This hardball tactic was justified, in our minds, by the extraordinary nature of the story. But sometimes you get lucky. The mother called Schweitzer the morning the story ran to say she liked it and hoped it would do some good.

Sometimes you don't get lucky. Another of our reporters, Annmarie Timmins, set out recently to cover a highway fatality: A 55-year-old man had been killed after losing control of his motorcycle. The police sergeant who handled the case smelled alcohol on the dead man's breath.

When Timmins checked our files, she found that nearly three years ago, in a state of inebriation, the same man had held a pistol to his wife's head while the police surrounded his house. According to police reports, the man went outside, leveled an assault weapon at one officer, and fired three shots into the air. Miraculously, the police held their fire and took the man alive.

The courts dealt leniently with the man. The local police chief liked him, telling our reporter that as long as he didn't drink too much, he was a great guy. It turned out that a few years before the armed standoff at his house, the man had helped the police solve a grisly murder.

Timmins recounted the standoff with the police in her story of the man's death. The family declined to comment, but Timmins closed with a quote from the man's boss at a local car dealership. He was hard-working and dependable, the boss said, and everybody liked him.

The calls and letters began the morning the story appeared. The message was the same in all of them: How could we be so callous as to repeat a three-year-old story about one bad day in a life of caring and doing for others? Didn't we realize the pain we had caused an already grieving family?

We print almost all letters to the editor from local people. We feel especially obliged to print letters critical of us and to respond to them only on points of information. But the letters that poured in over the next two weeks were especially vicious and personal. The writers accused Timmins of rumor-mongering and "sheer slandering" and called her "your staff hit man." All the sins of the national media and the tabloid press were visited on her.

Two weeks into this blizzard of invective, I decided to write a column defending Timmins. The attacks were over the top, I wrote, but more important, given the same set of facts in the future, we would report the story exactly as she had done in this case.

That is not to say we had presented a complete portrait of the dead man, but given the constraints of a deadline and his family's refusal to talk to Timmins, she had done a good job. It troubled me that in our letters column we had run 1,250 words of hyperventilation about the imagined sins of a reporter. How much better off our community would have been, I told readers, if the dead man's friends had instead filled that space with personal anecdotes about what made him special.

When a young person dies violently, the entire community feels the effects. When it happens at school, it presents a special challenge for the local paper.

Last year, two teenagers got in a fistfight behind Concord High School. One of them wound up dead. The next morning, our lead photograph showed paramedics tending to the victim in the background and a woman running toward the photographer to block his view. I came to see this photograph as symbolic of the official response to our efforts to cover the story. School officials circled the wagons, releasing almost no information. Because juveniles were involved, the police could tell us little.



Yet the nature of this story made digging into it imperative. Perhaps no issue is more critical to a community than the safety of a public school. Parents and taxpayers had a right to know how school officials had performed in this crisis.

On this particular story, chances were good that, without the facts, the public might jump to a wrong conclusion. The dead boy had grown up in Concord, was popular and fun-loving, and was not known as a fighter. The boy who threw the fatal punch was a tuition student from out of town who had been kicked out of other schools as a discipline problem.

Fortunately, our education reporter, Matthew T. Hall, had excellent contacts among students. We try to cover education by reporting on what happens in the classroom, not just at school board meetings, and Hall had done a good job of this. In the days after the fight, he called many students he already knew, seeking information about what had caused it. Of course, kids often say more than

they know. But Hall applied a practiced ear, weeding out exaggeration and bravado.

The story that emerged was this: The out-of-town student had been harassed and beaten for three weeks by a group of students who were upset that he was dating a particular girl. The boy's father was aware of the beatings and had complained about them to an assistant principal. The boy, meanwhile, had offered to fight his harassers one by one. He arranged to meet one of them behind the school, but that rival backed out. Another boy stepped forward to take his place. A blow behind the ear caused a brain hemorrhage, and the substitute fighter died.

Four months after the fight, Hall wrote a long narrative account, taking our readers from the origins of the dispute through the fistfight and into the troubled life of the boy who threw the fatal punch. Hall was even able to report one possible reason a popular teenager not known as a fighter would step up to the challenge on that fateful day: the autopsy had turned up evidence

of cocaine and marijuana in his system.

All of this Hall did with little help from the authorities. Shortly after the fight, I wrote an angry column (in retrospect, too much hardball, not enough heart) criticizing school officials for shutting out the public. Alongside the column, as a graphic reminder of the school's stonewalling, we reran the picture of the woman rushing toward the camera trying to block the photographer.

For a community journalist, many big stories have personal postscripts. I've had two sons go through Concord High, and while I recognized the woman in this picture as a member of the school's staff, I didn't know her. My third son is a student at CHS now. The woman in the picture is his guidance counselor.

Anytime we cover a tough story—whether it is a teen suicide, a drug story, a seemingly routine motorcycle death, or a fatal fistfight—chances are good we'll run into people involved in the story again in the future. This thought is at once rewarding and bracing. It is also a good reason for an editor to play hardball with heart. ■



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# Peeking Behind The Silver Screen

Whether the subject is war heroes, capital punishment, or the heyday of disco, real-life stories often provide the foundation for Hollywood movie magic.

## SAVING PRIVATE RYAN

The real-life roots of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* can be found in the 1942 battle of Guadalcanal during World War II and in the true story of the Sullivan brothers. On the morning of November 13, 1942, the light cruiser *U.S.S. Juneau* was hit by torpedoes fired by a Japanese submarine. The ship sank in minutes. The Sullivan brothers—Albert, Francis, George, Joseph, and Madison—were among 700 men on board the ship. Approximately 110 survivors, including only one Sullivan—the eldest, George—made it to the life rafts.

For several days, the *Juneau's* remaining crew members waited in vain to be rescued from the shark-infested waters. When the Navy finally decided the area was secure enough for rescue operations, only ten men were still alive. George was not one of them.

The resulting furor over what many perceived as the Navy's cowardice found its expression in an outpouring of public grief for the Sullivan family. President Franklin D. Roosevelt instituted a policy which declared that if any family lost two sons, any brothers still in combat would be removed from battle. The policy served to answer the PR and morale problems that the Sullivans' deaths created among the American public.

The movie's screenwriter, Robert Rodat, based his story on how this policy affected the Niland family

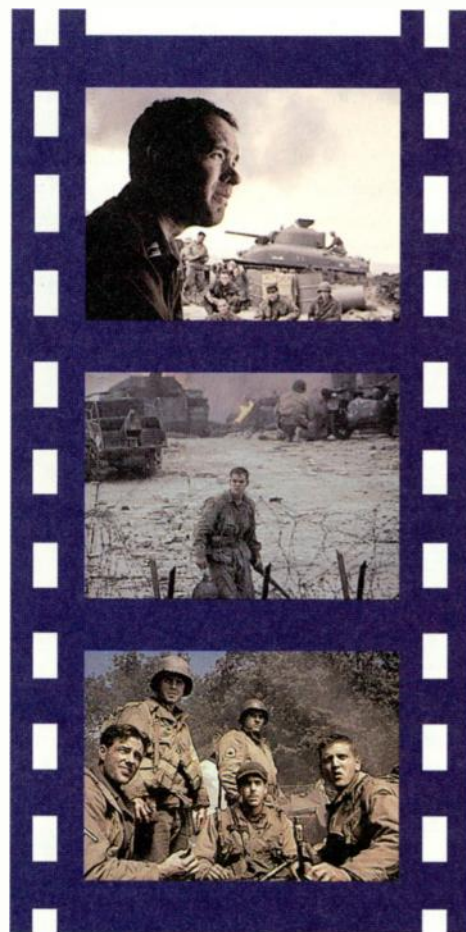
*Assistant editor Michael Kadish wrote in the October issue about computer hackers who target America Online users. Dimitra Kessenides is the associate editor of this magazine.*

of Tonawanda, New York. Rodat modeled Ryan after historian Stephen Ambrose's brief account of Private Frederick "Fritz" Niland in *Band of Brothers*. As in the film, the three older Niland brothers were all reported killed or missing in action, and a mission was launched to recover Fritz, the fourth and youngest son, who had parachuted into France on D-Day with the Army's 101st Airborne Division.

In the movie, the Army sent a squad of soldiers behind enemy lines to find Ryan. In actuality, it was an Army chaplain named Father Francis Sampson who found Niland on the front lines near where he had landed. Like Ryan, Niland refused to abandon his post but was finally pulled out of France and away from danger.—*Michael Kadish*

## RETURN TO PARADISE

When three young Americans enjoy a holiday of drugs, women, and sun in Malaysia, one of them gets left holding the bag. *Return to Paradise*, a film that explores the subjects of loyalty and responsibility among friends, depends on the particulars of the Malaysian criminal justice system to drive its plot.



On the front lines in *Saving Private Ryan*

One character, Lewis McBride, is arrested after police discover 104 grams of hashish in his possession, most of which his friends had left with him before their return to New York. That's enough drugs to earn McBride a death sentence in Malaysia. Two years later, he faces a hanging—unless his friends return to share the responsibility and the jail time.

*How tough are the drug laws in Malaysia?* In Malaysia, under the country's Dangerous Drugs Act, those accused of drug trafficking are presumed guilty and must prove their innocence. The law includes in its definition of trafficking the possession of at least 15 grams of heroin, 200 grams of

cannabis (hashish or marijuana), or 1,000 grams of opium. Anyone found trafficking in drugs receives a mandatory death sentence. As a Malaysian consulate spokesman repeatedly told us, "Drugs are [the] number one enemy in Malaysia."

*Are prisoners in Malaysia executed by hanging?* Yes. Amnesty International's 1998 annual report stated that "at least seven people were sentenced to death, and at least two people were executed" by hanging in Malaysia during 1997. But



U.S. State Bureau of Consular Affairs spokeswoman Maria Rudensky said she is unaware of a single American who has been executed in Malaysia to date.

*How many Americans are being held in foreign prisons and jails?* Currently, three Americans are imprisoned in Malaysia. Mexico, with roughly 400 U.S. citizens detained, has the largest population of American prisoners outside of the United States.

The State Department estimates that there are a total of 2,700 to 3,000 Americans detained in countries worldwide. Of that group, approximately one-third are held on drug-related charges; half are being detained on a short-term basis while facing charges stemming from such matters as visa violations, automobile accidents, or drunken disorderliness.

*What can the U.S. government actually do for an American facing drug charges in Malaysia?*

Not much. According to Rudensky, American diplomats cannot bail people out of jail or act as their legal representatives. Under the Vienna Convention, local authorities are required, if requested, to notify the relevant U.S. consulate when they have an American in custody. A consular representative can then notify whomever the detainee wishes and provide a list of local lawyers willing to represent American clients. In addition, a U.S. consulate can facilitate payment of local lawyers and can monitor ongoing cases by having a representative attend most court proceedings.

A consular representative is allowed access to detainees to monitor their health and diet, and to check on whether they are being mistreated. Extra food can be sent to prisoners if

Anne Heche counsels Vince Vaughn to accept a Malaysian prison sentence in *Return to Paradise*.

54 gives audiences a glimpse into the famous nightlife in 1970s New York.

it's paid for by their families. The general rule is that U.S. citizens should not be treated any worse than the native-born citizens, but how well the locals are treated in some countries is a matter for debate.

—Michael Kadish

## 54

Films built on 1970s nostalgia have filled movie screens in recent months. With Miramax's release of *54* in late summer, viewers were promised entree to the world of New York's famous nightspot, Studio 54.

How faithful was writer-director Mark Christopher to the club's history? Certain key historical elements did not make the final cut. Most noticeably absent are the very people responsible for bringing the club to life.



Christopher focused on Studio 54 proprietor Steve Rubell, portraying him as a risk-taking entrepreneur who puts everything on the line for his dream. In fact, the Qualude-popping Rubell was co-owner with Ian Schrager, but no Schrager-like character appears in the movie. Through his spokeswoman, Schrager declined to comment.

"Ian Schrager was an important part of it, certainly, as was Carmen D'Alessio," says writer Anthony Haden-Guest, whose book, *The Last Party*, chronicled the club's rise and fall. According to the book, D'Alessio—also absent from the film—was the PR mastermind, planning parties and bringing in celebrities. "Carmen's role was absolutely crucial in the beginning," explains *Vanity Fair* special correspondent Bob Colacello. "She introduced Ian and Steve to the powers that be

in New York nightlife, including Andy [Warhol]."

D'Alessio's version goes even further. "I was the founder of the club, the most important person in that project, the main promoter," she says. "Steve had a dream, I had a dream too. He invested in my dream, together with Ian Schrager." Christopher was unavailable for comment.

And what of the film's depiction of Rubell uncontrollably discussing money on talk shows like Merv Griffin and Dick Cavett? In the film, this sequence of events is portrayed as contributing to the club's demise, but it, too, plays with the truth. "I don't remember Steve going on talk shows at all," says Colacello. Instead, Colacello, Haden-Guest, and D'Alessio all point to an article in *New York* maga-

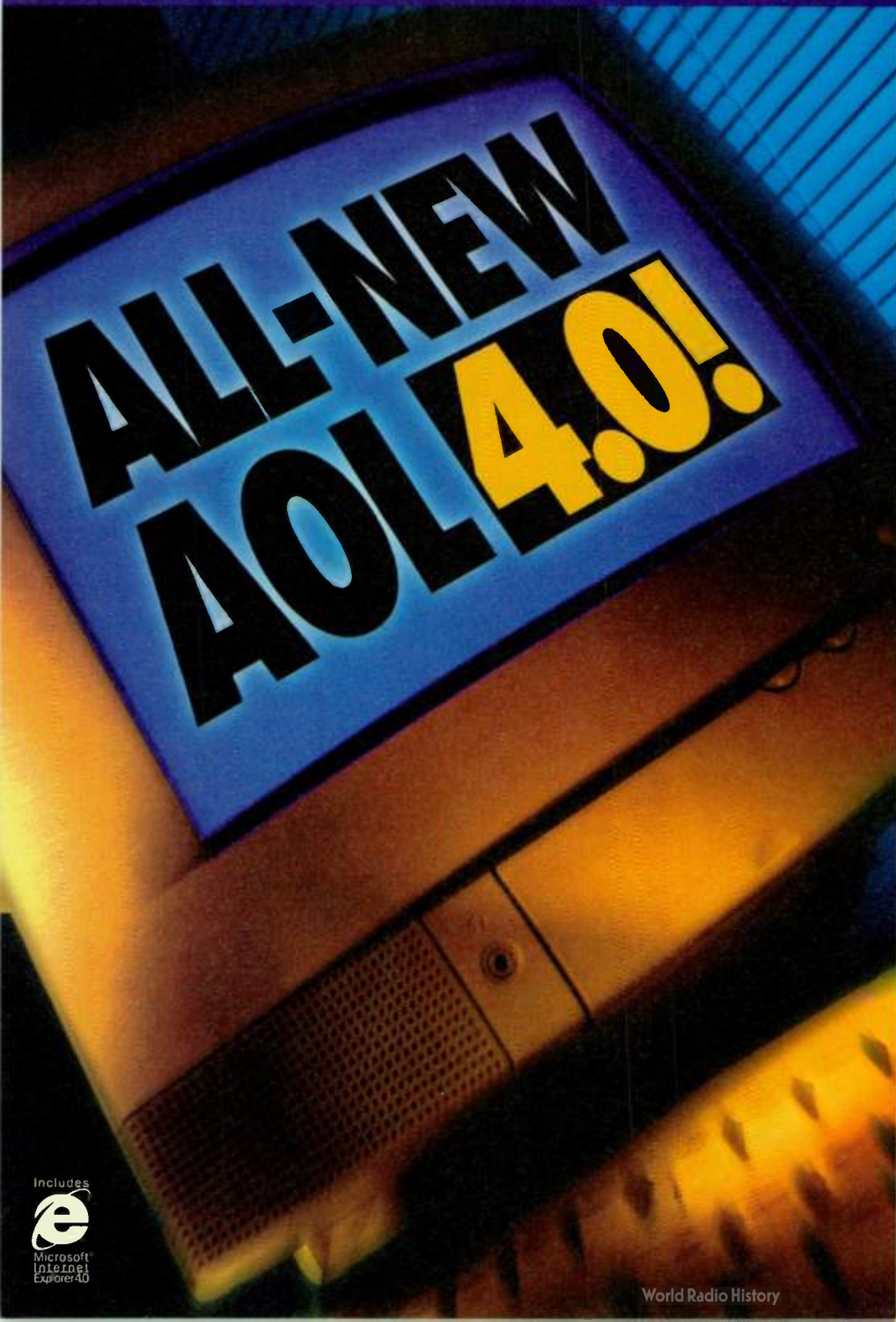
zine in which Rubell let a little too much slip. "The profits are astronomical. Only the Mafia does better," *New York* reported Rubell as saying in 1977. "It's a cash business and you have to worry about the IRS. I don't want them to know everything."

Rubell and Schrager ultimately were convicted on tax-evasion charges; each served just over a year in jail. The IRS's investigation of these crimes is referred to in the film, along with the agency's raid on the club and discovery of hidden cash-filled trash bags.

Besides Rubell, there is another 54 character who is obviously based in reality—Disco Dottie. Like real-life Studio 54 reveler Disco Sally (aka Sally Lippman), Disco Dottie parties as hard as—or harder than—any of the club's young-and-beautiful regulars. But the character's dramatic death from a drug overdose on the Studio dance floor on New Year's Eve 1979 never happened. "She died years after," says D'Alessio. According to an obituary that ran on the Associated Press wire, Sally Lippman died on May 27, 1982, of undetermined causes.

—Dimitra Kessenides

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# Lead Political Reporters

During the election season, news outlets rely on their star political reporters to bring us all the news. Who are those stars, and how did they rise?



**BOB SCHIEFFER**

*CBS News, chief Washington correspondent; anchor/moderator of Face the Nation with Bob Schieffer*  
B.A., Texas Christian University, 1959; Before

joining CBS News, was a reporter for the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*. Has served at CBS News since 1969 as Pentagon correspondent, State Department correspondent, chief Washington correspondent, and congressional correspondent. Was the anchor of the Saturday edition of *Evening News* for 20 years.



**FRANK SESNO**

*CNN, senior vice-president and Washington bureau chief; coanchor of Newsday*  
B.A., Middlebury College, 1977; Served as White House correspondent for Associated Press Radio before joining CNN in 1984.

Currently oversees the network's largest news-reporting team.

**JOHN HARWOOD**

*The Wall Street Journal, national political reporter*

A.B., Duke University, 1978; Served as a Washington correspondent for the *St. Petersburg Times*. Joined *The Wall Street Journal* in 1991 to cover the White House at the end of the Bush administration. Has since reported on the 1992 elections, Capitol Hill, and national politics.



**ERIC POOLEY**

*Time, senior writer*  
B.A., Brown University, 1981; Served as the city politics columnist for *New York* magazine; joined *Time* in 1995, where he has covered the 1996 campaign and ongoing political issues.

**HOWARD FINEMAN**

*Newsweek, chief political correspondent*

B.A., Colgate University, 1971; M.S., Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, 1973; J.D., University of Louisville School of Law, 1980; Covered Kentucky politics for the Louisville *Courier-Journal* before moving to that paper's Washington bureau to report on the federal government. Joined *Newsweek* in 1980 and was promoted to chief political correspondent in 1984.



**DAN BALZ**

*The Washington Post, political reporter*  
B.S., University of Illinois, 1968; M.S., University of Illinois, 1972; Served as the *Post's* political editor for the 1980 presidential campaign and as a reporter for the 1984 presidential campaign. Became national editor in 1985; returned to political reporting in 1989.

**TIM RUSSERT**

*NBC, senior vice-president and Washington bureau chief; moderator of Meet the Press with Tim Russert; MSNBC, contributing anchor; CNBC, anchor of his own program called Tim Russert*

B.A., John Carroll University, 1972; J.D., Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, 1976; Worked for Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and New York Governor Mario Cuomo before joining NBC in 1984. Served as senior vice-president and Washington bureau chief before he joined *Meet the Press* in 1991. Also acts as a political analyst for *Nightly News with Tom Brokaw* and *Today*.



**BRIT HUME**

*Fox News, managing editor and chief Washington correspondent; host of Special Report with Brit Hume*  
B.A., University of Virginia, 1965; Served at ABC News for 23 years as Washington correspondent, Capitol Hill correspondent, and chief White

House correspondent. Joined Fox News in 1996 as managing editor and chief Washington correspondent. Is responsible for news content for the Fox Washington bureau.

**COKIE ROBERTS**

*ABC News, chief congressional analyst; coanchor of This Week with Sam Donaldson & Cokie Roberts*  
B.A., Wellesley College, 1964; Served as cohost of PBS's *The Lawmakers* and as congressional correspondent for *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*.



First appeared as a panelist on ABC's *This Week With David Brinkley* in 1987 and joined the show as a regular panelist in 1988. Is currently also a news analyst for NPR's *Morning Edition*.

**JOE KLEIN**

*The New Yorker, staff writer*  
B.A., University of Pennsylvania, 1968; Served as news editor of *The Real Paper* and in *Rolling Stone's* Washington bureau. Was a political columnist for *New York* magazine before joining *Newsweek*, where he wrote the "Public Lives" political column. Joined *The New Yorker* after the 1996 campaign as a Washington correspondent. Author of the 1996 political roman à clef *Primary Colors*.



**RONALD BROWNSTEIN**

*Los Angeles Times, national political correspondent*  
B.A., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1979; Covered national politics for the *National Journal* before joining the *Los Angeles Times* as a national political correspondent and later as a columnist. Served briefly as chief political correspondent for *U.S. News & World Report*; returned to the *Los Angeles Times* in July 1998 as a national political correspondent and columnist.



**RICHARD BERKE**

*The New York Times, national political correspondent*  
B.A., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1980; M.S., Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, 1981; Served as the Baltimore *Evening Sun's* Washington correspondent. Joined *The New York Times* in 1986 as night editor of the Washington bureau. Has since covered the White House, Congress, national politics, and campaign finance.

KAREN COOPER (SCHIEFFER); ANDREW ECCLES (SESNO); ELLIS/NEWSMAKERS (KLEIN); TED THAU/TIME (POOLEY)

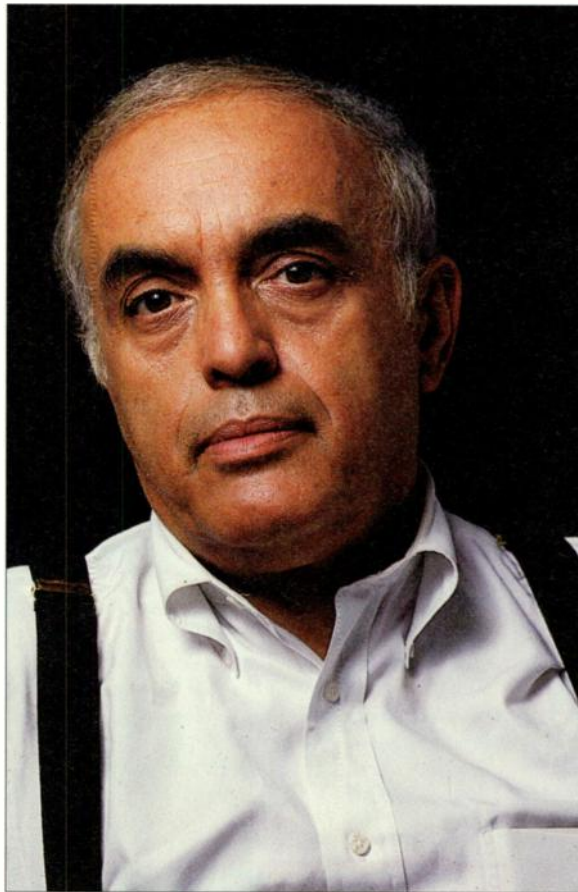
# Robert Novak, Inc.

Political commentator and veteran Washington newsman Robert Novak has turned political punditry into a profitable industry. • BY ROBERT SCHMIDT

**ROBERT NOVAK IS FAMILIAR TO** millions of Americans who watch him espouse his view from the political right on CNN or who read his nationally syndicated newspaper column to get the inside dope on what's happening in the nation's capital. But in an era where the airwaves are filled with political pundits of all stripes, Novak stands out—for his entrepreneurial skills. Along with spinning his conservative punditry, Novak has also spun a web of gold. Although the bulk of his earnings comes from a multiyear contract with CNN, Novak has also developed lucrative side businesses that go hand in hand with his journalistic endeavors.

Take the Evans-Novak Political Forum. Twice a year, Novak invites the same Washington luminaries he covers to this private seminar, where they speak to an audience of executives and lobbyists who subscribe to his newsletter, the *Evans-Novak Political Report*. Novak hosts the events with Rowland Evans, Jr., the coauthor of the newsletter and, until his retirement in 1993, the other half of the Evans and Novak syndicated column. Attendees pay \$450, on top of their yearly \$297 newsletter subscription fee, to mingle for half a day with the politicians and to ask them questions during set time periods.

Held in the Madison Hotel, an old-line Washington establishment, the seminars draw about 80 people each, Novak says. For speakers, Novak lines up top government officials and politi-



cal consultants—always a mix of Republicans and Democrats. Novak's forum in April featured Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin; Representative John Kasich, the Republican chairman of the House Budget Committee; Senator John Kerry, a Democrat touted in the forum's literature as a member of the Banking Committee; and New York Republican Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Novak pays an honorarium to speakers

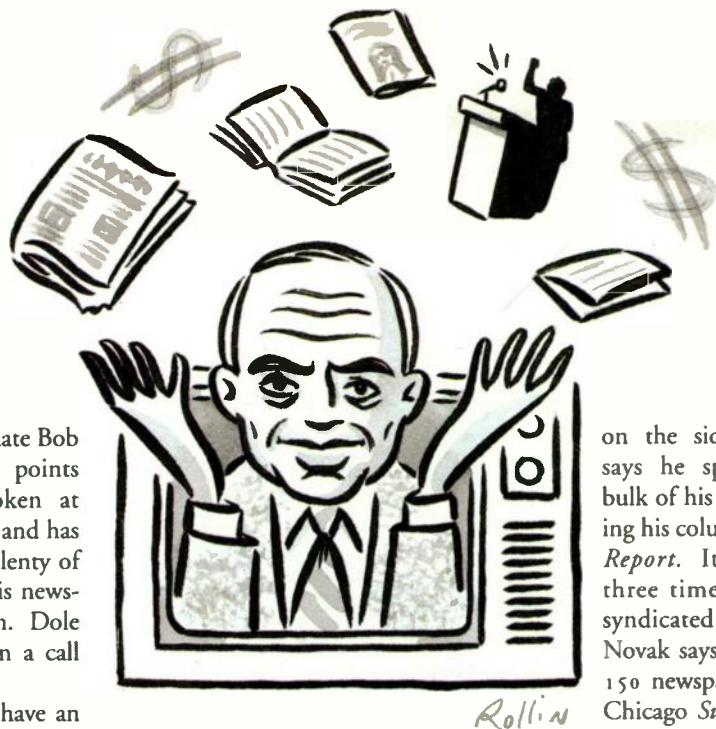
Robert Novak's colleagues marvel at his ability to juggle the many facets of his life as a journalist and businessman.

who are not government officials; he used to pay members of Congress until both the House and Senate put gift bans into effect in 1996.

The forums, Novak says, provide a service for his readers. "They have a great deal of desire to question these people," Novak explains, noting that he has hosted the events since 1971. However, the forums do have their critics, some of whom say Novak's use of government officials for his own money-making purposes breeds a coziness that's inappropriate for a journalist. Others, mainly Democrats who disagree with Novak's political views, harbor a more sinister view, claiming that government officials agree to speak at the forums in hopes of currying favor with the notoriously acerbic Novak, who often lashes out at politicians in his television appearances and newspaper columns. Few people are willing to criticize Novak publicly. But those who will speak openly about him can be just as blunt as he is. "What he does is he sells his column and then has all these 'private briefings' for interested parties," says Martin Lobel, a Washington attorney who represents a number of pundits. "If you want to get favorable mention, or no mention at all [in the column], you show up."

Novak disputes those charges. "Some of the people I cover who have been to the seminars I've been critical of; some, I haven't been critical of," he says. He contends that having a politician at one of his forums is similar to having that politician appear on one of his television shows. Former senator and presi-

*Robert Schmidt is a senior reporter for Legal Times in Washington, D.C.*



dential candidate Bob Dole, Novak points out, has spoken at three forums and has come in for plenty of criticism in his newspaper column. Dole did not return a call for comment.

"I don't have an empire—I'm just a poor, humble journalist," Novak says with a chuckle. Nonetheless, Novak's newsletter has about 2,500 subscribers. That's a gross of \$742,500, in addition to the \$72,000 he makes each year on his seminar (80 people x \$450 x two seminars a year).

Novak is also a prominent client of the Washington Speakers Bureau, an agency that books speeches. Last year, Novak says, he made about 15 paid speeches,

although he won't say what he charges for a speaking engagement. The former president of one trade association that Novak addressed in 1997 says the pundit's fee was in the \$6,500 to \$10,000 range, not including expenses for first-class airfare and meals. For his part, Novak says that he is traveling less and making fewer speeches than in previous years because he is doing so much television.

But television has not completely hampered Novak's speaking career. His speakers bureau also offers the opportunity to hire Novak's CNN show, *Capital Gang*. Instead of a speech, the group of pundits puts on a mock television show for the audience. Novak also appears in staged shows of *Crossfire*, another CNN program.

Despite his proclivity for earning money

on the side, Novak says he spends the bulk of his time writing his column, *Inside Report*. It appears three times a week, syndicated in what Novak says are about 150 newspapers. The *Chicago Sun-Times* is the column's home paper, and Novak draws a salary from that paper.

Still, television is also a major time commitment. Last year, Novak signed a four-year contract with CNN, where he appears regularly on the *Capital Gang*; *Evans, Novak, Hunt, & Shields*; *Inside Politics*; and *Crossfire*. Novak helped develop *Capital Gang* and is a co-executive producer on the show. He also has his own interview show, *Insights With*

**In an era where  
the airwaves  
are filled with  
political pundits of  
all stripes, Novak  
stands out—for  
his entrepreneurial  
skills.**

*Robert Novak*, on the conservative cable television network America's Voice.

Although they have stopped writing their newspaper column together after 30 years, Evans and Novak still coproduce their newsletter. The two also write articles together as contributing editors at *Reader's Digest*. Surprisingly, Novak also takes on freelance writing projects, often reviewing books for such magazines as *The American Spectator*, *The Weekly Standard*, *International Economy*, and *National Review*. It is a schedule that amazes plenty of journalists in Washington. Novak acknowledges he packs a lot into each day. "I spend a lot of time on work, but I'm extremely young, I'm only 67," says Novak. "I enjoy it. I wouldn't do it if I didn't enjoy it."

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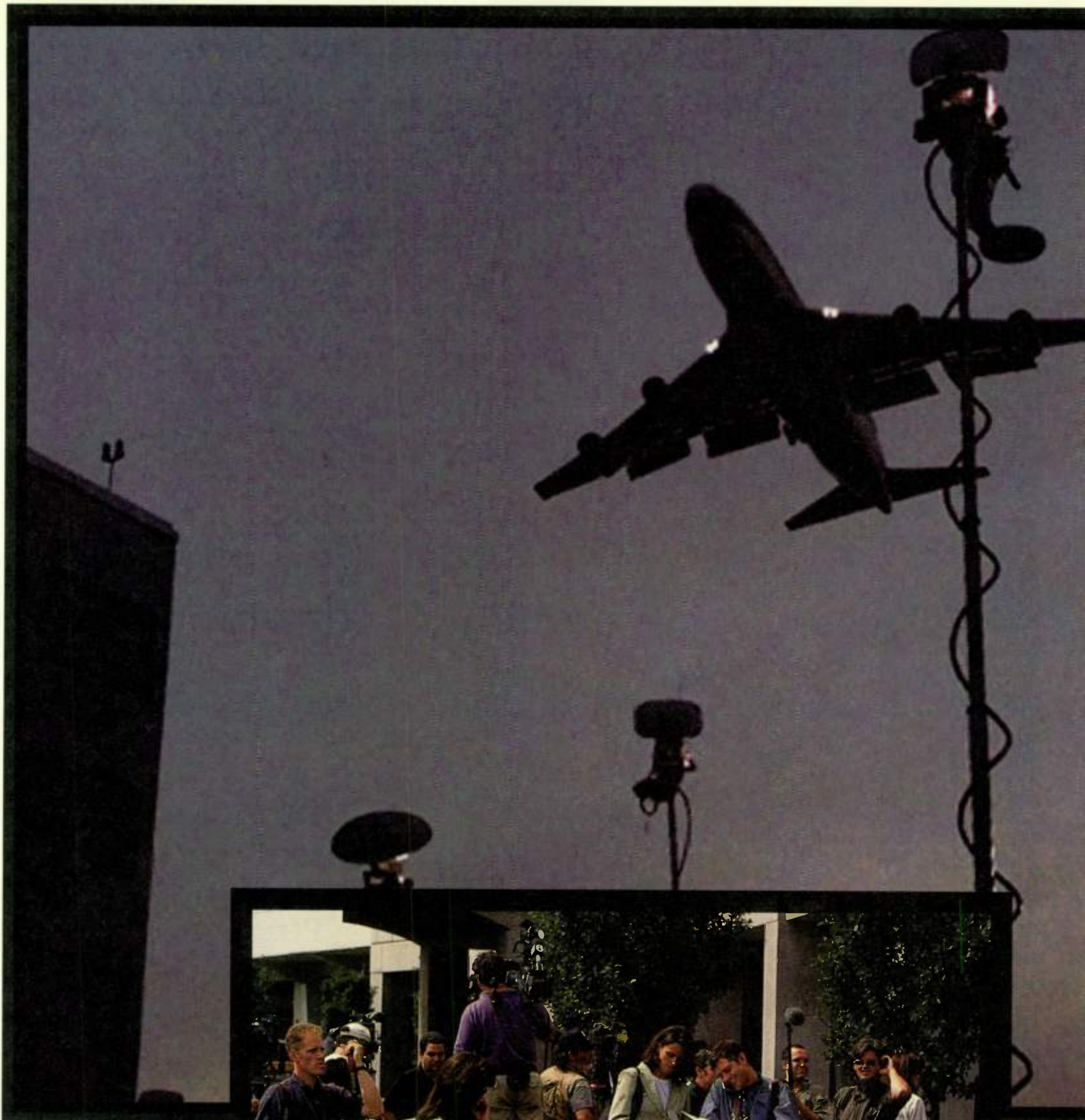
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Reporters camped out at Kennedy Airport after the Swissair crash are hoping for something—anything—from the stunned relatives of the victims. Above them, microwave transmitters, perched atop television remote trucks, stretch toward JFK airspace.





After the crash of Swissair flight 111,  
the victims' families converged at  
Kennedy airport. The press was waiting.

# Chasing Grief

IT IS SHORTLY AFTER NOON ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, THE DAY AFTER THE CATASTROPHIC crash of Swissair Flight 111, and a crowd of reporters is chasing an Hasidic rabbi through a parking lot of the Ramada Plaza Hotel at John F. Kennedy International Airport. The rabbi ignores them, weaving silently among cars to get to his own, but the cameras stay with him. These journalists know nothing about this large man in a long black coat except for one crucial fact: he walked out of the hotel where the crash victims' families are gathered. Every reporter and photographer here has come for one reason—to catch a glimpse of the grief.

Driving up to the Ramada on a sunny day, the parking lot looks from afar like a tailgate party. There are round white tables with sun umbrellas and chairs, platters of sandwiches and tortilla chips, soda, a water cooler. There is a trailer with portable toilets. Swissair and the Ramada have been impressive hosts, reporters say, an improvement over 1996 when many of these same journalists covered the crash of TWA Flight 800 and were given a much more chilly and chaotic reception. A *New York Times* reporter is uncomfortable with the hospitality. "I feel weird about the tables with the little umbrellas," she says. "It's nice that they're trying to make us comfortable but considering the circumstances..."

The Ramada has reincarnated itself as a crisis center; it served the same function two years ago. Friends and relatives of the crash victims converge, desperate for the latest information about the flight that took off from JFK the night before and crashed into the waters off Nova Scotia. They are tended to by trauma counselors, members of the Red Cross, staff from the mayor's Office of Emergency Management, representatives from Swissair, and relatives of the victims of TWA 800, who are on hand to offer consolation.

No one is allowed to enter the hotel without a reservation or some connection to the flight—an



After comforting relatives inside the Ramada, Port Authority Chaplain Rabbi Edgar Gluck (in baseball cap, with police patch on arm) emerges to debrief the press.

RON FREEMAN/WIDE WORLD

By Abigail Pogrebin

ABC News producer Edward Pinder (in sunglasses) does his best to engage one of the unidentified mourners, who exits the hotel with a police escort.



“When I see something that looks interesting, I attack,” says ABC’s Edward

Pinder. “I haven’t scored many points today.”

admonition the journalists take seriously. Many recount the case of Tonice Sgrignoli, a *New York Post* reporter who, in 1996, was arrested after posing as a cousin of one of the victims of the TWA 800 crash, sneaking into the Ramada, and even attending private memorial services. She was prosecuted for criminal trespass, criminal impersonation, and petty larceny. She paid a \$1,000 fine and performed 120 hours of community service. Sgrignoli says the *Post* covered her costs; she no longer works for the paper.

The press assigned to the Swissair disaster is sectioned off behind low metal gates in the parking lot; so little real information trickles out that anyone emerging from the Ramada becomes an instant magnet. Maybe this rabbi knew one of the victims or counseled the relatives. He might be able to offer a window onto the pathos inside.

Edward Pinder, a producer for ABC News, is among the most aggressive in today’s press herd. An imposing man who maneuvers quickly despite his large frame, Pinder has a booming voice that rises above the others. “What are they saying to you directly in terms of their grief and their pain?” Pinder asks the rabbi, who has little to say. The press lets the rabbi drive away.

Pinder explains his game plan on a day when every reporter has the same assignment and the same paltry bits of information: “I keep my eyes moving all the time—I’m looking here, I’m looking there, I’m looking everywhere,” he says. “When I see something that looks interesting, I attack... I haven’t scored many points today.”

Despite the competitive pressure, reporters say they have to reconcile themselves to the pack mentality; on a story like this there is almost no such thing as a scoop. Indeed, the scene is crowded but not frenzied. Reporters sit or stand around, mostly waiting. “You do find that it’s sort of a mish-mash of people trying to get to an interview first,” says May Lee, CNN’s correspondent on the scene. “I gotta say, in this situation we’re all going to get the same thing. So you don’t have to crawl over each other.”

There are uplink trucks from the local New York area sta-

tions and major networks, including all-news cable channels NY1, CNN, Fox News Channel, and MSNBC, their mast-like antennas climbing toward JFK’s airspace. At regular intervals, the roar of planes taking off interrupts the TV reporters below. Satellite dishes—large white saucers—face up to the sky.

There are radio reporters with tape recorders slung over their shoulders and print reporters armed with notepads and cell phones, all filing information for their rewrite desks. The CNN producers appear to have their cell phones permanently attached to the sides of their heads because they are in constant contact with Atlanta and New York, where producers tell them when they should be ready to go live. May Lee, who, at 5 feet tall, stands on a box of camera equipment when she’s on the air, does live reports for 12 hours—she estimates 30 by the end of the day. Lee broadcasts for three CNN outlets: domestic, international, and Headline News. She makes the most of very little material, describing the scene and interviewing the grief counselors who occasionally emerge from the Ramada.

There are at least 50 cameras—some trained all day on the entrance to the hotel, some poised on tripods a few yards away for the occasional press conference. One cameraman explains his simple mandate on a day like this: “Shoot whatever moves.” Camera operators are photographing virtually anyone who walks out of the hotel without knowing whether they are even remotely connected to the disaster. Some photographers can be heard analyzing body language and facial expressions. Are they mourners or not? Do they look sad enough?

ABC’s Pinder spots two women in dark sunglasses, clearly distraught, walking to their car escorted by police officers. He breaks into a sprint. His quick movements alert others—with so many reporters searching for a scrap of news, any rapid activity gets attention. Pinder shouts out, “What are they telling you inside? Is Swissair being helpful?” The women remain stone-faced; the police shoo the reporters away.

A local reporter for WABC News, Stacey Sager, who has also jogged up to see if these women will talk, can be heard scolding Pinder’s approach. “I can’t shout questions at these people,” she says to no one in particular as she walks back to the picnic tables. Asked to elaborate, she explains, “I think we can tell if someone wants to talk. If someone has a police escort right to their car, and they don’t respond to the first question, they clearly want to be left alone.”

Pinder defends his intrusiveness. “It’s sad that we have to approach these people and ask them to spill out their guts moments after their loss, but you have to do it,” Pinder says. “I’m always amazed that in the face of all kinds of tragedy, there’s always someone who will talk. And you don’t know who that someone will be—they don’t wear ‘I Will Talk’ T-shirts. You gotta ask everybody.”

Pinder says he is constantly balancing his desire “to be the only one to get something” against his sensitivity to the anguish, and he doesn’t fault the families for making his job difficult. “They’re not thinking about our needs; they’re thinking about ‘Oh my God, I have a family member’s body up in the ocean and I got to get to it.’”

Occasionally an official emerges from the Ramada to throw a bone to the press. Shouts of “Podium! Podium!” from producers signal that an impromptu press conference is about

Senior writer Abigail Pogrebin contributed to October’s cover story on consumer reporting by television newsmagazines.

to begin. At one point, Jerome Hauer, director of the mayor's Office of Emergency Management, fields some questions. Later, Rabbi Edgar Gluck, a police chaplain for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, obliges the crowd. Although these briefings usually offer a thin gruel, reporters persist in trying to elicit some kind of personal tale. But accounts remain frustratingly general: Relatives are crying, counselors are listening, Swissair is doing everything possible to accommodate the families.

When Rabbi Gluck, a bearded man in a Port Authority baseball cap and windbreaker, leaves the podium, he is surrounded by a cluster of reporters searching for more detail. A CNN cameraman mutters some advice to the chaplain under his breath: "Just walk away rabbi—walk away before they pounce on you." But Gluck doesn't walk away; a longtime community activist and never considered camera-shy, he answers repetitious questions as reporters alternately join the flock and walk away. A radio reporter rushes up late, thrusts her microphone into the fray, and whispers to her neighbor, "Who is this guy?"

This is not the place for hard facts on the crash investigation—those briefings are happening at JFK's Building 14. This is the place to find the human story. But the flight manifest with the passengers names won't be released until late Thursday evening—and without addresses or phone numbers. (A Gannett reporter would later describe the scramble: reporters tracking down phone listings for people with matching names and cold-calling homes to try to reach grieving relatives.)

This story is only alive here as long as the family members remain at the Ramada. As soon as they take off for Halifax the next day, the story will move with them. Some reporters are trying to book flights to Nova Scotia to stay with the action. Word circulates that a *Daily News* reporter, Michelle McPhee, got the last seat out Thursday night.

"I'm ready to quit playing 'Chase The Grieving Family Members,'" says a freelance reporter for the Reuters news service. And yet when another couple walks from the hotel to the parking lot, this Reuters reporter is quickly at the metal gate debating whether to go after them. He and two other journalists—the Gannett reporter and Cathy Hobbs from television station WPIX in New York—weigh the same intrusion.

Their ambivalence is palpable. Asked if he's going to pursue the couple, the Reuters reporter says no. But as soon as Hobbs makes a move, so does he, and others follow. Hobbs walks toward the car slowly. The couple doesn't drive away—an encouraging sign. Hobbs approaches the driver's window. The window is rolled down—another invitation.

The woman in the car doesn't want to go on camera, but Hobbs determines that the man is willing. She signals her cameraman. The interview begins gingerly, but is cut short when a police officer arrives. The man in the car turns out to be Abraham Klein, whose father, Stanley, died in the crash the night before.

Afterwards, Hobbs describes her approach: "I said, 'I'm not here with the camera, I don't have the camera rolling. I just want to know if there's anything that you want to get out...as far as telling the public what you're going through? Is there any way I can help you?'...I made it on their terms. I made it like, 'Look, if you tell me to get lost, I'm out of here'... If they had said no, I would have backed up and walked away."

In fact, after the police officer interrupted the interview, Hobbs gestured to her cameraman not to shoot the couple as they departed. "At that point, I wanted these people to know that I wasn't also exploiting them further," says Hobbs. "They had shared with me. At that point, there's no use getting a car driving off. I'm like, 'That's it.'"

Local Fox television reporter Mike Sheehan, a burly former NYPD detective, says he doesn't chase people. He has a special sensitivity, he says, having spent 25 years on the other side of tragedies. "Too many times I had to go knock on the door to tell someone their child was laying in Central Park or in some gutter somewhere. A family's grief should be a very, very private time."

WNBC-TV's Joe Avellar says that the best story to tell may be that no one could bring themselves to tell it. "The compelling thing may be that people were too upset to talk," he says. "That could be an interesting story, isn't it? That's a real story."

At around 5 P.M., two large vehicles sandwiched by security approach the Ramada. It's the politicians' caravan—New York Governor George Pataki and New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. The two men visit with the families inside the hotel and then head for the press podium in the parking lot. Giuliani commends the reporters on their conduct so far regarding the families' privacy. "I think you've shown remarkable restraint and I thank you for that," he says. But when he visits the next morning, he is less complimentary, asking the press to leave the families alone as they depart for Halifax.

Friday's story at the Ramada is the families' departure. Reporters are back in the parking lot before the sun rises, doing live shots in the blue dawn. The Ramada again has provisions: coffee, juice, and danish. A *New York Times* stringer arrives. "Did I miss any breakfast?" he asks. "Steak and eggs?"

After some delays, at approximately 11:30 A.M., the families start to emerge. They load three buses, one at a time. For the first time in two days, the parking lot is hushed as reporters watch the somber parade of people board each bus. Except for a smattering of hugs, little emotion is evident. But the cameras keep rolling; the scene speaks for itself.

Afterwards, photographers want to shoot the families boarding the plane, but are offered only a rooftop at the Delta terminal for a shot of the plane leaving the runway. No families, no faces. They take what they can get.

The reporters finally pack up and leave, but it's clear many have been affected by their brush with the despair. NY1 reporter Adele Sammarco—who did 17 live shots during the day, one every half hour—also covered the TWA disaster. "You have to be as sensitive as you can," she says. "I'll never forget Aurelie Becker. She is the mother of a young woman my age who died in Flight 800. She showed me a picture of her, a beautiful girl..." Abruptly, Sammarco's eyes well up and she can't continue. She turns away. "I have to do another live shot." She quickly wipes away tears. "I have to go on live." ■

When reporters spot Abraham Klein (below, left) whose father died in the crash, and his wife, Cheryl, they briefly ponder whether to seek their comment and then make an approach.





Kelly Ann Sole's mission: Make the business pages of the *Los Angeles Times* more appealing to readers and advertisers.

# THE DEVIL MIGHT BE AN ANGEL

When *Los Angeles Times* publisher Mark Willes, a one-time cereal marketer and economist, shook up the paper's structure by placing business executives alongside editorial section managers, pious critics inside and outside the newsroom howled. So what exactly has marketing whiz Kelly Ann Sole done? The not-so-terrible truth follows.

**F**OR SOMEONE AS GLAMOROUS AND PERSUASIVE as Kelly Ann Sole, it must have been a rude shock to have so many doors slammed in her face. As the newly hired national sales manager for financial advertising at the *Los Angeles Times*, Sole had spent March 1996 in New York trying to sell ad space to Wall Street securities firms and brokerages. Every investment house on the Street had turned her away.

Although its daily circulation of 1.02 million made the *Times* the nation's fourth-largest newspaper, Wall Street ad buyers considered it a local paper and were unmoved when Sole explained that L.A.

was the country's second-largest and fastest-growing securities market. "They said, 'You're too expensive for the return we'll get,'" remembers Sole, 32. "And they said things like, 'What do you have in terms of editorial coverage on investing?'"

Flummoxed and depressed, Sole returned to Los Angeles and—without a second thought—called William Sing, then the *Times*'s deputy business editor. "I just got back from Wall Street," Sole told him. "And it was pretty scary."

A flinty 40-year-old who has spent half of his life working for the *Times*, Sing explained that he received 100 calls a week from readers demanding more of the

BY D.M. OSBORNE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LISA ROMEREIN



Sole came on like the cavalry for *Times* business editor William Sing (above, left), who credits her with helping pry loose the cash needed to beef up financial news coverage without meddling in editorial content.

personal-finance and investment coverage that the Wall Street firms had asked Sole about. Trouble was, the business section lacked the resources to meet those demands, and Sing had exhausted himself trying to get them. "We'd been striving for more of that coverage for years," he says.

Sole came up with a plan that would ultimately solve both their problems. On April 23, 1996, she suggested in a 15-page proposal that the advertising and editorial departments team up for a major *Times*-sponsored conference on personal finance: Advertising staffers would enlist corporate cosponsors and speakers, while the editorial side of the paper would publish a ten-week series on topics such as retirement planning and mutual-fund investing. "We didn't think it was possible," remembers ad sales manager Gail McFadden, one of five advertising and editorial people at the *Times* who say Sole's idea was unlike anything the business section had ever done. "Kelly just kept saying, 'Well, why not?'"

At a newspaper notoriously resistant to innovation, management might have put off Sole's proposal as a well-polished advertising gimmick. But her pitch—reflecting readers' requests for more personal-finance coverage—resonated with editors. "I didn't say, 'This is something we need to do to make a difference for our advertisers,'" says Sole. "I said, 'This is something we need to do to make a difference for our community, for our readers.'" At the time, daily circulation had dropped from 1.2 million in 1991 to 1 million in 1996, a 24 percent decline.

Under Mark Willes, the recently installed chairman of the paper's parent, The Times Mirror Company, the *Times*'s operations committee latched on to Sole's proposal as "a breakthrough idea," recalls senior vice-president Robert Brisco. "Within about ten minutes it was crystal clear to us that this was a fabulous idea and deserved funding." Sole paved the way not just for a single series, but for an ongoing regular feature package called "Wall Street, California." The expanded personal-finance and investment coverage represents one of five special weekly sections now produced by the business news staff. Designed to reach out to the disparate interests of subgroups of readers, the new business pages have become a model for what Willes—now the paper's publisher, as well as chairman of the parent company—wants to

*In October, senior writer D.M. Osborne contributed to the cover story on TV newsmagazine consumer reports and wrote about Hollywood trade papers.*

do throughout the *Times*. So, too, has the investment conference Sole envisioned; in February 1997, 10,000 Angelenos paid \$45 apiece to attend the event, which generated \$2 million in revenue from 35 corporate sponsors, nearly half of which have become regular advertisers in the paper.

"Kelly is definitely a change agent," comments Len Short, an executive vice-president at Charles Schwab & Company, Inc., who says his firm became a *Times* advertiser because of Sole's initiatives. "She's a dynamo...Wherever you put her she would be innovating and making new things happen."

It made sense, then, that a month after Willes announced a controversial restructuring at the *Times* in October 1997—assigning business people to work with editors in developing new features and marketing the paper along the lines of a typical consumer good—Sole vaulted into the new post of general manager for the business section. The promotion formalized Sole's working relationship with Sing, who became business editor in June 1996 and who lobbied for her to get the job. It also put Sole in an unusual role, one in which she is responsible for boosting both readership and revenue. "The essence of Kelly's role is to be a champion for building the section, both as a marketplace for editorial ideas and as a marketplace for advertising," explains senior vice-president Brisco.

As such, Sole personifies what a host of critics charge is worrisome about Willes's corporate-minded efforts to turn around the *Times*. Unlike any other business, where a management directive to give customers a product they actually *want* would be noncontroversial, in the newspaper business, the idea that editors should worry about attracting readers (and, in the process, attracting advertisers who want to reach those readers) is a dicey subject. Willes had barely begun his overhaul at the paper late last year when journalism heavyweights rushed to condemn him as an ignorant outsider foolishly tearing down the traditional wall that has separated newsrooms from ad departments.

A successful newspaper, the naysayers claimed, could not be modeled along the lines of the cereal business that Willes had run as vice-chairman of General Mills, Inc. Max Frankel, former executive editor at *The New York Times*, and Ben Bradlee, who ran *The Washington Post*, forecast a loss of editorial independence. Shelby Coffey III, editor of the *Los Angeles Times* for eight years, abruptly resigned. "Skeptics at the *Los Angeles Times* and throughout the industry...worry that the structure and the atmosphere [Willes is] creating will inevitably lead some mid-and lower-level editors to compromise principles..." reported David Shaw, the *L.A. Times* media critic, in his own paper in March.

Indeed, the partnerships now developing between section editors and their respective general managers at the *Times* are charged with potential conflicts. Even as Sole's marketing efforts have afforded Sing powerful financial clout to expand editorial coverage (and to add a dozen new editorial jobs), the rich corporate sponsorships she has lined up have also effectively put the editor in a business relationship with some of the same companies about which he's supposed to present hard-nosed reporting. There has also been nervousness and resistance among some reporters—a naturally skeptical lot.

"When we all started working together...we all went through this gut-wrenching worry," recalls Kathy Kristof, whose personal-finance column in the *Times* is syndicated

nationally. After six months, however, Kristof became convinced that business and editorial could cooperate in attaining a common goal without corrupting the product. "This general manager structure and this strategy work because it's all about readers," Kristof says. "Not once, not ever, has Kelly even had an inkling of breaching the wall of editorial integrity....She knows that would absolutely ruin our credibility and her ability to sell the product."

Battered and insulted by critics—many of them rivals at competing papers—executives, writers, and editors at the *Times* have now hunkered down for the long haul. Some, such as Sing, have become hostile and defensive. "The whole impression that the ideas are coming from the business side and that we're just sitting here like a bunch of dopes is a bunch of bullshit," he fumes. Adds Sole: "If I were to recommend a story idea to Bill, all it would do is guarantee that it would never be published."

Willes readily admits that his overhaul is a risky, un-certain venture—one that will be several years in the making. Yet the publisher never talks about allowing advertisers to influence stories, only about producing a paper that is more appealing to readers. "We're not confused about high-quality journalism," he says. And he's adamant that a radical restructuring is inevitable if the *Times* is to survive the current media glut. "The challenge is not to wring our hands and say, 'Woe is me, isn't it a terrible thing,'" Willes says. "The challenge is to find a way to do

world-class journalism and...to meet the fiduciary duty to shareholders at the same time."

### A "voracious appetite for learning"

In the first half-hour of an interview with Sole in her neat, sunny office on Spring Street in downtown L.A., it's abundantly clear that this auburn-haired Alaska native embodies all of the values Willes has sought to bring to the *Times*. The third of five children raised in a Christian missionary family, Sole seems to be on a personal crusade to find new ways for the *Times* to connect with its readers, such as the Monday "Health" section she helped launch last year, and—as an extension of the paper's new small-business coverage—an October 1998 conference she's planning for business owners. "From the moment you walk into that conference," she vows, "you're going to feel on fire about your small business."

Like Willes, Sole did not grow up in the newspaper business. She first honed her marketing skills by negotiating product-placement deals for feature films and television programs. She then worked for two and a half years as national sales manager for *The Los Angeles Daily Journal*, a legal newspaper. There she cracked a previously untapped portion of the consumer advertising market, working up joint promotions such as a 1995 deal that brought Los Angeles Cadillac dealers together with Warner Books. Car dealerships invited the paper's readers to come in for a test drive and offered as an added bonus an autographed copy of the Warner-published Alan Dershowitz novel, "The Advocate's Devil." In time, Sole made both Cadillac and Mercedes Benz regular *Daily Journal* advertisers, says Nell Fields, one of the paper's publishers.

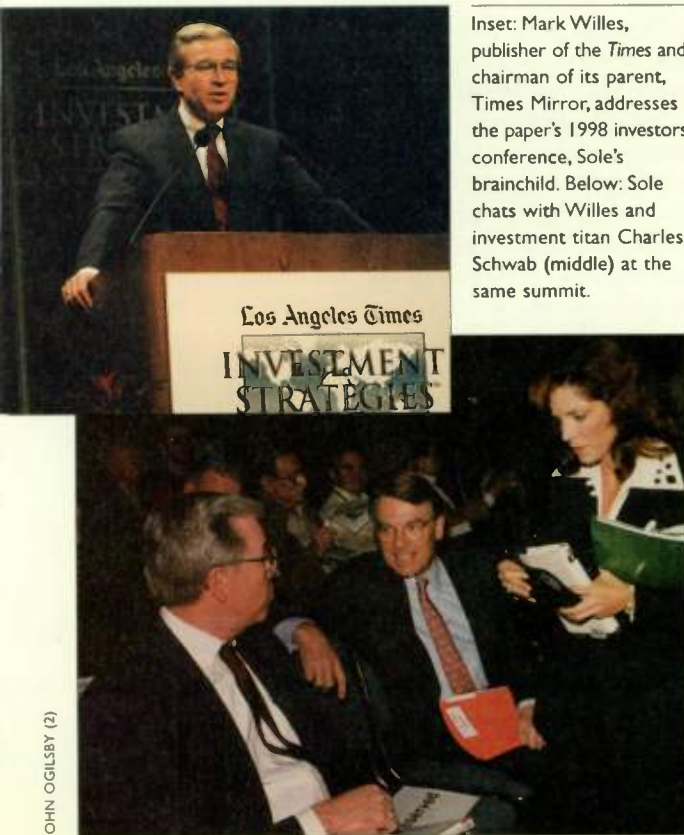
For all of her marketing savvy, Sole says it never occurred to her that she might be violating journalistic protocol when she called Bill Sing to report on the dismal results of her Wall Street venture in 1996. "I didn't know that the marketing, or sales side...wasn't supposed to pick up the phone and call someone in editorial," she claims.

Nor did Sole have much financial-industry expertise when she landed the top financial-advertising job at the *Times* ("I knew how to balance a checkbook"). "She didn't look like the strongest candidate on paper," acknowledges Kathy Aaronson, the national recruiter who included Sole among the half-dozen candidates she proposed for the *Times* position in late 1995. What made Sole stand out, Aaronson says, was a combination of charisma, enthusiasm, and a demonstrated ability to grow a business from scratch.

At the *Times*, Sole found out fast that the consolidation in the banking industry had made deep, permanent cuts to what previously had accounted for half of all financial ad revenue. "For every bank that got gobbled up, that cost us a million dollars," she says. In addition, advertising from mutual-fund brokers had dropped off drastically, from \$4.9 million in 1993 to \$2.7 million in 1995.

**"THE CHALLENGE," SAYS PUBLISHER MARK WILLES, "IS TO FIND A WAY TO DO WORLD-CLASS JOURNALISM AND...TO MEET THE FIDUCIARY DUTY TO SHAREHOLDERS AT THE SAME TIME."**

Inset: Mark Willes, publisher of the *Times* and chairman of its parent, Times Mirror, addresses the paper's 1998 investors conference, Sole's brainchild. Below: Sole chats with Willes and investment titan Charles Schwab (middle) at the same summit.



JOHN OGILSBY (2)

Intending to recoup such losses, Sole set her sights on the Wall Street investment firms and brokerages that had historically bought few ads in the *Times*. She hired two ex-stockbrokers to sell financial advertising and to tutor her on the financial markets. "I just got this voracious appetite for learning," she says. "And then I started thinking, 'If I don't know about this, maybe our readers don't either.'"

### Staying "honest"

"Wall Street, California" was clearly something that Kelly was involved in from the beginning," says Bill Sing, tense and cagey as he reflects on Sole's role in creating the personal-finance and investment section the *Times* began publishing in October 1996. "It's a product that was a result of things that Kelly did." Among those things: Sole came up with the section name and worked with graphic artist Donna Broyles in developing its Benjamin Franklin logo (adapted from his portrait on the \$100 bill). She went shopping and picked out the pair of Ray-Ban Wayfarers the great man wears in his weekly *Times* portrait. "And we decided to give him a little tan," Sole adds, "because we wanted the section to be hip, to have some edge."

Yet Sing, who became editor after five years as deputy editor and ten years as a staff writer, is emphatic: With "Wall Street, California," as with everything else his 70-person staff produces, the content is pure editorial. "Kelly had some general suggestions as to what the overall thrust should be...but she was not involved in the specific content," he says, adding, "She doesn't come to our news meetings. She doesn't see our [story] budgets."

"Kelly knows perfectly well that what goes into the paper is purely Bill," echoes Willes.

Beneath the surface, "Wall Street, California," like all five of the business-themed weekly sections, has a strong service aspect. "What we're trying to do is provide expertise," explains Sing. "We're trying to present content to readers that they're not going to find anywhere else." Readers have deluged the *Times* with requests to lay bare their personal finances in the "Money Make-Over" feature, in which a reporter summarizes a financial planner's free analysis of families' and individuals' earnings and investment portfolios, and makes long-term recommendations. Walter Hamilton's "Street Strategies" column is similarly "how-to." Hired away from *Investor's Business Daily* last December, Hamilton explained recently how the Beardstown Ladies arrived at their informal investment-return rates, and he showed readers how to calculate actual returns on their various accounts. The column invited readers to utilize a software program designed for that purpose and posted on the *Times's* website.

Reading such reports "as a competitor, I was concerned," says former *Orange County Register* personal-finance writer Liz Pulliam, who says the new features were part of what made her want to move over to the *Times* in June. "It seemed that the *Times* was getting its act together...and filling some big holes."

As general manager, Sole, along with her five-person staff,

promotes the section both inside and outside the paper, aiming to market the business pages as a distinct sub-brand within the *Times*. "The ideas are coming from our department and she helps us execute them, in getting resources and showing management that these are good ideas," explains Sing. Whereas Sing previously had to fight his own battles, he now has an advocate in Sole. "Before the general manager structure, we had a bureaucracy that would put the politburo to shame," comments personal-finance columnist Kristof. Sole can now cut to the chase, says Kristof: "We're working on prototypes constantly...making a serious effort at really reaching our readers on a personal level."

The *Times* investment strategies conference, which reaped \$4 million in revenue this year, is one example. To

keep the conference "honest," Kristof says, editorial staffers moderate the panels and sit in on workshops. "If we thought the panelists were trying to sell something, we'd shut them down." A senior *Times* editor and columnist also vetted all of the panelists and exhibiting companies. "You can't buy your way into the conference," adds Sole, who for two years in a row has

**WITH SOLE, *TIMES* ADVERTISERS SUCH AS CHARLES SCHWAB NOW HAVE THE SENSE OF BEING CLOSER TO THE EDITORIAL PRODUCT THEY ARE SUPPORTING—ONE REASON CRITICS ARE TROUBLED.**

lined up as keynote speaker the chairman of the Securities and Exchanges Commission, Arthur Levitt. After an invitation to Charles Schwab languished at the company's San Francisco headquarters, Sole cold-called cofounder Hugo Quackenbush, who says she convinced him in a single conversation that Schwab should speak as well as become a cosponsor of the event. Says Quackenbush: "She's a killer."

Through Sole, *Times* advertisers now have the sense of being closer to the editorial product they are supporting, one reason critics are troubled by the general manager strategy. In the weeks leading up to the June 25 launch of a monthly auto section conceived by Sing, for example, Sole was alternately attending meetings on editorial concepts (though not on specific story ideas) and promoting the section with prospective advertisers. She frequently goes out on sales calls, but says she never suggests advertisers can buy favorable coverage or special editorial content: "I don't have editorial-type conversations when I'm out on sales calls."

For his part, Sing is offended even by questions about whether, through his partnership with Sole, he might be swayed by advertiser concerns. "It has absolutely no influence on our coverage whatsoever," he retorts. Four *Times* writers concur, including recently hired business reporter Pulliam: "I could see that the walls were not coming down, that the advertising department had not taken over the section." The litany of articles published since the *Times* restructuring began last October cites only one instance (occurring three years ago) of the advertising department attempting to affect editorial content, one in which the assistant to a sales rep faxed a press release to a business reporter. That reporter complained directly to Sing, and the matter was resolved when Sing distributed an e-mail to his staff denouncing the ill-conceived dispatch. (The staffer wasn't fired, says senior vice-president Jeffrey Klein, "because we want people to learn from their mistakes.")



If anything, Sing says, advertisers now subject themselves to more scrutiny. "If they aggressively market, they're more likely to be in the public eye," he says. In fact, on August 19, business reporters at the *Times* broke a story that state regulators had accused Irvine mortgage company DiTech Funding Corporation (a business section advertiser) of gouging at least 2,000 customers on interest payments.

Of course, how issues of editorial independence shake out over the long term remains to be seen. Just this May the *Times* filled out its general manager ranks, hiring an advertising veteran to work with editors in marketing the "Life & Style," "Health," and "Food" sections, and a former magazine publisher to promote the "Metro" and "Book Review" sections. For the editors now

joining hands with these business people in finding new ways to market the paper, a major issue will be whether they will ignore news that is not reader-friendly. If the *Times* tries too hard to appeal to reader interests, won't it run the risk of not publishing important stories that few people say they want—stories, say, on international monetary policy, or the Federal Reserve Board? "No," responds Willes. "I'm surprised and a little disappointed that so many people in the media view this as an either/or proposition.... A great newspaper has to do prize-winning journalism and be useful in people's lives. We also need to report on important stories in ways that help readers understand why these stories have significance to them."

"We're not giving [readers] what they want at the expense of what they need," agrees senior vice-president Klein, who oversees general managers for the paper's hard-news sections. "We're not editing the paper according to market research. We're not pandering."

Indeed, as Sole nears the end of her first year as general manager for the business section, there is tangible evidence that the controversial brand-management strategy at the *Times* has actually given editors and writers more authority and power than they had before. According to Sing, Sole helped craft the business plan that persuaded Willes to grant the section 12 new editorial positions last February. It was a breathtaking move for the publisher, who wiped out 150 editorial jobs in his early days at the *Times*, earning himself the label "cereal killer." The day after Willes approved the new hires, recalls financial writer Michael Hiltzik, "the atmosphere in the newsroom was total shock."



The new reporters and editors hired as a result of that plan will enable the business section to beef up its hard-news coverage. That's proof, say Sing and three business writers, that the specialized theme sections and general manager influence are not driving daily news out of the paper. "We have more room for the daily reporting than we had before," says Hiltzik. The section has, for instance, increased from two to four times a week its hard-edged reports on the entertainment industry in "Company Town," a feature that attracts no advertising, Sing notes. The editor has also stepped up production of news-driven, in-depth special reports such as one in August by staff writer Pulliam on how insurance companies have scaled back loss-replacement coverage in their earthquake policies.

Senior vice-president Klein says the business section is ahead of the rest of the paper in terms of ad revenue and attracting new readers. Ad dollars for the section increased 16 percent in 1996 and 18 percent in 1997. According to the most recent Audit Bureau Circulations report, as of March 31, the *Times*'s daily circulation had edged up by 26,201 from the same date last year. While the paper can't trace readership increases to a particular section, "Wall Street, California" has clear advertiser appeal: after just 11 weeks, the section had attracted 15 new financial advertisers, including some of the securities firms that snubbed Sole back in early 1996. One example is The Vanguard Group, whose principal, Lucy Gordon says the section has "editorial compatibility" with the firm's philosophy. Adds Charles Schwab executive vice-president Len Short: "What the *Times* has done is build a franchise with its readers that has made it a very good buy for us." ■

Sole (foreground, left) and outside advisers discuss a new *Times* venture aimed at teaching teens about business. Such innovations are key to Sole's push to extend the paper's reach among readers and advertisers.



The evidence stacks up: In just ten years, Fuller has edited five fashion bibles.

With a savvy mix of sex, beauty, fashion, and celebrity coverage, Bonnie Fuller has climbed to the top of the women's magazine field. Now she takes the reins of *Glamour*, the most journalistically respectable title of the lot. Truth may be the first casualty.

# The Secret of her Success

INSIDE THE MANHATTAN HEADQUARTERS OF *COSMOPOLITAN* MAGAZINE THIS MAY, editor Bonnie Fuller was leading a story meeting. Around the periphery of the open eighth-floor space that Fuller liked to call her "newsroom," assistants scurried about, answering phones, ferrying copy from desk to desk, and typing manuscripts into computers. The room buzzed with all the chaos of a real newsroom.

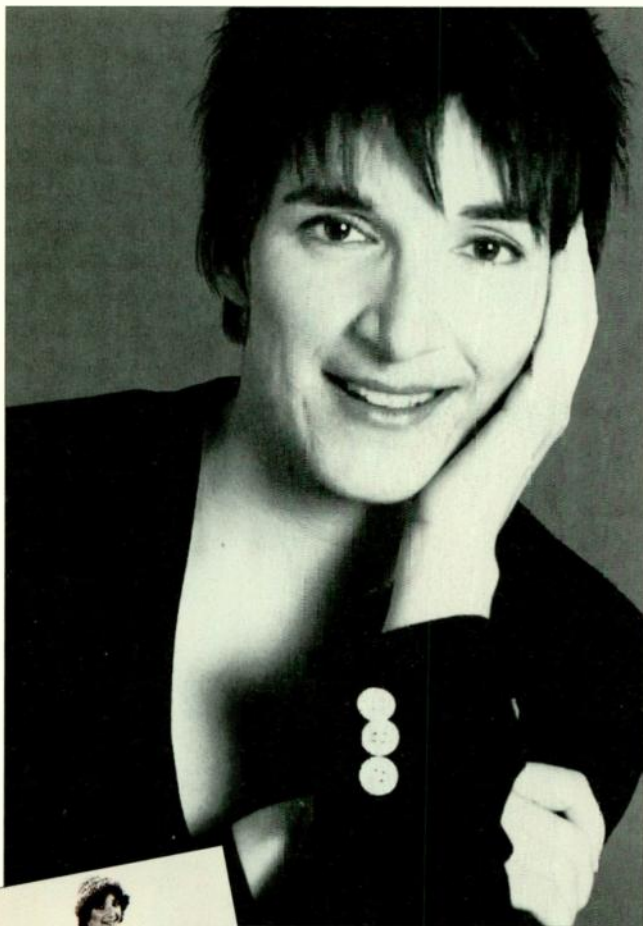
Fuller, 42, was presiding at the oval conference table on the edge of the room. As editors and writers bounced story ideas back and forth, she scribbled on a legal pad. She crisply approved some ideas, killed others, and demanded answers about the rest.

Then Fuller herself explained how her 8-year-old daughter, Sofia, couldn't stop talking about *Grease*, the 1950s revival movie that had just been rereleased. Sofia's obsession had given Fuller a story

BY KATHERINE ROSMAN



"I hope the *Glamour* reader can expect that she's going to be unable to take her eyes off any page," Fuller says.



Fuller, pictured during her tenure at *YM*, brought new sophistication to the teen magazine. As a reporter at *The Toronto Star*, she took a turn at modeling (left).

idea of her own.

“Bonnie came up with a headline: How to shake or maintain a summer romance,” recalls one editor who was present.

The story was quickly assigned to freelance writer Laurel Touby, who delivered it two weeks later. The first draft began, “You happily starred in your own X-rated version of *Grease* this summer, playing opposite the buff beefcake of your dreams. Fun was the main aim and nothing else seemed to matter much. But, as the weather cools and the haze of summer clears, it’s time to get back to reality.” (Touby confirmed that she wrote that paragraph but refused to comment on the editing process.)

The article appeared in the August issue, under the same headline Fuller had suggested. But this version of the story began with a quotation that never appeared in writer Touby’s draft: “It was like I was Olivia Newton-John star-

*In October, staff writer Katherine Rasman profiled celebrity photographer Patrick McMullan and wrote about Wall Street Journal investigative reporter Alix Freedman.*

ring opposite John Travolta in my own X-rated rendition of *Grease*.” The quote was attributed to “Eliza Hay, 23, a normally reserved office manager.” But Hay was nowhere to be found in Touby’s first draft.

Story editor Isabel Burton says she “reworked the lead.” Eliza Hay, Burton acknowledges, does not exist. But she says the quote is real. The source, whom Burton says she interviewed (asking what she terms “leading questions” to elicit a *Grease*-related response), didn’t want her name used, and that is why “Eliza Hay” appeared. Neglecting to disclose that “Eliza Hay” was a pseudonym, Burton says, was “an editorial oversight” because so many editors worked on the story.

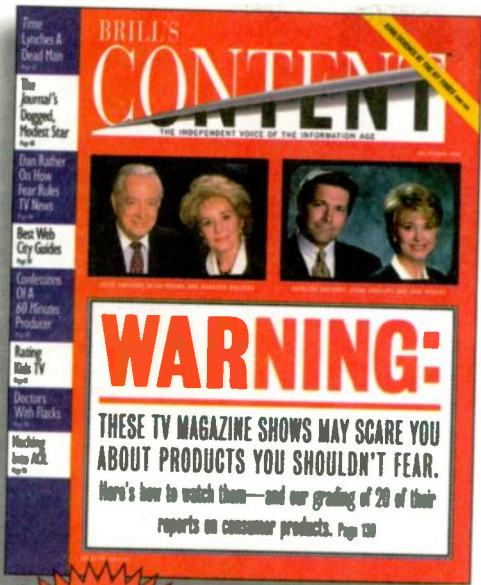
If this instance of truth-bending at *Cosmopolitan* were uncommon, it might not be worth mentioning. But interviews with ten current and former writers and editors at the magazine suggest that phantom quotes were par for the course at Fuller’s *Cosmo*. In addition, seven current or former *Cosmo* editors and staffers say that during Fuller’s regime, the magazine routinely fabricated anecdotes and invented named sources. Frequently, the editors say, such liberties were taken in order to satisfy Fuller, whose staff always felt compelled to come up with the sexiest quote or the perfect anecdote. “You give Bonnie what she wants or you get fired,” one former *Cosmo* staffer says.

Fuller denies any knowledge of such chicanery. “I’m not aware of it and if it happened, it’s not something that I would like or condone,” she says.

In August, Fuller left *Cosmopolitan* and in September she became editor in chief of *Glamour* magazine. In terms of circulation and status within their respective publishing divisions, the two magazines are roughly equivalent: *Cosmo*, with a circulation of 2.3 million, is one of the Hearst Corporation’s most profitable magazine titles, according to Hearst Magazines Division president Cathleen Black; *Glamour*, with a circulation of 2.1 million, is the biggest moneymaker within The Condé Nast Publications Inc. stable, according to a Condé Nast executive.

Journalistically, though, the two magazines could not be further apart. *Cosmo* focuses almost entirely on relationships and sex. *Glamour*, under longtime editor Ruth Whitney, has traditionally been considered the most journalistically ambitious of women’s magazines, complementing its coverage of fashion and beauty with serious journalism about health, medicine, and politics. No other women’s magazine has won as many awards, including four National Magazine Awards—two for general excellence and two for investigative reports. In the last eight years alone, *Glamour* has won 45 national awards from organizations ranging from the National Women’s Political Caucus to The American Dietetic Association. Carolyn Kitch, a former *Good Housekeeping* editor who now is an assistant professor of magazine journalism at Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism, says, “*Glamour* has the greatest reportorial history in women’s magazines.”

What does Fuller’s fast rise—just nine years ago she was editing a relatively obscure teen magazine and now is running a popular fashion magazine—say not only about *Glamour*’s tradition and its future, but about the institu-



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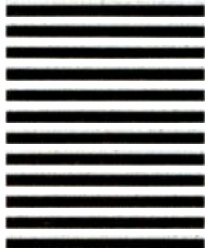
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editors said to me, 'Just make it up. The trashier it is the better Bonnie likes it.'" She began "to learn it was something that was commonly done"—meaning the embellishing or fudging of reader anecdotes.

Robertson had his own concerns with the anecdotes: They were too explicit. "We were having a problem with '[*Cosmo*] Confessions," a former editor recalls. "Donald said they [the anecdotes] were getting too salacious." So Fuller told her staff, according to the former editor, "We're going to have to do some *real* reporting."

But even "real reporting" was not bringing in anecdotes that respected the balance between sexy and lewd. The deadline to ship the magazine was approaching and pressure was building to come up with the goods. The former editor explains that at this stage panic set in and even more anecdotes were fabricated. Fuller had to have known about the fakeries, the former staffer says. Because Fuller doesn't know how to use a computer, anecdotes would be crossed out and rewritten on the very same piece of paper that went to Fuller for her final approval. "Everything," all the altering of quotes and sources, the editor says, "was done on paper."

Not all quotes were completely fabricated, though. Some were often teased out of sources. One such case exists with a story that ran in May about hangover cures. According to a former editor, Fuller let the staff know that she wanted to run a story telling readers what to do when a night's drinking had taken its toll. Unfortunately, according to the editor, every doctor contacted said that there was in fact no cure for a hang-over. The editors knew this would not be acceptable to Fuller.

So, finally, they did find an Oregon doctor to quote. "We turned to Gregory Clark, M.D., chief of neurology for Kaiser-Permanente Northwest, to give us a symptom-specific guide to healing what hurts," said the story. The advice that *Cosmo* says Clark gave was hardly earth-shattering: "You need a piece of dry toast" or maybe "two Tylenol."

But Clark says he didn't give a "symptom-specific guide." Editors called "and gave me a list of long-standing remedies," Clark says. "I endorsed them as being reasonable methods" to deal with a hangover. "It was more of a confirmation."

"I really don't see what the problem is there," Fuller says. She said the idea for the story was spun in a staff meeting and that editors contributed ideas to a list of "folk remedies." That was the list that was read to Clark. (The writer of the piece, *Cosmopolitan's* deputy editor Carol Brietzke, declined to comment.)

This type of reporting was commonplace under Fuller, one former staffer says. She "takes a kernel of truth and they'll [the editors] build a story around it."

How can a magazine that has a fact-checking department—as *Cosmo* does—go to press with so much fiction purporting to be fact? Because at Fuller's *Cosmo*, facts did not stand in the way of a good story. "Whether or not [an article] is accurate is not a concern," says a former *Cosmo* staffer. Fuller is "very concerned with sensationalized stories. Whether they're true or not is irrelevant."

No effort went into building accountability. Articles that used anecdotes attributed to first-name-only sources were often not checked, unless the story was health- or news-related or possibly defamatory, according to Stephanie Dolgoff, a former *Cosmo* senior articles editor who has accepted a job to work for Fuller at *Glamour* as executive editor. And the website includes no space for those offering personal anecdotes to write their last names or contact numbers. The site actually invites people to submit their stories anonymously. Essentially, *Cosmopolitan* had implemented a system for "reporting" that discouraged fact checking and gave editors and writers carte blanche to embellish or fabricate anecdotes.

"If someone's talking about vaginal discharge, they don't want some guy from the fact-checking department calling them," Dolgoff says to explain why parts of the magazine are not fact checked. All stories that contain health information were evaluated by doctors for "medical accuracy," she explains, but adds that fact checking "isn't necessary if we're changing the names" in certain stories.

Fuller stands by the policy: "I think when you're doing personal opinion about, 'Well, my girlfriend really likes it when I touch her here and there,' I don't know that they fact check that.

The editor in her *Cosmopolitan* newsroom in 1996



I'm not quite sure that that would be necessary, I mean they're giving an opinion about a very personal like or dislike in bed."

In the September issue, 12 out of a total 63 stories had such first-name-only sources; five others displayed asterisks explaining that sources' names had been changed. That means that 27 percent of the magazine could have been fabricated.

Fuller says she is "not aware" that any anecdotes were ever made up. She says that when she demanded "fresher" or "juicier" anecdotes and an editor delivered the goods, she assumed the proper reporting had been done. An editor, Fuller says, "wasn't supposed to change anything that actually happened and, I mean, the people that she asked were supposed to be readers of the magazine so that they were reader confessions."

Kitch, the Northwestern University journalism professor, is weary of suggestions of skullduggery at *Cosmopolitan*. "I would be careful believing it," she says, adding that this type of allegation "tends to be said about women's magazines that are circulation leaders." In fact, Kitch says that during the Helen Gurley Brown era, rumors of invented anecdotes at *Cosmopolitan* abounded. It's an allegation that Brown refutes out of hand, saying if anything was amiss in the truthfulness of the "case histories," as she calls them, she hadn't a clue.

"You were not allowed to make them up. I could always tell," Brown says. "I was so arrogant, so sure of my turf, I felt I could tell." But she admits that it's likely that something may have slipped past her detectors in her 32 years of editing *Cosmo*. If Fuller's anecdotes are made up, Brown says, "I'm no judge and jury." She says that *Cosmo* under Fuller has been an extremely successful publication. "I couldn't begin to tsk, tsk, cluck, cluck at her *Cosmo*." (But Brown did "tsk, tsk, cluck, cluck" at Fuller's *Cosmo* in a September 11 appearance on ABC's *Politically Incorrect*. In a discussion about the veracity of an article that ran in the October 1997 issue, which Fuller edited, Brown said, "I doubt any of those things really happened." Just after she said that, she seemed to have second thoughts and admitted that she may have let some inaccuracies slip into her *Cosmo*. Brown said after the appearance, "When you're on a network television show, you say whatever's expedient.... I regret having said that.")

Kitch wonders whether subjecting *Cosmopolitan's* content to intense scrutiny isn't a bit overzealous. "If sometimes an anecdote is a composite of real people...and yet the details of the issue are intact...it is truer than a single experience can be."

But, Kitch admits, to make up anecdotes entirely is a bigger problem. It's an "ethical violation," she says, and such fakery implies that "you're out of touch with the reader. It misrepresents the realities of women's lives." Kitch sees only the downside to this type of content. "It's not a smart editorial process. There's hardly anything to be gained, [only] timesaving."

One former editor who worked under both Fuller and Brown says the standards of fact checking did not substantively change from Brown to Fuller. The practice, he says, was not employed "in instances when people's full names were not being used and nothing libelous was being said." But, under Fuller's reign, he explains, fact checking became an increasingly useless tool. "I think the treatment of direct quotations...became very liberal." In all, seven former *Cosmopolitan* editors and staffers who worked at the maga-

zine during Fuller's reign say parts of the magazine were routinely fabricated.

All say that editors set out to portray truthful stories, but Fuller's management style often got in the way. One former editor explains, "It gets closer to the closing date and the editors are in a panic. 'I've got so much work to do. This is never going to ship. The managing editor is breathing down my neck. I've got to make up anecdotes.' So, they start making up anecdotes, because real life anecdotes are too boring... [Fuller] knows that some of them are made up," because "late in the game, these editors crank these things out very quickly."

If one word in *Cosmopolitan* were ever untrue, it's news to Fuller, she says. "I'm not aware that anecdotes were getting just made up...I was very conscientious on stories that they be researched, that we use experts, that we use lots of real people. I've always found that you get better stories from people than you could ever make up because truth is truly is stranger than fiction."

"It certainly was not the policy of the magazine," Fuller adds, "and I don't know if those editors made their own decisions to do that but they certainly didn't discuss it with me." If incidents of stories being fabricated are true, she says, "I believe that that was isolated. I don't believe that it was common practice."

Other writers and editors who have worked for Fuller say she would never tolerate lies. Barbara Sgroi, a Toronto-based freelancer who has written for Fuller since 1981, says Fuller demands that stories be "factually accurate." Catherine Romano, executive editor of *Maxim* and a former editor under Fuller at *YM*, *Marie Claire* and *Cosmo*, agrees, saying accuracy is important to Fuller. Mark Golin, *Maxim's* editor in chief and *Cosmo's* former deputy editor, says of allegations of fabricated stories, "I would question your sources on that."

**B**ONNIE FULLER NOW WANTS TO make her mark on *Glamour*. That's no easy task given its history of award-winning journalism under former editor Ruth Whitney. (Whitney declined to comment for this article.) According to *Ms.* magazine founding editor Gloria Steinem, Whitney transformed the magazine from "a traditional fashion magazine—grade-C Diana Vreeland," into one of the few fashion magazines that "hasn't hurt equality" for women.

This is high praise coming from Steinem, an outspoken critic of women's magazines who believes that they exist solely to help advertisers target consumers. "Ruth tried to fight the battle of having at least some text that was not for the advertiser but for the reader," Steinem says, adding that Whitney "has standards and she has dignity" in a media niche where those qualities are hard to come by. "My fear is that the degree of resistance that Ruth was putting up against total control is gone," Steinem says of Whitney's departure.

In a speech given in 1993 at Drake University, Whitney reminisced about *Glamour's* history and the role it has played in women's lives. "During my 25 years at *Glamour*," she said "the lives of women (my readers) have been more than changed they have been transformed—as sexual objects and as sexual



beings, as wives and as mothers, as students and as teachers, as workers, and as professionals, as voters and as politicians and as first ladies... Yes, women's magazines played a role."

In Whitney's 31 years as editor, *Glamour* certainly did. In August 1968, it became the first fashion magazine to put an African-American woman on its cover. It joined forces with other women's magazines that ran editorials in July 1976 urging women to support the Equal Rights Amendment. In 1992, *Glamour* won a National Magazine Award for a series of articles on abortion. In 1994, it again won a National Magazine Award for its searing look at the effect of managed care on women's health.

By including hard-hitting, issue-driven journalism in its mix of fashion and beauty, *Glamour* has served women who love the escapism that women's magazines offer, but want truthful information delivered in an intelligent voice. *Glamour*—though not without content that might be considered "fluffy"—often hits both targets.

"We win a lot of awards for 'truth in' stories," Whitney told *The New York Times* in September. "Truth in Beauty. Truth in Fashion. Truth in anything. Because when women think they're not getting all the truth, they're usually right."

There are longtime Whitney deputies who, so far, remain at *Glamour* and can show Fuller the ropes. But how long they will last is anybody's guess. In Fuller's 18 months as *Cosmopolitan's* editor, between 34 and 40 employees resigned, retired, or were fired, according to an executive associated with the magazine (Fuller insists the number is 31); many were seasoned employees who had worked under Helen Gurley Brown.

"There was a number of staff that had been there a very long time and it needed to change a bit," Fuller explains, but she insists she looks forward to working with the editors who were hired by Whitney. However, Robertson hints at a round of mass firings, saying he and Fuller didn't want to move to Condé Nast until they could staff the magazine as they chose. "We had to make sure our family could come with us," he says, so there would be "no *Sophie's Choice*" situation. (That family so far includes art director Henry Connell, fashion director Enna Halie, and executive editor Dolgoff.)

Changes to *Glamour* will be "subtle," Fuller promises, although she confirms that it will undergo a complete redesign. Robertson says Condé Nast has promised to publish the magazine on a higher-quality, higher-priced paper. He also says readers should expect a more fashionable magazine: "Ruth looked at fashion as a necessary evil," he says. "We're more fashion-friendly." More high-profile models will be used than under Whitney, according to Robertson. And, Fuller says, actresses will occasionally appear on the cover (though she says she will not allow any of them to have the story-approval rights she allotted Lee).

Fuller says she thinks *Glamour* is a "dense magazine"

with a bit too much text and headlines that aren't attention-grabbing enough. "What I'm hoping to do is communicate, hopefully clearer, more effectively with the reader—draw them in better, stronger, easier—so I hope the *Glamour* reader can expect that she's going to be unable to take her eyes off of any page."

She'd like to make a more direct connection with readers than Whitney did in the past, Fuller says. "I like having an edi-

*Cosmopolitan* implemented a system for "reporting" that prohibits fact checking and gives editors and writers carte blanche to embellish or fabricate anecdotes.

tor's letter and Ruth didn't have an editor's letter." It helps develop the voice and the identity of the magazine, she says. "Right there, you give a face to your reader. I like that because I think it helps with the reader connection [if] they know who's behind the magazine." (She says that she in fact "writes" the editor's letter, though Robertson types it up for her; see sidebar, page 107.)

Despite the fact that she admits to "occasionally" calling *Glamour* "Gloomer" while at *Cosmo* ("We were competitors," she says with a laugh), readers should not anticipate "noticeable" changes in the features, according to Fuller, who says she "doesn't know" if *Glamour* will run more of the first-name-only anecdotes that fill the pages of *Cosmopolitan*.

Condé Nast chairman S.I. Newhouse Jr. says through his publicist, Maurie Perl, that he is "not concerned" about Fuller's ability to maintain the journalistic standards of *Glamour*, which he calls "the essence of the publication." But Whitney has spoken vociferously about her concerns to the press. On August 11, the *New York Post* quoted her as saying, "I'm very disappointed in the replacement... There are all kinds of people I would have recommended."

Fuller has "a track record that you just can't argue with," counters publisher Berner, who says she was "in awe of what [Fuller] did at *Cosmo*." Whether Fuller just tweaks *Glamour* or totally revamps it, Berner says, is not the important issue. She says Fuller has complete editorial discretion and can do whatever she wants to the magazine as long as her changes benefit the bottom line. "The main goal," says Berner, "is to maintain or grow the circulation. She's shown she can do that again and again." ■



Conquering hero: Matt Drudge at a recent paid appearance before the conservative Eagle Forum in Arlington, Virginia.

# TOWN CRIER FOR THE NEW AGE

**Matt Drudge, a maverick with a cheap computer in a Hollywood apartment, is the Tom Paine of the Internet Age. Though his journalism is raw and reckless, it thrusts potent challenges at the power of big media. By David McClintick**

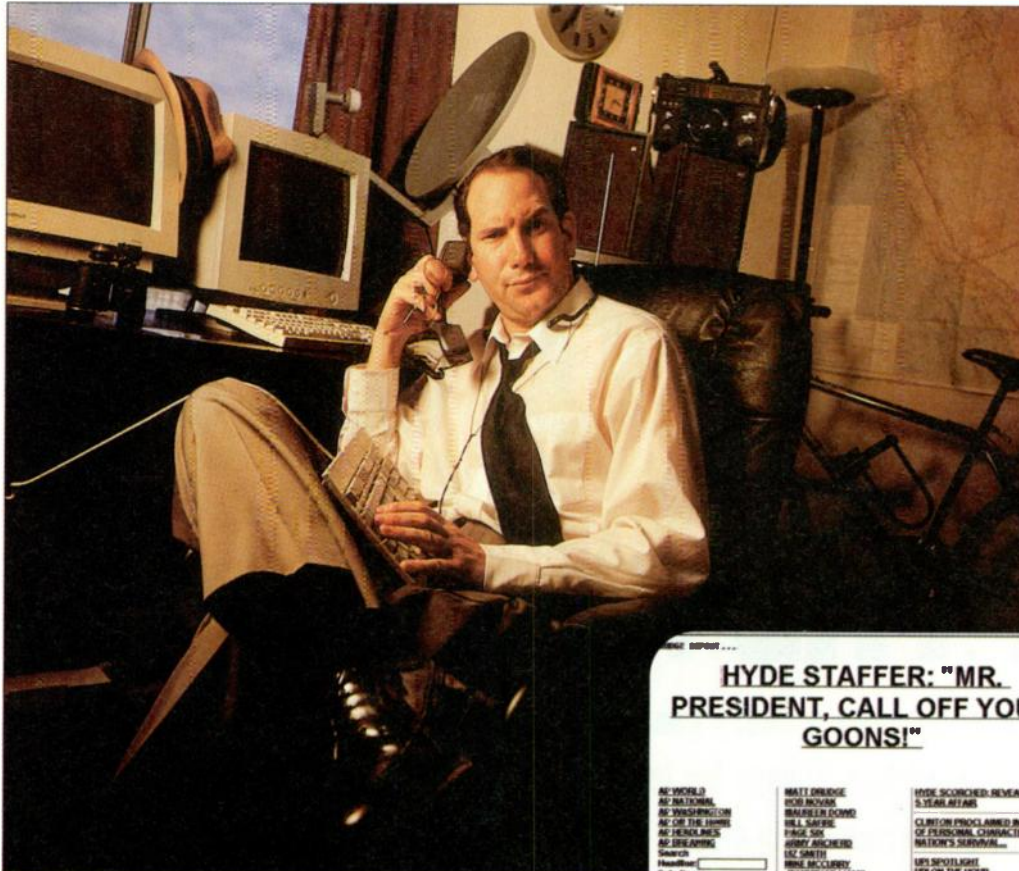
**M**ATT DRUDGE, PALE AND INTENSE, STARED AT an old computer screen in his cramped apartment in a shabby neighborhood of Los Angeles. "She's lying, Drudge, don't report it," a White House staffer e-mailed. With a click of his mouse, Drudge reported it anyway: Kathleen Willey claims Bill Clinton groped her. The disclosure led the July 28, 1997, Drudge Report, a flamboyantly provocative, often outrageous Internet news compendium that is roiling the elite journalistic establishment and rattling politicians all the way to the president of the United States.

Drudge, a slender man of 31 with receding black hair, is the most controversial reporter in America since Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein emerged from obscurity to expose the crimes of Richard Nixon a quarter-century ago. Working alone from his cluttered lair with a cheap computer and modem, Drudge "broke" the story of President Clinton's alleged involvement with Kathleen Willey. He also "broke" the story that

would threaten the Clinton presidency, the Monica Lewinsky affair. "Broke" is in quotation marks because Matt Drudge's journalism eludes conventional definition. What he actually did was spread the word to thousands of people via the Internet that *Newsweek* magazine had the Willey and Lewinsky stories but was sitting on them. By revealing salient details he'd unearthed himself and sparking a massive e-mail response, Drudge prompted, if not forced, *Newsweek* and other mainstream media to report the stories themselves. Drudge's Lewinsky bombshell in January sparked one of the most intense media frenzies in history, drew millions of "visits" to the on-line Drudge Report, and elevated Matt Drudge from fringe notoriety to mainstream infamy—a lone maverick from out of the West wreaking havoc in the once genteel precincts of Washington media and politics. President Clinton himself is well aware of Drudge. He calls him "Sludge," according to Monica Lewinsky, as quoted in Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's report to Congress.

PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM WOLFF

## The Drudge Report's significance lies not in its flaws but in the elemental question his work poses for conventional journalism: Is media power too concentrated?



The Internet mischief-maker in his Los Angeles lair.

Matt Drudge flouts the norms of professional journalism. He doesn't even believe journalism *is* a "profession." Anyone can do it. You don't need a college education. You don't need editors, researchers, or fact checkers. All you need, Drudge believes, is determination to seek "the truth" and the means to publish it, which the Internet now provides to everyone with a computer and a modem.

It's easy to criticize—even ridicule—Matt Drudge. His Dickensian name invites parody, and his website is raw, shrill, and erratic. Indeed, when *Brill's Content* reviewed the 51 stories Drudge labeled "Exclusive" between January and September 1998, it found that of the 31

*Contributing editor David McClintick wrote about money manager Michael Steinberg's media diet in the premiere issue.*



stories that actually were exclusive, ten (32 percent) were untrue and/or never happened, 11 (36 percent) were true, and the accuracy of the remaining ten (32 percent) is debatable or still unknown (see "Gauging Drudge's Accuracy," page 119).

But many of the criticisms of Drudge have a way not only of stinging him but of bouncing back and stinging journalism in general. Matt Drudge doesn't always publish "the truth," but what publication does? *The Boston Globe* and *The New Republic* recently dismissed writers for fabricating stories—something no one has ever proved Drudge has done. Drudge publishes lewd material, but what newspaper hasn't, as explicit stories of White House sexcapades swirl through the hallowed halls of

Washington justice. Matt Drudge is the subject of a \$30 million libel suit by a White House aide. But even respected newspapers get sued; on March 20, 1997, a Texas jury awarded \$200 million in damages against *The Wall Street Journal*, which is appealing.

There's a difference of *raison d'être*, of course, between Drudge and the established organizations. They would claim a seriousness of purpose to which he doesn't always pledge allegiance. Nonetheless, the Drudge Report's significance lies not in its flaws but in the elemental questions it thrusts at contemporary journalism. Is media power too concentrated? Is news disseminated by too few elite sources? Matt Drudge answers a rude "yes." And the Drudge Report foreshadows the role of the Internet as a new and different journalistic medium—and as a catalyst of broader trends in America toward democratization and devolution of the power of big institutions, especially in the media worlds of New York and Washington. In that sense, Drudge can be seen as a modern Tom Paine, a possible precursor to millions of town criers using the Internet to invade the turf of bigfoot journalists.

Matt Drudge, in short, poses a threat to the status quo. And the panjandrums of that status quo loathe him. Veteran Washington correspondent Jules Witcover of *The Baltimore Sun* calls Drudge "a reckless trader in rumor and gossip—[the] abomination of the Internet." Marvin Kalb, director of the Shorenstein Center on the Press at Harvard, dismisses Drudge as a "conveyor of gossipy information." Joan Konner, publisher of the *Columbia Journalism Review* says Drudge is "by no reasonable measure working in the public interest."

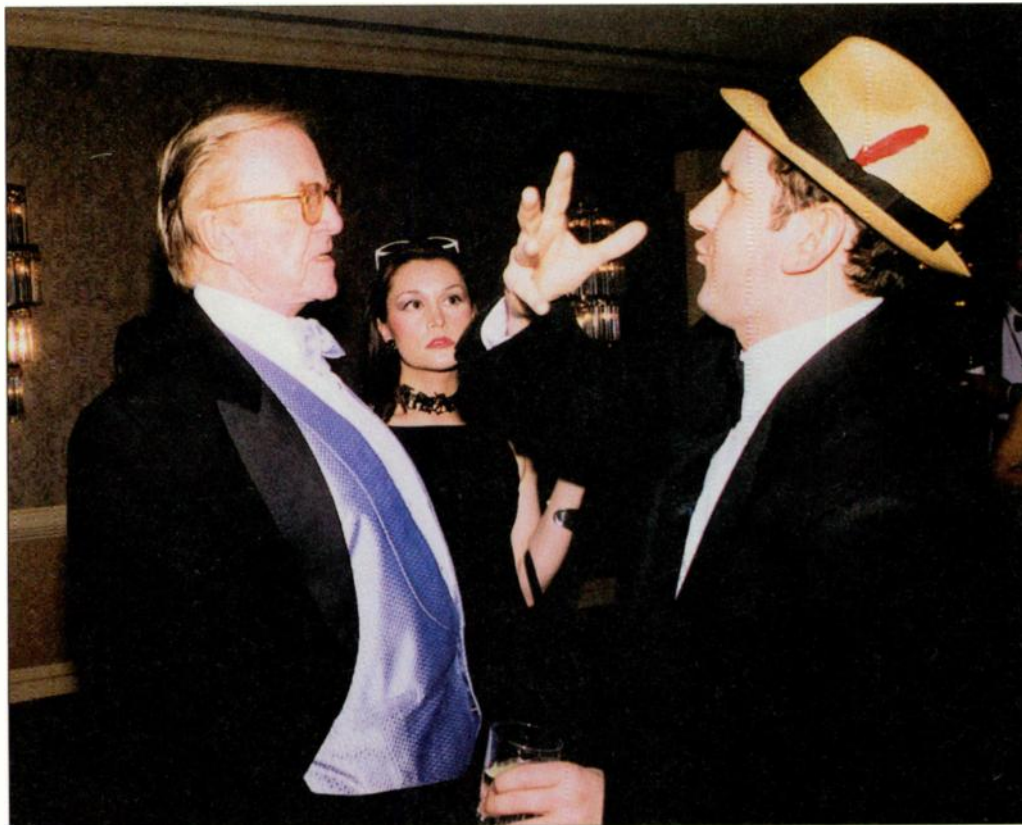
To which the disdainful Drudge replies: "Who are these people? What does it say about an establishment that puts them at the top of the heap? If they're the top, give me the bottom."

Drudge's "bottom" is a \$600-a-month two-room flat in a once elegant building, long since gone to seed, overlooking CNN and Capitol Records in old Hollywood, a neighborhood evocative of Times Square before Disney. His nerve center is a fluid cacophony—a cheap Sanyo television monitor tuned to

CNBC, another to CNN, another to C-SPAN (his favorite—"not even a close second"), a Sony radio purring phone talk, an RCA satellite dish bringing in European news, show tunes, and extra TV channels, a police scanner looking for local action, and, most important, two computer screens linked to chat rooms, e-mail, news wire services, and the Internet. Perched on a battered wooden chair at the center of this bargain-basement agglomeration, Matt Drudge not only creates and issues the Drudge Report but cultivates his multiple images—an iconoclast with a cyber-laser trained on the White House, a contrarian mischief-maker, a sensationalist who consumes supermarket tabloids but is also a reflective student of Erich Fromm and Thomas Sowell; an atavist who apes Walter Winchell, complete with hat, embracing the romance of old-fashioned tabloid muckraking; a futurist deploying new technology in ways not possible just a few years ago.

**M**ATT DRUDGE GREW UP IN TAKOMA Park, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C., the only child of liberal Democrats—his father is a social worker, his mother a lawyer. Drudge has been hooked on news since boyhood when he would fall asleep listening to a police scanner for crimes in progress. He delivered *The Washington Star* and grew fond of its op-ed page. As a teenager in the eighties he never missed CNN's *Crossfire*. Politically, young Drudge leaned conservative. He loved Ronald Reagan.

Though intellectually curious, he was a poor student in high school and did not go to college. Frustrated in a dead-end job at a 7-Eleven, he moved to Los Angeles, where he began reading *Variety* and old Walter Winchell clips and eventually got a job at the CBS television gift shop. His father bought him a computer in the fall of 1994, and Matt became fascinated by the new forms of communication it afforded. From his living room floor—he didn't yet have a desk—he became a regular in on-line chat rooms interested in show business and politics and began posting tidbits of information, some of which he had foraged from the trash at CBS. By early 1995, his "scoops" had drawn a small following to whom he e-mailed bulletins. He started the



Drudge Report in April of that year and quit his job the following January. The Drudge Report (which he distributes via a website as well as by e-mail), was the first to reveal that Jerry Seinfeld was demanding \$1 million an episode for his sitcom, that Connie Chung was being fired as the coanchor of the *CBS Evening News*, and that NBC and Microsoft were joining to form MSNBC.

By the 1996 election season, Matt Drudge had branched into politics and scooped the world on Bob Dole's choice of Jack Kemp as his vice-presidential running mate. An early Drudge Report reader, who was close to Dole's campaign manager, e-mailed the tip to him, Drudge says. By 1997, Drudge was focusing on the growing scandals surrounding Bill Clinton and the White House.

"ANYTHING ON KATHLEEN WILLEY?," Drudge typed. "I've got the whole story."

It was Saturday, July 26, 1997, and Drudge was at his computer exchanging messages with a White House staffer via a private on-line "buddy chat room," one of Drudge's preferred mode of debriefing confidential sources. ("Bob Woodward had his garage. I have my chat rooms.") The America Online

archives of the Drudge Report contain Drudge's transcript of the conversation.

"Not familiar with her," the staffer replied. Three weeks earlier, on the Fourth of July, Drudge had reported that *Newsweek* writer Michael Isikoff was "hot on the trail of a woman who claims to have been sexually propositioned by the president on federal property..."

"Willey," Drudge persisted on July 26. "She's the one that has been talking to *Newsweek* about—"

"About?...What's the story?" asked the staffer, whose identity Drudge says he had independently confirmed.

"The story is shocking."

"Hmmm..."

"I think I should just leave you with her name," Drudge typed back. "Carville, Begalla, etc. would freak if they knew that she was out there and that she was talking....She claims she was a part-timer who went to BC looking for more work—"

"Hmmm. Interesting. Are you sure the last name is Willey?"

"Yes. I'm holding off my story...but will move very soon."

"Willey just doesn't seem right to me. I've been here for 5 years and I've never heard the name."

Drudge chats with conservative talk-show host John McLaughlin at the White House Correspondents Dinner in April.

**"You and I did not have this conversation," a White House aide told Drudge. "I just got a lot of people very riled up around here about this Willey thing. We'll talk later."**



Drudge lectures the scribes he disdains.

"Willey? Midlothian, VA?...Her husband committed suicide."

"I'll check it out."

After a period of silence, the staffer returned.

"OK, I'll give you this bit of information. I just asked Podesta [Deputy Chief of Staff John Podesta] about it and he knows what it is and asked me to check to see if Isikoff was writing it for tomorrow's magazine. He's not, but you knew that. You and I did not have this conversation. I just got a lot of people very riled up around here about this Willey thing. We'll talk later. Do not mention this conversation....If asked, I'll tell people that you had on your web page: 'Possible Isikoff story on Willey' but that it's gone from your page now."

Drudge worked the story through the weekend. It was Monday, July 28, when a White House staffer warned, "She's lying, Drudge, don't report it." But Drudge wrote the story and posted it on his website that evening.

NOTHING FANCY GREETES THE READER who logs on to Matt Drudge's website, no color, no music, no sounds of any kind, just the bold logo, DRUDGE REPORT, black with a gray border on white, and, on that night, the headline:

**WILLEY'S DECISION: White House Employee Tells Reporter That President Made Sex Pass  
\*\*WORLD EXCLUSIVE\*\***

"Kathleen Willey is looking for a lawyer," Drudge began. After recounting his July 4 report of the yet-to-surface *Newsweek* investigation, Drudge wrote that the woman in question appeared to be Kathleen Willey and that "Isikoff has held back on the explosive story because the woman has refused to go on the record with her account. Nevertheless, the events surrounding Willey have become the talk of the Washington underground and threaten to undermine President Clinton's defense in the ongoing Paula Jones sexual harassment case....One White House staffer

strongly denies that a Kathleen Willey has ever been employed at the White House during the Clinton Administration... Washington waits." (Drudge refuses to say if either the White House staffer who said he had never heard the name "Willey," or the one who said Willey was "lying," was the same one who "strongly denied" she had been employed there; and he didn't supply an e-mail or chat-room discussion in which anyone "strongly denies" that she had been employed at the White House.)

Over the next 12 hours, the report attracted 2,600 visits to his website from White House staffers, according to Drudge, who cited statistics kept by his Internet service provider, which he says breaks down visits from various domains such as Congress and the White House.

With *Newsweek* still silent, Drudge struck again on Tuesday, July 29.

**"REVEALED: WILLEY WORKED AT WHITE HOUSE"**

"Newly unearthed documents show that Ms. Kathleen Willey did work at the White House, contrary to an official's off-the-cuff claim late on Monday that she did not. According to multiple sources in and out of government...this former low-level staffer personally approached President Clinton looking for more work...The President made sexual overtones [sic] toward her..." (Errors of usage, grammar, syntax, spelling, and typography are common in the Drudge Report.)

On Wednesday, July 30, CBS News, in the person of White House Correspondent Bill Plante, became the first mainstream outlet to report the Kathleen Willey story. Plante revealed that Willey had been subpoenaed by Paula Jones's lawyers.

*Newsweek's* story on Willey, which contained the first published mention of Linda Tripp, finally surfaced on the magazine's AOL site Sunday evening, August 3. Posting it on his own site, Matt Drudge commented, "The DRUDGE REPORT has learned that there were several urgent strategy sessions inside of the White House this weekend on how to publicly deal with the...Linda Tripp development."

In one day short of a month, Matt Drudge singlehandedly had forced the story of Kathleen Willey and President

Clinton from a brief item in the Drudge Report onto the nation's news agenda. And he had done it all from a small flat in darkest Hollywood.

That, in an episode, is the importance of Matt Drudge, the promise and the danger. If *Newsweek* had wanted to kill the story—and there is no reason to believe it did want to—it would have been much more difficult in the world of Drudge and his cyber-buddies than in the pre-Internet world. A gadfly like Drudge, wired, is a potent antidote to concentrations of media power. Whether a story is salacious or sober, flimsy or solid, helpful or hurtful, it will come out.

**T**HE DRUDGE REPORT OFFERS ITS readers three things: First, there is Matt Drudge's original reporting, much of it on politics, show business, and media. Second, Drudge culls the contents of major newspapers hours before they are published by tapping into their websites and getting tips from sources at the papers about future plans. Combining his own material with upcoming newspaper exclusives, Drudge updates his reports several times a day, often posting headlines minutes or even hours in advance of the story itself. His reports are brief, often fragmentary. Exclamation marks and all-cap highlighting lend a tabloid shrillness.

The Drudge Report's third element is the direct links it provides to the websites of dozens of newspapers, wire services, and columnists, both highbrow and low, a comprehensive cross-section of American and European journalism. Drudge wants his audience to read a wide variety of original sources for itself, with his readers functioning as their own editors. Drudge considers this service as important as any he offers, a direct challenge to big media's control of news editing and dissemination. In this age of exploding information, when conventional wisdom puts a premium on condensation, Drudge gives his readers a cornucopia. He also no doubt irritates big media powers, whose editorial offerings are now part of their nemesis's website.

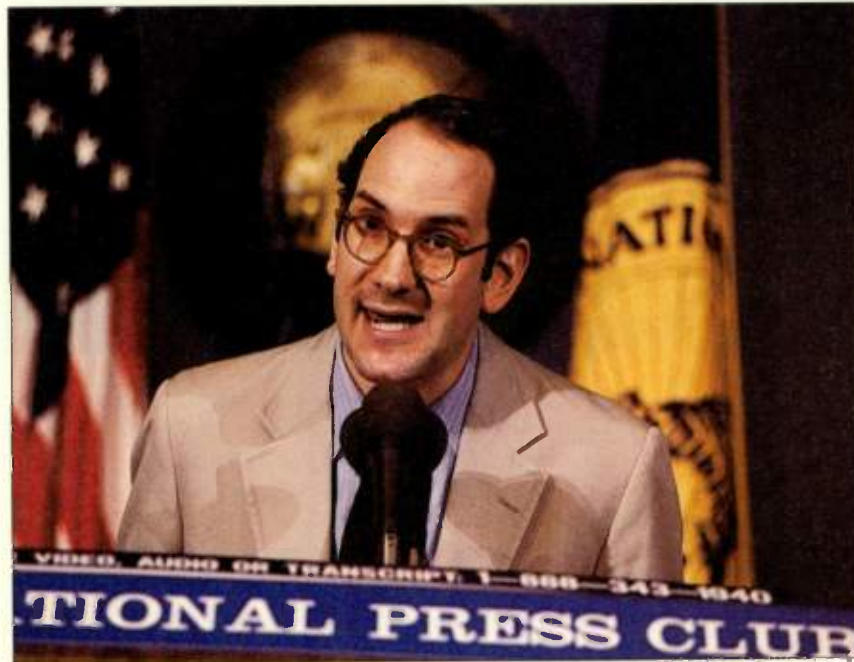
"There is a demand for unedited information," Drudge says. "It's very important that everyone can now see the AP and UPI online. The average Joe

can get the full picture—see what newspaper and broadcast editors are leaving out. That's going to change everything because we don't have to wait for Dan Rather to get his makeup on and read to us."

Even though visits to Drudge's website numbered in the hundreds of thousands by the summer of 1997, according to WebSideStory, a measurement service, the Drudge Report was still a marginal enterprise economically. The site could be accessed free, and Drudge did not charge for his e-mail service. He once asked for voluntary contributions and generated a

*violence against his wife,*" Drudge claimed, attributing the report to an unnamed "influential republican." But Drudge did not have the court records and cited no evidence that he had sought them or even that they existed. He did, however, quote a "White House source" as labeling the report "pure fiction." As well, he claimed he tried to call Blumenthal, who said he had no record of any call.

Blumenthal, through his attorney, declared the report false and demanded that Drudge retract it. Drudge did so the next day. "I apologize if any harm has been done," Drudge told Howard



In the belly of the Washington beast: Drudge meets the press in a June speech at the National Press Club.

few thousand dollars. That later was supplemented by \$3,000 a month from America Online. It was more than enough to pay his rent, feed him and his cat, and put gas in his Metro Geo.

AMONG MATT DRUDGE'S REGULAR READERS was Sidney Blumenthal, a writer for *The New Yorker* who was to begin a job as an assistant to President Clinton on Monday, August 11, 1997. Late the evening before, when Blumenthal logged on to the Drudge Report from his home computer, he was shocked to see his name in a stark headline:

**CHARGE: NEW WHITE  
HOUSE RECRUIT  
SIDNEY BLUMENTHAL  
HAS SPOUSAL ABUSE PAST**

*"There are court records of Blumenthal's*

Kurtz of *The Washington Post*. "The story was issued in good faith. It was based on two sources who clearly were operating from a political motivation....Someone was trying to get me to go after [the story] and I probably fell for it a little too hard....I can't prove it. This is a case of using me to broadcast dirty laundry. I think I've been had."

Blumenthal sued Drudge for \$30 million and demanded that he reveal his sources. President Clinton and Vice-President Gore approved the suit, according to *The Washington Post*. Garry Trudeau skewered Drudge in his "Doonesbury" strip: the Drudge character smears House Speaker Newt Gingrich by concocting a story that Gingrich was running a "sex ring" out of his press office.

The Blumenthal fiasco hurt Matt Drudge badly, enabling his critics to tar

**In this age of exploding information, when conventional wisdom puts a premium on condensation, Drudge gives his readers a cornucopia.**



With conservative friends Arianna Huffington (left) and Lucianne Goldberg.

him as a hack whose reporting couldn't be trusted, and also as an anti-Clinton zealot, an impression that gained credence when he accepted free legal representation from a conservative organization whose contributors include Richard Mellon Scaife, an avowed Clinton enemy. Drudge acknowledges opposing Clinton and being a conservative, although he prefers the labels "libertarian" and "populist." In September 1998, he would take a speaking fee from a conservative organization, Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum. But he says that "mischief-making in pursuit of breaking up media power is much more important than any political agenda. It's not left or right in the future, it's what's humorous and interesting. The action is always moving around. You're stuck if you're a conservative or liberal advocate."

Drudge's conservative politics don't keep him from having liberal friends. "He's interesting, and interested in a lot of things," says Julia Phillips, the Academy Award-winning movie producer and best-selling author, who is a liberal Democrat. "He's one of the first conservatives I ever met with any sense of humor."

In December 1997, Drudge made another error—less serious than the

Blumenthal bungle—in reporting that *New York Times* television writer Bill Carter is "polishing up a book that puts ABC Entertainment President Jamie Tarses back at the center of controversy." Drudge says he trusted his source, a Hollywood talent agent, who proved incorrect. Having failed to check the story with Carter, Drudge found it necessary to report a few days later that Carter was not writing a book. Asked why he didn't call Carter, Drudge says "it's the nature of what I do—I move quickly." But if he could do it again, would he take the time to call? "Sure, yeah, I would," Drudge says. And then he adds, "I'm working on something now on another *New York Times* person and they aren't returning my calls. I may go with it without the phone call.... There have been plenty of things attributed to me that no one's called me about.... You get angry, you huff and puff, but that's the nature of it."

Drudge's casual attitude and the resulting errors did not stop the growth of the Drudge Report, visits to which had risen to nearly 1 million a month in late 1997. And the mistakes did not deter Young & Rubicam, the big international advertising agency, from featuring Drudge among its "Eight Trends for '98."

"A Din of Small Voices," the agency said. "Think of Drudge—as in Matt Drudge, author of the online 'Drudge Report'—as the symbol of a small voice roaring. As with any form of mass media, the Internet wields great power. The difference between the Internet and TV or radio is that the 'Net allows two-way communication and gives as much potential power to a 13-year-old computer geek as to a corporate CEO or government leader."

AT ABOUT MIDNIGHT ON SATURDAY January 17, 1998, Drudge called Lucianne Goldberg, the New York literary agent.

"Can I read you something?" he recalls asking.

"Who is this?" Goldberg confirms saying.

"It's Matt Drudge in Hollywood."

"Uh-huh."

"It's about Monica Lewinsky."

"Hold on a second. Let me switch phones. I was just reading your website earlier tonight."

Matt Drudge says he had known about Monica Lewinsky since November, having received an e-mail from a Washington source. (Drudge first said he would show the e-mail to *Brill's Content*, then refused.) But he had more difficulty confirming and amplifying the story than he had had with Kathleen Willey in July. In January, however, the two stories took on a similar dimension when Drudge learned that *Newsweek's* Michael Isikoff, who had published his Willey story a month after Drudge first broke it, was also working on Lewinsky.

"It's comin', Drudge, Michael Isikoff's comin'," a Little Rock source had confided, according to Drudge.

On Saturday, January 17, Drudge learned that *Newsweek* had completed its story but had decided—at least for the time being—not to publish it. Drudge quickly drafted a story of his own and read it aloud to Lucianne Goldberg, who weeks earlier had encouraged former White House aide Linda Tripp to tape-record her telephone conversations with Monica Lewinsky and had subsequently become the key source for Michael Isikoff. Goldberg confirmed that Drudge's story was accurate. When they finished talking, he sent it forth onto his website



and into the e-mail boxes of about 90,000 subscribers.

NEWSWEEK KILLS STORY ON WHITE HOUSE INTERN BLOCKBUSTER REPORT: 23-YEAR OLD, FORMER WHITE HOUSE INTERN, SEX RELATIONSHIP WITH PRESIDENT  
\*\*WORLD EXCLUSIVE\*\*

"At the last minute, at 6 p.m. on Saturday evening, NEWSWEEK magazine killed a story that was destined to shake official Washington to its foundation: A White House intern carried on a sexual affair with the President of the United States!

"The DRUDGE REPORT has learned that reporter Michael Isikoff developed the story of his career, only to have it spiked by top NEWSWEEK suits hours before publication."

Drudge did not name Lewinsky or Linda Tripp, but reported that the intern had "indulged the president's sexual preference" in a study just off the Oval Office and "wrote long love letters" to Clinton.

"The DRUDGE REPORT has learned that tapes of intimate phone conversations exist."

The story spread quickly. William Kristol, editor and publisher of *The Weekly Standard*, mentioned it Sunday on ABC's *This Week with Cokie Roberts and Sam Donaldson*.

"The story in Washington this morning is that *Newsweek* magazine was going to go with a big story based on tape-recorded conversations, which a woman who was a summer intern at the White House, an intern of Leon Panetta's—"

George Stephanopoulos interrupted: "And Bill, where did it come from? The Drudge Report. You know, we've all seen how discredited..."

"No, no, no," Kristol replied. "They had screaming arguments in *Newsweek* magazine yesterday. They finally didn't go with the story. It's going to be a question of whether the media is now going to report what are pretty well-validated charges of presidential behavior in the White House."

"Drudge, this better not be true!" e-mailed his friend Susan Estrich, the University of Southern California law professor who had run Michael Dukakis's Democratic presidential campaign in 1988.

# GAUGING DRUDGE'S ACCURACY

**CAVEAT, READER:** This chart examines the items claimed as "Exclusives" by the Drudge Report from January 1, 1998, through September 14, 1998. It has two basic weaknesses. First, as should be clear, the definitions at the top of each column are imprecise and subject to debate. Second, the items used are based on those contained in an archive Drudge supplies to America Online; the problem is that Drudge himself decides what goes into the archive and could—and occasionally does, he says—decide not to archive items. Thus, we did not find one item, which—because we remembered it—we nonetheless listed: the inaccurate "exclusive" that Sonny Mehta was likely to be appointed editor of *The New Yorker*. We do not know how many others—both exclusive and non-exclusive, true and untrue—we missed. The best way to read this chart, therefore, is as a sampling of a body of Drudge's 1998 claimed exclusives that contains our shorthand assessments of their actual exclusivity and of their accuracy. Again, these are our assessments, and in going over them with Drudge he disputed some of our judgments, particularly with respect to whether an item was actually exclusive or significant.

DRUDGE REPORT	DRUDGE REPORT				
	YES, EXCLUSIVE	NOT EXCLUSIVE, OR IF TRUE, TOO INSIGNIFICANT OR GENERAL TO BE WORTHY OF THE TERM	TRUE	UNTRUE AND/OR NEVER HAPPENED	ACCURACY DEBATABLE OR STILL UNKNOWN AT PRESS TIME
1/14 Clinton to be questioned in Jones case about depositions from woman in "trench coat" and another in "pick-up truck."	✓				●
1/16 "The Friends of Al Gore" political website originated from the White House.	✓		●		
1/18 <i>Newsweek</i> kills story about former White House intern's sexual relationship with Clinton.	✓		●		
1/19 "Former White House intern denies sex with president in sworn affidavit."	✓		●		
1/19 Former White House intern subpoenaed in Paula Jones case; résumé detailed.	✓		●		
1/21 Federal investigators have tapes of former White House intern discussing alleged sexual relationship with Clinton.		✓			
1/21 Lewinsky offered U.N. job.		✓			
1/21 Lewinsky kept a semen-stained "garment."	✓		●		
1/29 "New White House woman to be questioned."	✓				●
2/5 "White House likely to invoke 'executive privilege'" to prevent investigators from probing White House aides.		✓			➔

**"The DRUDGE REPORT has learned that reporter Michael Isikoff developed the story of his career, only to have it spiked by top *Newsweek* suits hours before publication."**

There was no further mention of the story by the media that Sunday until midnight, when Drudge published Monica Lewinsky's name for the first time. *"The DRUDGE REPORT has learned that former White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, 23, has been subpoenaed to give a deposition in the Paula Jones case."* Drudge added Lewinsky's résumé, including her educational background, computer proficiency, and security clearance.

On Monday, Rush Limbaugh told his millions of radio listeners about Drudge's scoop. Late that evening, Drudge reported that Monica Lewinsky, in a sworn affidavit, had denied having any "sexual relationship with President Clinton."

At the White House press briefing Tuesday, January 20, ABC's Sam Donaldson asked press secretary Mike McCurry: "Someone said that you...put out the word that staffers should not be allowed to log on to the Drudge Report. Is that true?"

"I don't discuss that subject," McCurry replied.

"What? Whether you ever put out a word they can't log on?"

"I think calling it a 'report' is too generous."

"Well, whatever you want to call it is fine with me, but have you forbidden people to actually—"

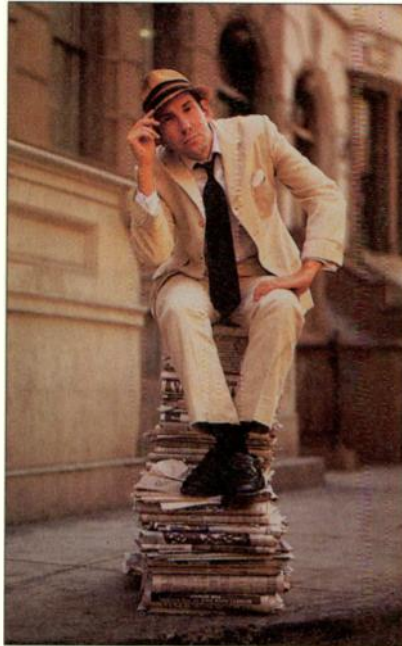
"No. It's a free country, and people can do what they want to on the Internet."

Drudge posted another headline early Tuesday evening.

**CONTROVERSY SWIRLS AROUND TAPES OF FORMER WHITE HOUSE INTERN, AS STARR MOVES IN!**

**\*\*WORLD EXCLUSIVE\*\***

*"Federal investigators are now in possession of intimate taped conversations of a former White House intern, age 23, discussing details of her alleged sexual relationship with President Clinton, the DRUDGE REPORT has learned."* It was



**Camping it up in Los Angeles.**

the first report in any medium that Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr was investigating the Lewinsky matter. *"The development has completely consumed high-level Washington, with Starr's investigators working past midnight in recent days. Developing..."*

Just before 1 A. M. Wednesday morning, 72 hours after Matt Drudge had broken the story, the dam holding back the mainstream media gave way. ABC News broadcast a story on the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal in the wee hours of Wednesday. *The Washington Post* ran a long article in its Wednesday editions. And *Newsweek*, which had held up Michael Isikoff's story on Saturday evening, finally posted it on its AOL site. None of the stories acknowledged that Matt Drudge had reported the scandal first. *Newsweek*, indeed, deployed people on television to claim it had broken the story.

Matt Drudge again streaked ahead of the pack, posting a new report late Wednesday:

**WATERGATE 1998  
\*\*CONTAINS GRAPHIC**

**DESCRIPTIONS\*\***

THE DRUDGE REPORT HAS LEARNED...THAT THERE MAY BE A DNA TRAIL THAT COULD CONFIRM PRESIDENT CLINTON'S SEXUAL INVOLVEMENT WITH LEWINSKY...A GARMENT WITH CLINTON'S DRIED SEMEN ON IT—A GARMENT SHE ALLEGEDLY SAID SHE WOULD NEVER WASH.

Having held media bigfeet to the fire and been ignored, Drudge finally was acknowledged early the next morning when he was invited on the *Today* show and met hostile questioning.

"The Drudge Report is a media gossip page known for below-the-Beltway reporting," NBC host Matt Lauer began, "and it's gaining a reputation as a growing irritant to the White House....You are, you admit, a conservative, and you have increasingly targeted the Clinton White House?"

"Well, I go where the stink is," Drudge said from NBC Burbank. "There's a Washington press corps that is too close to the situation to see how it looks from out here, and I write from that vantage point."

"Is it journalism or is it gossip?" Lauer asked.

"It's a reporter, not overly educated, not underly educated. It's..."

"But are the facts checked and double-checked as you would in journalism, or do you take what you hear and just put it out there?"

"Oh, you mean like Richard Jewell?" Drudge giped.

"Well, yeah. Like anything."

"Oh, okay. Okay," Drudge said. "I guess Richard Jewell was double-checked." Drudge had touched a raw nerve at NBC, whose principal anchor, Tom Brokaw, had insinuated that Richard Jewell was probably the man who had set off the bomb at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. NBC had later paid Jewell more than \$500,000 to avoid a lawsuit, *The Wall Street Journal* reported.

"I report what I hear and what I see," Drudge continued. "And it's a one-man operation....I dare to challenge authority, and at this point I have taken on the White House."

Lauer asked about the Monica Lewinsky story. "Are you at all concerned that you've made a mistake here?"

"Not at all. As a matter of fact, I have reported there's a potential DNA trail that would tie Clinton to this young woman."

"What evidence do you have of that?"

"She has bragged..."

"But you don't have any confirmation of that?"

"Not outside of what I've just heard..."

"You call your operation a one-man operation. Are you surprised at the amount of attention it has received?"

"Oh, Matt, absolutely. This thing has taken off to degrees I couldn't imagine....It bothers me that we have an effort from the highest office in the land against one single reporter who is simply calling it as he sees it. And if you don't like it, click it off. Don't sue him and don't try to destroy him."

Lauer's NBC colleague Tim Russert gave Drudge a warmer greeting on *Meet the Press* the following Sunday, encouraging Drudge's propensity for exaggeration. Russert asked about "discussions of other women, including other White House staffers, involved with the president."

"There is talk all over this town, another White House staffer is going to come out from behind the curtains this week," Drudge claimed, "...there are hundreds, hundreds, according to Ms. Lewinsky, quoting Clinton..." Later in the program, Drudge predicted, "I think the upcoming week—you thought last week was bad, this upcoming week is going to be one of the worst weeks in the history of this country if they're going to take a tack that this is all made up and this is all Ken Starr."

Drudge "doesn't care whether he's accurate or not," said Jack Nelson, the veteran Washington correspondent of the *Los Angeles Times*, when they appeared together on CNN's *Talk Back Live* January 29.

"I just think it's interesting for Jack Nelson...I've admired him for years, to be so nervous about a new medium," Drudge retorted.

"Matt, I mean, it's not the Internet. It's you. I mean...you ought to have at least some standards of decency and some standards of fairness."

"I work very hard [at] confirming. It's a one-man operation. I put my name on everything...I think just because I don't have the clout of a

# DRUDGE REPORT

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2/10 Starr has voice messages Clinton left for Lewinsky.	✓		●		
2/10 <i>Hard Copy's</i> story on Clinton fathering a child is in doubt.		✓			
2/13 "Pentagon squeezes federal witness Tripp"	✓				●
2/14 Lewinsky's urgent pages to Clinton before his testimony failed.	✓			●	
2/19 Lewinsky's father to speak with Barbara Walters on <i>20/20</i> episode.		✓			
2/22 Reporter preparing detailed story about whether diGenova is being investigated.	✓			●	
3/8 James McDougal may have written his Whitewater story before he died.		✓			
3/15 White House first learns of Willey talking through on-line chat with Drudge.		✓			
3/18 "Lewinsky details may make Congress blush."		✓			
4/17 "ABC kills interview with lawyer of Arkansas schoolyard shooter!"	✓		●		
4/19 "Rubin eyes Greenspan's job."	✓			●	
5/1 Morley Safer talks to Starr's Whitewater targets on next <i>60 Minutes</i> .		✓			
5/6 White House state dinner menu.		✓			
5/7 Lewinsky logged in to visit Currie when she was on vacation.	✓			●	
5/13 Starr subpoenaed security video recordings from the Oval Office.		✓			
5/13 "Paramount making film lampooning Bill Gates."	✓			●	
5/20 "Encryption missing after China/US [satellite] accident."	✓		●		➔



to the future. Here's to liberty."

Matt Drudge flogged the scandal almost daily.

**LEWINSKY DETAILS MAY MAKE CONGRESS BLUSH**

**\*\*EXCLUSIVE\*\***

**\*\*CONTAINS GRAPHIC DESCRIPTION\*\***

"While prosecutors in Kenneth Starr's office have not yet decided exactly what to include in their report to Congress regarding the Monica Lewinsky mess, one theme of concern is already taking place behind the scenes on Capitol Hill: How explicit is Starr's report going to be!

"....There is concern on The Hill that the political scandal may very well turn Triple-X once transcripts of Lewinsky/Tripp conversations are given to Congress or otherwise become public....Lewinsky's graphic descriptions of what she claims was a sexual affair with the president has been the talk of the underground since the scandal broke.... What sex evidence will eventually be passed to Congress is a debate that has been under way inside of Starr's office, the DRUDGE REPORT has learned... While investigators and congressional leaders publicly maintain that Starr's research is focused on potential crimes of obstruction of justice, witness-tampering and perjury, it's the graphic sexual dynamic swirling around some of the possible crimes that may have Capitol Hill blushing...."

"I KNOW YOU DON'T LIKE TO ADDRESS THE DRUDGE REPORT," ABC's Sam Donaldson told White House Press Secretary Mike McCurry, on May 6, 1998, "but you should know that Drudge is reporting that [Betty Currie, Clinton's secretary] has been questioned about times when her name appears as having had Monica Lewinsky come in, and in fact, she, Betty Currie, was on vacation."

"Sam, if ABC wants to rely on Matt Drudge as a source of news, that's your choice."

"Well, when I said you should know, I was trying to do you a public service and not broadcast it on ABC."

"If it's Sam Donaldson's view that Matt Drudge's reporting is a public service, I'd take some issue with that."

WHILE RIDING THE WHITE HOUSE STORY hard, Matt Drudge didn't ignore other

## "I know you don't like to address the Drudge Report," ABC's Sam Donaldson told White House Press Secretary Mike McCurry, who was dismissive of the gadfly.

In September, Drudge played a videotape on his Fox News Channel show depicting a "mystery woman" in the Oval Office.

major newspaper doesn't mean you can't get close to truths."

MATT DRUDGE NOT ONLY LED BIG media's coverage but figured in the investigation by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr. Monica Lewinsky's lawyer, William Ginsburg, wrote in *Time* that "Matt Drudge was on the Internet....I had never heard of Drudge before, but we were at the [Independent Counsel's] offices and these men would walk in with a piece of paper like it was news of war breaking out in Bosnia. It was Matt Drudge's Internet column. They were using the Internet to investigate!"

Drudge told his website readers, "I feel like Linda Bloodworth and Markie Post jumping up and down on the Lincoln bed in the White House on Inauguration night! Look Ma, I've made TIME again this week!"

Mike McCurry wasn't the only White House official bitterly dismissive of Drudge. On Monday, February 9, at a Harvard panel on the scandal, senior Clinton aide Rahm Emanuel said, "This story broke with Matt Drudge from the Internet who deals with...the low end of gossip but not other material." And on Wednesday, Hillary Rodham Clinton told a Washington gathering: "When you move to the railroad, or you move to the cotton gin, or you move to the

automobile, or the airplane, and now certainly as you move to the computer and increasing accessibility and instantaneous information on the computer, we are all going to have to rethink how we deal with this....As exciting as these new developments are...there are a number of serious issues without any kind of editing function or gatekeeping function....It is just beyond imagination what can be disseminated....I don't have any clue about what we're going to do legally, regulatorily....Anytime an individual or an invention leaps so far out ahead....you've got a problem...."

The "individual" she referred to could only have been Drudge, who that week thanked "all who have cheered and jeered this report... What a run it has been. There have been 6,162,100 visitors to the DRUDGE REPORT website in the past 31 days, [29,525 from the White House...]" Drudge again quoted his Internet service provider.

"Even though possible events in the coming months may try and divide citizens, may force good men and women of all stripes into different corners of the ring, I remain convinced, with little doubt, that truth will be the victor. A free press is alive and well on this winter's night in America. And as this e-mail shoots through the wires, bounces off satellite dishes, pings and pongs and relays toward wherever you are—here's

interests. On May 20, 1998, Drudge broke a story having nothing to do with the White House scandal.

### ENCRYPTION [EQUIPMENT] MISSING AFTER CHINA/US ACCIDENT

A veteran employee of Loral Space and Communications and Hughes confided to him, says Drudge, that sensitive encryption equipment from a U.S. satellite was missing after the Chinese rocket carrying it into space exploded in 1996 and crashed in China.

*"The most interesting aspect of the accident was this [the Loral employee supposedly told Drudge]: engineers who reviewed the recovered payload debris noticed something special that was missing: encryption hardware...I spoke to one of our engineers...His assumption was that the Chinese kept the encryption...with the intent of reverse engineering its function and that espionage was China's intent."*

A month later, a similar story surfaced on page one of *The New York Times* when Congress held a hearing on whether sensitive space technology had been "transferred" to China by U.S. aerospace corporations using Chinese rockets to launch their satellites.

Matt Drudge trumpeted his exclusive. *"The story will read familiar to smart DRUDGE REPORT readers,"* he posted on his website.

BY THE LATE SPRING OF 1998, MATT Drudge had become a gadfly celebrity.

"It's introducing news to a generation that wasn't reading newspapers or watching television news but is playing with computers," Drudge told a pack of reporters and TV cameras after addressing the National Press Club in Washington on June 2. "If you could read wire services and you could read news through a computer, which is a medium that a lot of older Americans don't use but younger people do, I think it's going to help rejuvenate news and I think to a certain degree has...I get readers who say they are disenfranchised by the mainstream press, who don't trust it, who don't look for straight facts from corporate editors. So, to that respect, I think I'm offering a glimpse of how it can be otherwise...I put my name on everything I write. I am a partisan for truth. I love going where the stink is."

# DRUDGE REPORT

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5/28 "Investigators rule out physical exam of President."	✓				●
5/31 Clinton fired Dick Morris in a Chicago hotel while Lewinsky was down the hall.	✓			●	
6/4 Chelsea Clinton will get Volkswagen Beetle.	✓				●
6/5 "Brill-Cream: Media watchdog works media for mag launch..."	✓		●		
6/17 White House attempts to block Lewinsky's immunity deal.	✓			●	
6/17 Bret Easton Ellis returns with new book.		✓			
7/2 "Veteran CNN producer says Kaplan should resign."		✓			
7/7 "Lewinsky was jealous of other White House woman."	✓				●
7/10 Sonny Mehta may become next editor of <i>The New Yorker</i> .	✓			●	
7/22 "Richardson's role: Lewinsky didn't want U.N. job."		✓			
7/27 "Starr offers closed-circuit TV testimony; Clinton may...demand written questions."		✓			
7/28 "Lewinsky tells Starr that she wrote talking points."	✓		●		
7/28 Starr has photo of Clinton and Lewinsky holding hands.	✓				●
7/28 Lewinsky agreed to cooperate because of evidence against her.		✓			
7/29 Mark Fuhman was consulted on semen-stain testing.		✓			
8/17 "President appeared 'lost' during prosecutor's questioning."	✓				● →

**"I get readers who say they are disenfranchised by the mainstream press, who don't trust it, who don't look for straight facts from corporate editors."**



The ultimate accolade: vicious satire from Brenda Starr.

STRAW HAT IN PLACE, DRUDGE ARCHED his menacing brow into the television camera's tight close-up. "The X-Files opened No. 1 at the box office Friday night, according to my Hollywood sources...but tonight, I'm gonna open my Monica Lewinsky file."

It was Saturday, June 20, and Drudge was at the studios of the Fox News Channel in midtown Manhattan taping the first of a new television program, *drudge*, which Fox had created to exploit his notoriety. For Drudge, the show was an opportunity to display his personality and mischievous sense of humor in an older medium. It was also an opportunity to earn some significant money—\$150,000 annually, according to a Fox source—after years of paltry returns on his work and growing fame.

The set was noir. Drudge, dark tie at half-mast, sat at a battered desk cluttered with newspapers. Shadows shrouded an old typewriter and filing cabinets. The music evoked *Sweet Smell of Success*, the fifties movie about a Winchell-type gossip columnist played by Burt Lancaster.

"He's the mod muckraker, Internet informer, citizen journalist," the Fox announcer intoned. "Everyone's dying to hear what he'll say next. You know his name. Now, here he is. *Drudge*."

"Matt Drudge somewhere from in New York City," he began, "one of the first guys to make a name for himself on the Internet—showing my face, a face they kinda like down at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue....Tonight, new details about those tapes...and about that dress...and those stains....Before I introduce my guest, a warning: The conversation I'm about to have most likely will take a graphic turn. There's simply no getting around it in my search for truth. If you're sensitive to the raw nature of the ongoing investigation of President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, please turn your sets off now. If not, turn up the volume."

Drudge's guest was Lucianne Goldberg, who had confirmed his original Internet story on the scandal the night of January 17.

"A generation ago, we had a president who resigned over tapes," Drudge

said. "Is there enough on the tapes to end Clinton's presidency?"

"I think if it were just the sex part of the tapes, no," Goldberg replied. "But there are two tapes at the end of this that show obstruction, and then you have the events happening after the last tape that show subordination and perjury. If that doesn't do it, then we're not living in the country that I want to live in."

"You've totally stunned me tonight," Drudge said with droll melodrama at the end of the interview. "Kids, you can let the parents back in the room."

*Entertainment Weekly* gave the Drudge show a B-minus. "I've never had a grade that good!" exclaimed Drudge.

"**O**KAY, I CAN DIE NOW. I'VE MADE Maureen Dowd's column," Drudge posted on July 18. "People often wonder," Dowd had written in *The New York Times*, "how the great social observers of the past would dissect the madness and the inanity in Washington today. How would Mark Twain skewer Kenneth Starr on Larry King? What would be left of Matt Drudge after Evelyn Waugh got through with him?"

Drudge further ripened as a target by blowing another prediction. "The New Yorker top job [the editorship vacated by Tina Brown]...may go to Knopf editor-in-chief Sonny Mehta, the DRUDGE REPORT has learned." The job went to David Remnick.

Drudge cut a glittery swath through the television talk circuit. *Crossfire*. *Letterman*. *Politically Incorrect*. "I get the feeling you think you know the truth when you don't," *PI* host Bill Maher needled Drudge.

"Who's telling more truth this summer, me or the president of the United States?" Drudge retorted. The audience roared with laughter.

Drudge's incandescence drew the ultimate compliment: satire. Other sites parodied him: the Dredge Report, the Sludge Report, the Smudge Report, and the Drudge Retort (CORRECTION: NO VAN SUSTEREN SEX ORGY AFTER ALL!).

The Brenda Starr comic strip introduced a new character, Rat Sludge, creator of the Sludge Report, an Internet gossip column. Brenda interviewed Rat for an article in her paper, *The Flash*:

"I'm not one of you fancy corporate journalists, Miss Starr. No ergonomically correct desk. No 401K. No expense account. Journalism isn't a lifestyle for me. It's a calling."

"God called you to gossip?" Brenda asks. "Mr. Sludge, how can you call yourself a journalist? You traffic in vicious rumors."

"Hmmm, a rumor is gossip when it's in the Sludge Report and journalism once it's in The New York Times?"

A reader opens *The Flash* with Brenda's article "The Scoop on Sludge."

"Wow! This article claims that Rat Sludge makes up stuff he calls fact, lies to sources and knowingly spreads false rumors!"

"So?" asks another reader. "How's that any different from what most journalists do?"

"With little more than a modem and an attitude," Brenda Starr wrote, "Rat Sludge has dragged journalism into the mud and perhaps mired it there for good. What's worse, the American public is sucking up his dirt as if it were a triple fudge frappuccino."

Reveling in the attention, Drudge had once mused about injecting a comic strip sensibility into the Drudge Report, spicing it with drawings and bold-faced sound-slang like BAM! and POW!

ON FRIDAY, AUGUST 14, AS BRENDA Starr was interviewing Rat Sludge, Matt Drudge rushed aboard United Airlines flight 2 for a flight from Los Angeles to New York. He wore a navy and red Associated Press baseball cap, a charcoal t-shirt, khaki shorts, and green sneakers. Two small duffel bags contained a pair of old black Florsheim wing tip shoes, which he wears for good luck at public appearances, and his laptop computer, which he would use to update his website from his New York hotel room.

Settling into seat 7A (Fox flies him business class), he ordered tomato juice (no ice) and began perusing the weekly tabloids, which he'd just purchased in Hollywood on his way to the airport: the *Globe* ("Monica: I Wanted Bill's Baby! White House sources tell how she tried to trap the Prez."), the *Star* ("Monica's Sex Diary: Prez and I were alone 50 times"), and the *National Enquirer* ("Hillary & Monica Showdown: Behind the Scenes").

# DRUDGE REPORT

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8/18 "Clinton wore Lewinsky tie during speech!"	✓			●	
8/18 "Tripp wants to return to workplace, Pentagon silent."	✓			●	
8/19 In 1974, Clinton calls Nixon's lying an impeachable offense.		✓			
8/22 Story of Clinton and Lewinsky using cigar in sexual act.	✓		●		
8/30 Lewinsky and Clinton had sexual encounter on Easter Sunday.		✓			
9/9 "Report includes up to 30 counts of impeachable offenses."	✓			●	
9/12 "Secret White House video shows Clinton with other intern!"	✓			●	
9/14 "White House; Woman in Oval Office video is Arkansas friend."		✓			
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

Summary: Of 51 claimed exclusives, 31 were actually exclusive. Of these 31, ten (32%) were untrue and/or never happened, 11 (36%) were true, and the accuracy of the remaining ten stories (32%) is debatable or still unknown. Of nine exclusives not having anything to do with the Lewinsky saga, four are untrue and/or never happened, four are true, and one is debatable or still unknown.

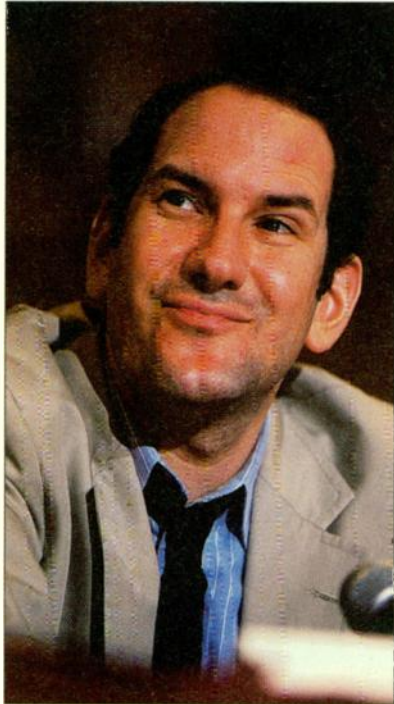
"I'm pro checkbook journalism," Drudge said of the tabloid practice of paying for news, which generally is shunned by mainstream media. "I think it's a really good thing....If you're paying for it, you're going to be damn sure it's good stuff....That's why you have rewards for killers. That's why there's FBI rewards. The Cosby case would not have been solved without the *National Enquirer*, quite frankly. I'm sure Bill Cosby is thrilled with checkbook journalism and its merits." Drudge says he would pay for stories but until recently hasn't been able to.

The tabloids unquestionably are more accurate and influential than they used to be—a fact confirmed in recent

years by no less than *The New York Times* and *Time* magazine, which named the *National Enquirer's* editor, Steve Coz, one of the 25 most influential people in the U. S. in 1997. One irony of the White House scandal is that the Washington law firm that represents President Clinton, Williams & Connolly, also represents the *National Enquirer*.

The tabloids are important sources of news for Matt Drudge. Their columnists get equal billing on the Drudge website with intellectuals like Stanford University's Thomas Sowell. The *Star's* Janet Charlton "reaches millions of people," Drudge says. "She writes about ethics in show business. She writes about deception. If we open the *Star*, it's like

**"We've got this great new medium where people can publish what they hear and what they know and what they see. A lot of people are uncomfortable with that..."**



**"Screw journalism!"**  
he says.

opening a battle of good and evil. It's played out through a Schwarzenegger running from a photographer or someone sneaking into someone's house, someone lying about something—it's still morality plays. Thomas Sowell will write about it on a much more deep level, and serious tones, making higher points, but...I look at them equally. I don't know where I got that from, probably from not going to school, which would train you to think that a

gossip column is down low and a serious work is up high....The struggle of life and human existence is the same whether you're driving a Mercedes or walking....The journalism may be different levels of IQ, but it's still the same emotions. So that's why I treat them equally."

In New York, Drudge taped his ninth Fox television show and then raced to the studios of Talk Radio 77 WABC, ABC Radio's flagship, where he had been invited to host on Saturday evening, August 15, less than 48 hours before Bill Clinton was to testify before the Starr grand jury. The *Dragnet* theme opened the show, and then the stentorian announcer: "The story you are about to see is true. The names have been changed to protect the innocent."

"Innocent? Innocent? Who's innocent?" Drudge began, his intense nasal baritone cutting through the music. "Looking for an innocent person, maybe in Washington, D. C. Is anybody innocent in that whole stinking town?...just hours before Bill Clinton faces Ken Starr, once again to answer

questions about a story I broke from my Hollywood apartment, a story *Newsweek* held back at the last minute. On the Internet, the din of small voices is what I call it (he had appropriated Young & Rubicam's line), I began to tell the tale of a White House intern, later to be known as Monica Lewinsky, and boy what a tale it's been."

Tie loosened, hat off to accommodate earphones, Drudge spoke comfortably into the microphone beneath a big yellow and blue 77 WABC sign in the dimly lit studio.

"News that Hollywood producer Harry Thomason is back in Washington...to help President Clinton, of course, prepare for the grand jury testimony...[takes me] back to a more innocent time, back to the beginning. It was Inauguration Eve 1993...Harry Thomason was executive producer."

Drudge cued a recording of Barbra Streisand singing the Stephen Sondheim song "Children Will Listen" from *Into the Woods*, which she had performed at the inaugural gala, and "would end up," Drudge said, "turning into a presidential prophecy. Just hours before Bill Clinton was sworn in, there was Barbra Streisand...lecturing Bill Clinton."

*Careful the things you say  
Children will listen.*

*Careful the things you do  
Children will see, and learn.*

Drudge let the song sink in, then spoke over the refrain. "The irony of that faraway moment is enough to break your heart....No one in the arena that night could have any idea that Bill Clinton would later appear before a federal grand jury to face questions about what he did as he watched a White House intern do strange things with his cigars in the Oval Office....The 1990s have turned into one sick nightmare, as far as I'm concerned. Children, run for cover!"

Drudge did not elaborate. He had used the Streisand episode in his on-line report the previous week. It was the first mention in any news medium that

Clinton and Lewinsky had used a cigar in one of their sexual encounters.

A caller asked if Drudge had a "deep throat" in the White House. "I do have White House sources....There's people all over Washington who are frustrated, and you know I live and breath on the Internet....And we've got this great new medium where people can publish what they hear and what they know and what they see. A lot of people are uncomfortable with that, including the first lady. She says we need to rethink the Internet. Technology has finally caught up with personal liberty, making a lot of people uncomfortable....This is an interesting time when a small fry like me can break stories of this magnitude....What does that say about the press corps?"

By the end of the second hour, Drudge's shirttail was out and his hat back on, as he held the earphones to his ear and reprised "Children Will Listen."

"Now Bill Clinton will face the American children and explain a relationship with an intern," Drudge emoted, "...we'll be tellin' this to the grandchildren."

Late Monday night, August 17, Drudge posted a restrained report of Clinton's grand jury testimony ("*President Clinton may have slipped further into perjury*") which he says he's very proud of. "We'll read that story in six months," he says. "It will be completely on the money." Then Drudge spent the rest of the week shocking and toying with his readers.

**EXCLUSIVE: CLINTON WORE LEWINSKY TIE DURING SPEECH!**

*"Insiders who have full knowledge of the gifts exchanged between Monica Lewinsky and President Clinton tell the DRUDGE REPORT that Clinton wore a tie given to him by Monica Lewinsky—during last night's national TV address!"*

On Wednesday, August 19:

**WORLD EXCLUSIVE TONIGHT:  
CLINTON: RESIGNATION!**

Having gotten his readers attention, Drudge changed the headline to:

**WORLD EXCLUSIVE TONIGHT:  
CLINTON TALKED  
RESIGNATION!**



And then:

**CLINTON DEMANDED  
RESIGNATION OF NIXON  
BECAUSE OF LIE!!**

Drudge typically posts headlines in advance of a story, which in this case concerned Bill Clinton's calling on Richard Nixon to resign in August, 1974, when Clinton was running for Congress from Arkansas. But many Internet readers howled that Drudge's original two headlines had given the irresponsibly misleading impression that Clinton himself was about to resign.

On Saturday, August 22, from his laptop computer in a hotel room in New York, Drudge posted a story he had hinted at several days earlier on WABC while talking about Barbra Streisand musically lecturing President Clinton that "children will listen."

First, the headline:

**SHOCK REPORT: SHE HAD  
SEX WITH CIGAR!**

Then a different headline:

**EXCLUSIVE: MEDIA  
STRUGGLES WITH  
SHOCKING NEW DETAILS OF  
WHITE HOUSE AFFAIR**

Then the story itself:

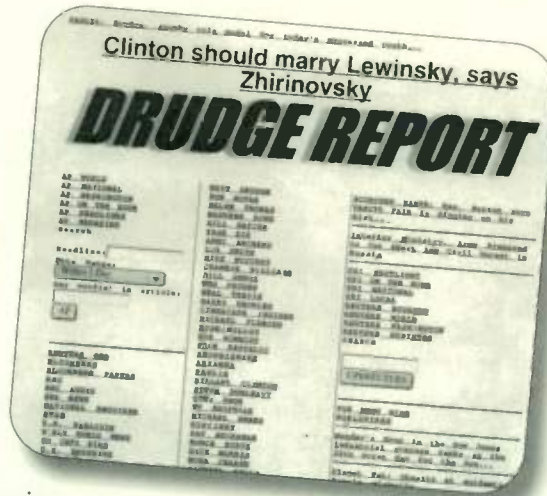
*"In a bizarre daytime sex session, that occurred just off the Oval Office in the White House, President Clinton watched as intern Monica Lewinsky allegedly masturbated with his cigar....It has been learned that several major news organizations have confirmed the shocking episode and are now struggling to find ways to report the full...gross out."*

By Monday evening, August 24, lightly sanitized versions of the "cigar" story were in Jay Leno's monologue and the London press, including *The Times*.

On Sunday, August 30, Drudge reported that Clinton had met Lewinsky for sex on Easter Sunday of 1996. Three days later, when NBC News broadcast the same story without crediting Drudge, he got angry and posted:

**NBC'S LISA MYERS  
STEALS DRUDGE REPORT**

*Time*, however, gave full credit to Drudge, who kept the stories coming:



**EXCLUSIVE:  
WHITE HOUSE MOLE!**

**"IT HAS BEEN LEARNED THAT  
PROSECUTOR KEN STARR HAS A  
SECRET WHITE HOUSE SOURCE  
WHO HAS BEEN PROVIDING A  
ROAD MAP FOR THE INDEPENDENT  
COUNSEL'S INVESTIGATION  
OF THE PRESIDENT!"**

WHEN THE STARR REPORT WENT TO Congress on September 9 (with no hint of a White House "mole" contained in its 445 pages), it seemed only appropriate that it was first disseminated to the public not through newspapers or television but via the Internet, the medium where Matt Drudge originally had broken the story.

The Drudge Report logged 13,557,770 visits between August 10 and September 9, up more than 13-fold in a year. "If you make many mistakes, they'll turn on you," Drudge says. "They won't read you....People are coming to me....They're getting a use out of it. They believe what I'm saying. It's entertaining."

Asked if he has learned from his mistakes, he bristles. "I don't appreciate *Brill's Content* trying to teach me how to do journalism. In the fast give and take of Internet reporting, mistakes are made. Sure I learn as I go, as does *Brill's Content* and *The New York Times*." In a more reflective moment, he says, "I'm not even sure I'm that good at this. Somebody will come along to be better."

Drudge went silent on Friday, September 11, as the Net was jammed with accessors logging on to the Starr Report. The next morning, however, as

millions of Americans settled for a weekend of reading hard copies of the salacious document, Matt Drudge again leaped ahead of the media pack:

**DRUDGE WORLD EXCLUSIVE:  
SECRET WHITE HOUSE  
VIDEO SHOWS CLINTON  
WITH OTHER INTERN!**

But a few hours later he backtracked, changing the headline to:

**SECRET WHITE HOUSE  
VIDEO SHOWS CLINTON WITH  
MYSTERY WOMAN!**

It was unclear whether the woman was an intern or not. A presidential aide, in responding to Drudge's story, later said she was an old family friend from Arkansas. The White House, along with everyone else, has discovered that Matt Drudge cannot be ignored any longer.

He is getting too respectable.

**P**EOPLE DISMISSED THOMAS PAINE AS a disreputable renegade when he started pamphleteering. But he stood for something bigger. He was a pioneer. So, too, is Matt Drudge. He confronts problems common to all pioneers. Many dismiss them. Few take them seriously. But pioneers eventually must learn to keep up with the rising expectations of the revolutions they start or they risk sliding into irrelevance. In Drudge's case, he must achieve a higher level of accuracy in his reporting to gain genuine credibility. But when I raised these questions with him, Drudge didn't seem to want to accept that challenge. "I don't intellectualize it," he said. "I live life every day. I live in the moment. I don't know what I'll be doing two weeks from now. The Internet gives you the freedom to go at your own pace."

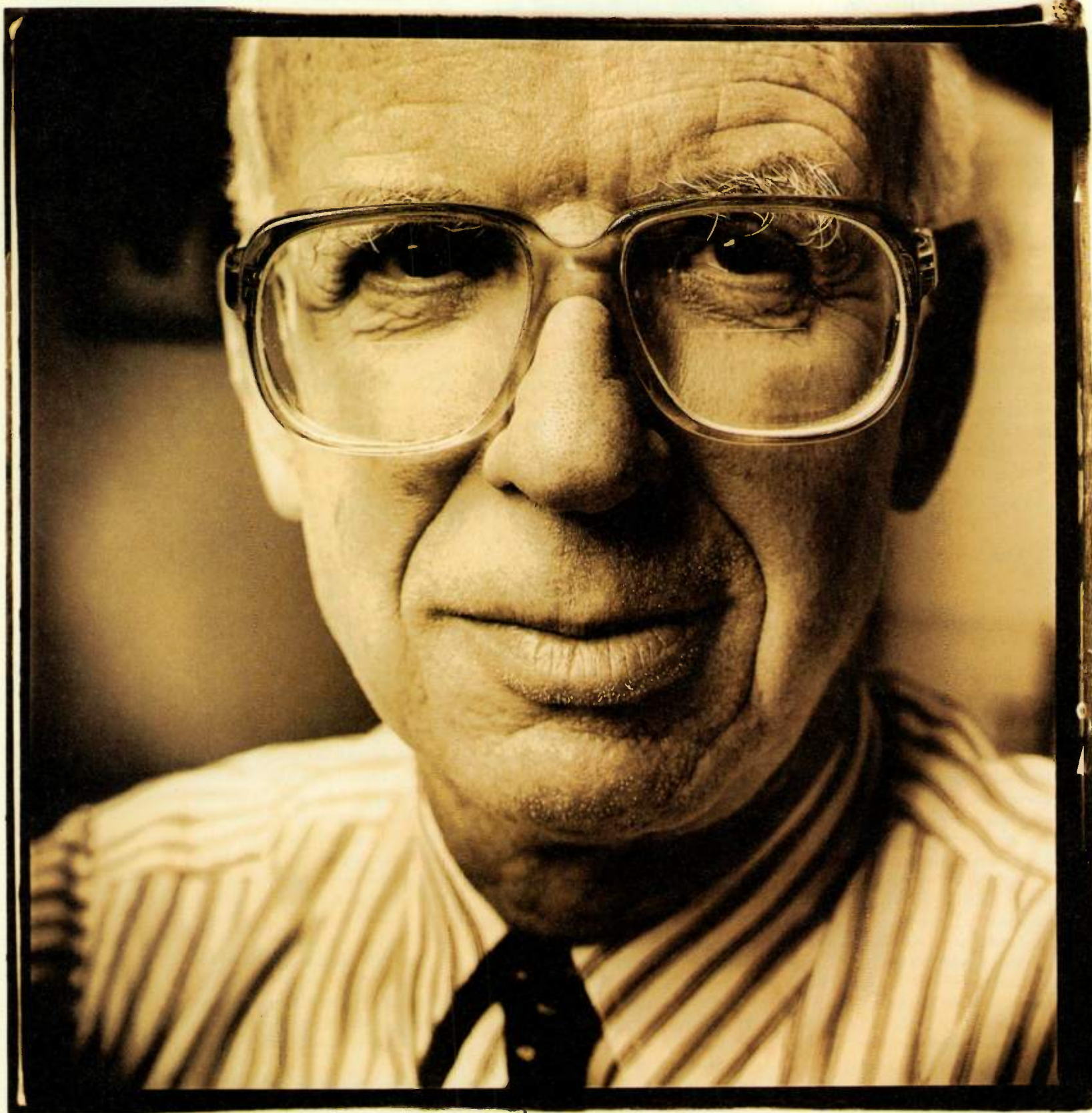
"What have you learned?"

"I've learned how to spell better, and how to use grammar at an acceptable high school level. I've learned how to have the courage to go against people in power."

"What have you learned journalistically?"

"Screw journalism! The whole thing's a fraud anyway!" ■

*Assistant editor Bridget Samburg contributed to the research for this story.*



*The Washington Post's David Broder: Policing journalism by example.*

# THE UN-DRUDGE DAVID BRODER: STILL THE CLASS OF THE FIELD

When the dean of American political journalism talks, most smart reporters pay attention. As a recovering Clinton fan, Broder reflects on the primacy of character in politics but urges the media to resist the temptation to pronounce anyone unfit to be president. **By Michael Kramer**

**T**HEY EXIST IN EVERY PROFESSION. MOST ARE NOT THE flashy, neo-celebrity superstars known to the wider public. They are the people their colleagues trust and respect. In medicine, they are the doctors other physicians visit when they themselves are sick. In the law, they are the lawyers other lawyers rely upon when they themselves are in trouble.

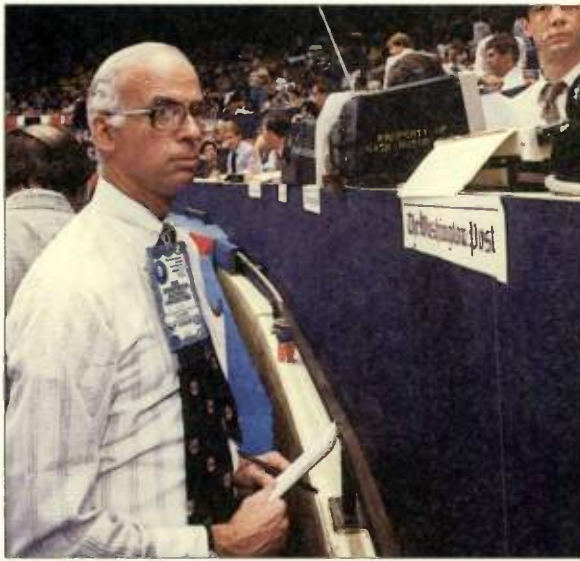
In journalism, too, there are those the rest of us seek out for guidance, although often quietly since we are a famously egocentric breed. They are the calm, sober voices we reference to test our own theories and to check our tendency to hyperventilate. This is particularly true in political journalism where one person stands out—David Broder of *The Washington Post*. “I don’t agree with all of his conclusions,” says Ronald Brownstein, the *Los Angeles Times*’s political columnist. “But many of us take Broder into account, and particularly in times of crisis, like now,

precisely because he never loses his head. He grapples with everything with complete integrity and honesty. He’s not spinning a web, like a Bill Safire, or venting overheated speculation, like a Chris Matthews. At a time when so many have been driven to the dark side of journalism by the Clinton scandal, Broder never raises his voice. That’s why it’s important to see if David has moved—and how.”

Another observer who perceives Broder as representing reasoned journalism is Bill Clinton. In December 1996, C-SPAN’s Brian Lamb asked the president if there were any columnists “you respect enough to read on a regular basis.” “Oh, yeah,” the president replied, “I read David Broder, and I respect him....Once in a blue moon he says something that I think is just haywire, but I think he’s an honest fellow that tries to call it like he sees it.”

To appreciate how Broder sees it now, it’s useful to under-

PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM WOLFF



On the road: Broder working the aisles at the 1980 Democratic National Convention.

stand the career and judgments this “honest fellow” has pursued and propounded—a history that helps explain the evolution in his thinking about Bill Clinton who, although he has a good deal else to worry about these days, is in even more trouble because David Broder’s early doubts about him have grown deeper.

Broder, 69, grew up in Chicago Heights, Illinois, and always wanted to be a journalist. “As much as anything,” he says, “it had to do with being skinny, wearing glasses, and being uncoordinated. I was terrible at sports but I loved them. The most I could do is run track, but I was a slow white guy. So I started writing sports for the school paper.” After two years as an Army grunt in Europe during the Korean War, Broder covered two rural Illinois counties for the Bloomington *Pantagraph*. He worked at *Congressional Quarterly* in 1955 and later wrote about national politics for *The Washington Star* and *The New York Times* before joining the *Post* in 1966. Along the way, he’s won every major journalism prize, including a Pulitzer for distinguished commentary.

Broder is still skinny and still wears glasses. He is essentially shy and remarkably humble. Asked what of his own work he most admires, he instead recalls his errors. One in particular still grates. As if it were yesterday instead of 26 years ago, Broder remembers having “unwittingly played into the hands of Nixon’s dirty tricksters” when he reported that Edmund Muskie had cried at a campaign stop in Manchester, New Hampshire, during the 1972 campaign. Muskie blamed the snow falling at the

outdoor rally. It’s rare lapses like those that Broder had in mind when he addressed the 1979 Pulitzer winners in his typically self-deprecating tone. What he hoped, he said then, was that journalists would tell their readers “that the newspaper that drops on your doorstep is a partial, hasty, incomplete, inevitably somewhat flawed and inaccurate rendering of some of the things we have heard about in the past 24 hours—distorted, despite our best efforts to eliminate gross bias, by the very process of compression that makes it possible for you to lift it.”

While only the miscues seem seared in his own memory, others revere Broder’s insight. No particular scoop stands out, although he is justly famous for having predicted the rise of numerous politicians such as Bill Clinton, Richard Riley, James Blanchard, Lamar Alexander, Trent Lott, and Olympia Snowe. Rather, his influence derives from the entirety of his non-hysterical work, an oeuvre that has conferred on him an authority no journalist has enjoyed since the late James Reston wrote for *The New York Times*. Thus, it was not unusual—indeed it seemed fitting—to see Broder, alone among journalists, invoked by R.W. Apple, Jr., in the *Times* on September 16. At the end of a survey of political powerbrokers, some of whom have come to believe that the president should resign, Apple wrote that “at least 74 newspapers have already called on Mr. Clinton to step aside, and the judicious, influential columnist David Broder...came close to doing so today.”

Broder contributes to that heft with a twice-weekly column for the *Post* that is syndicated in more than 300 other newspapers across the country. “After a lot of reporting and thinking,” he says, “I’ll take a whack or two at the column and send it into the office by computer.” On average, he says, “it takes me about two hours to actually write a column. The writing isn’t hard after you’ve done the work, assuming of course that you know what you want to say.”

Yes, but that is far from a meager caveat. In the service of knowing what he wants to say, Broder explains that he spends about half of his time in any given two-year election cycle “out of town, talking to voters and local pols, to the people who make the system work.” In Washington, Broder works his bulging

Rolodex. “I used to spend a lot of time talking to consultants,” he complains, “but they’re off my phone list now. All they do is spin.” Who does he call, then? Scores of governmental aides—the people who survive through all presidential administrations—and a wide cross section of pollsters. Broder believes in survey research and over time has come to “know the ones I can rely on—both Democrats and Republicans—to tell me the truth about what they’re finding.” He also checks in regularly with academics like Merle Black of Emory University. “There’s something to be learned from the political scientists,” he says. “They help balance what you hear from the politicians and you can never know enough history.”

And then there are the “formers,” those who have served previously, like Joseph Califano, who worked for Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter, and Leon Panetta, Bill Clinton’s former chief of staff. “The kind of people who are still wired in,” says Broder, are free to speak honestly as they often could not when they were inside. “He’s one of the hardest workers I know,” says Robert Strauss, the former Democratic Party chairman and ex-ambassador to Russia, “and because of that he’s the most fun to talk to. What he knows is worth knowing.” What’s more, adds Strauss, “It’s hard for people who don’t follow his work or who aren’t in politics to understand how important Broder is to the political discourse. He is *the* calming influence in journalism, something we need now more than ever.”

Off the phone, Broder prowls Capitol Hill “simply because it’s the easiest place to pick up info,” but he’ll stray to wherever he thinks “genuine info” can be found. After the 1988 election, for example, Broder felt he’d “spoken to just about every politician in the country about crime and drugs—and none of them seemed to know what they were talking about.” So Broder spent six months covering the District of Columbia courts, “talking to the people on the front lines. I learned a lot even though I didn’t produce much for the paper,” he says. “I learned that the criminal justice system is like most systems. If you tweak one piece of it without tweaking others, you create problems elsewhere.” In substantive terms, what Broder learned confirmed what those who cover crime for a living have always

known: "That most of the politicians are just blathering. The cops and the prosecutors involved with this stuff all the time believe in prevention first, especially when it comes to drugs."

Having sated his need to "get where the problems actually are," Broder returned to politics. He has covered every presidential campaign and every president since 1960, and his memories are striking.

"For good and bad," says Broder, Lyndon Johnson was the "largest" president "I ever knew." The scene forever etched in his consciousness occurred in New Orleans during the 1964 campaign: "We were in a packed, cavernous convention hall and Johnson went on about how every Southern politician for years had gotten elected shouting nigger, nigger, nigger. He actually used those words. There was a stunned silence, but heads were nodding. Everyone knew it was true. It's just that it was one of those things that people never imagined they'd hear that bluntly from a president. But Johnson was like that. In fact," adds Broder, "I think we've been blessed by a generation of Southern politicians of both races who've been appalled by the segregation and prejudice they saw growing up and who bring a sense of the terrible damage of injustice to their politics because of it."

Broder still can't understand why Richard Nixon chose a career in politics. "Nixon simply never could relate to people in normal situations," he says, "and that includes those of us he knew." In 1962, Nixon met Broder's wife, Ann, and, "he said to me, 'So this is your wife? Well, who was the blond I saw you with in California?' There wasn't one, of course. I think it was Nixon's idea of a joke and of being one of the boys. He was the most awkward human being I ever knew."

Broder says he "never got Reagan's charm," but his fondness for Gerald Ford endures. "Ford was the least neurotic president I've known," says Broder, "and I've come to value that more and more. I think he had just about figured out the job when he lost. He had no great vision of himself or of the role of government but you knew he was never going to make an irretrievable mistake. I've spoken with lots of people who worked with him, like Alan Greenspan, and there's a consensus: By the end, when he'd replaced Nixon's people with his own, Ford had one of the most

competent staffs any of us have seen."

Despite their personal friendship, George Bush's presidency barely registers for Broder, but Jimmy Carter's still does. "He's an estimable person, of course," says Broder, "but he was incompetent as president. My great fear is that after Clinton we will again turn to some other unknown just because, like Carter after Watergate, he'll look us in the eye and say he won't lie to us."

Broder has had his eye on Clinton since he was the "kid governor" of Arkansas in the 1980s. "I was fascinated and intrigued," he says. "Clinton is an incredible seducer of people and, like most people, I am not immune to charm. By the time he ran for president, I thought that he was about the best thing that had come along in the Democratic party in a long time in terms of policy smarts, people skills, and as a successful campaigner."

Broder has long remembered a story told by Doris Kearns Goodwin (the historian and Lyndon Johnson biographer) about LBJ's "making up the tale of his grandfather having died at the Alamo. Doris's point is that when you find discrepancies in the life stories of politicians, pay attention. Patterns are every-

induction notice. From that point, I realized we were dealing with someone for whom the truth was a manipulable commodity; it had no inherent value."

Broder is not among those who argue that Clinton was elected and re-elected *despite* his character. "I think it was simply that after the cold war people wanted someone who would deal with the other issues that concerned them. Bush didn't seem to have a clue and Clinton did. In 1996, I take the fact that Clinton still couldn't get a majority of the vote to mean that people had severe doubts about his character."

Most journalists accord any new president a honeymoon. So, on Inauguration Day, 1993, Broder wrote that Clinton "seems to have all the tools for the task at hand. He can do policy analysis with the best of the think-tank wonks, handle TV talk shows with the aplomb of one who has known the medium all his life, and outcampaign anyone American politics has seen since Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey." Nevertheless, Broder brooded. "At times," he wrote in that same column, people "see a lack of self-discipline...a desire to please—to leave people feeling they have heard a 'yes,' no matter what their question—that blurs the sense

**"We have to do a better job of exploring people's pasts without invading their privacy, a better job of illuminating the character patterns that are at someone's core."**

thing." But it wasn't until Broder's *Post* colleague, David Maraniss, wrote about "Clinton's bizarre family background [during the 1992 campaign] that I first had an inkling that there was more to Clinton than I realized."

Broder nonetheless insisted to friends that "they wouldn't find me talking about 'Slick Willie.' The term was too pat. I resisted it. I resisted it even during the Gennifer Flowers stuff." For Broder, the "lightbulb lit up in terms of Clinton's character during the flaps over his having evaded the draft. After talking to my colleagues for hours, Clinton seemed to have set it all to rest. Then we found out that he had actually received an induction notice. When confronted, he said he'd forgotten about it. Well, that struck me as complete and utter bullshit. No one ever forgets getting an

of conviction any leader needs....More worrisome," Broder continued, "Clinton-watchers see an inability to confront the contradictions and consequences of his own past misjudgments...that threatens recurrently and dangerously to undermine the credibility without which he cannot govern." Again, this was on Clinton's first day as president in 1993.

While praising the president for deserved and often unexpected accomplishments, such as balancing the budget, Broder has revisited that theme over the years as he has gradually warmed to his indictment of Clinton. But he isn't a screamer. Broder instructs softly, and often by analogy. Thus, when Richard Nixon died in 1994 and Broder quoted the president's eulogy ("May the day of judging President Nixon on anything less than his entire life and career come to a

close”), he went on to say, “That is, of course, a plea Clinton already has had occasion to make on his own behalf.” When Paul Tsongas, the Massachusetts senator who had challenged Clinton for the 1992 Democratic presidential nomination died in 1997, Broder wrote that “there is one other aspect of the Tsongas legacy that Clinton has not made his own and from which he and the country would both benefit. That is the courage to confront the cherished beliefs of his listeners....Clinton has done that only rarely,” Broder continued, but “it’s not too late for him to acquire the habit.... What [the president] said of Tsongas is



A gentleman's pundit: Broder is a regular on *Meet the Press*.

true: 'In a life devoted to public service, he set an unparalleled example of integrity, candor and commitment.' It is an example worth emulating."

Finally, on August 19 of this year, Broder, to borrow Ronald Brownstein's word, "moved" unambiguously. In a column titled "Truly Nixonian," Broder slashed at Clinton for "showing utter disrespect for the high office he holds....In one respect, what Clinton has done is every bit as bad as what Richard Nixon did. Like Nixon, who knew from the moment the Watergate break-in occurred what had really happened, Clinton knew from the first moment he was questioned about the White House intern what had been going on between them. Instead of owning up...he lied....The selfishness of that act is staggering." And then Broder went further, arguing that the president's behavior "is worse" than Nixon's "in one way. Nixon's actions, however neurotic and criminal, were motivated by and connected to the exercise of presidential power. He knew the place he occupied, and he was determined not to give it up to those he regarded as 'enemies.'"

"Clinton acted—and still, even in his supposed *mea culpas*, acts—as if he

does not recognize what it means to be president of the United States. This office he sought all his life, for what? To hit on an intern about the age of his own daughter, an act for which any business executive or military officer would be fired immediately?"

Broder bowed to Clinton's good work ("Like Nixon, he has done things of importance"), and then drove his point home. "But in every important way he has diminished the stature and reduced the authority of the presidency. He may hold on, but when he said of the investigation of his activities, 'This has gone on too long,' his words could equally well have applied to his own tenure."

Today, Broder views the president as hopelessly hobbled. "On the key issues, like reforming Social Security, where—because it is so complicated [that] people eventually have to accept a president's insistence that he would never harm them—the point at which he has to really say 'Trust me on this,' Clinton has no credibility. That's the definition of political paralysis in a system where persuasion is central to how one governs."

What to do? Broder says "I'm a process freak," by which he means that he favors the impeachment mechanism running its course unless the president resigns. But he is also a realist and, again by analogy, Broder reaches back—this time to Lyndon Johnson's decision against seeking another term in 1968. "When he told his people, like Joe Califano, what he had decided," says Broder, "they said he couldn't quit because only he could get his programs enacted. No, Johnson told them, he had so lost the respect and trust of the nation that he was the only person who *couldn't* get them passed. Any successor, Johnson said—even Nixon—could do the things he himself no longer could."

To Broder, that decision was a measure of Johnson's honor. "I think," he says sadly, "that Clinton doesn't even think in those terms. He's only interested in his own survival."

All of this begs the question: If Broder (among others) knew so much about the president's flawed character before he was first elected, did he not have an obligation to shout louder at the time? It's a question the man who has been called the rector of American political journalism says he "has thought about a lot," and the answer is "No."

It's a matter of "balance," Broder explains: "I don't argue that I struck the right balance with Clinton. I probably should have been more outspoken about his failings. But a degree of restraint is justified when we deal with politicians. We have to know, if we're honest, that our knowledge of these folks is limited. Journalists are not historians. We are not psychiatrists. To say that someone is unfit to be president is a big thing to say. People have a right to say to us, 'Just tell us what you know and let us decide.' That's easy to do in terms of the public record," but Broder acknowledges it's tougher with questions of character. Still, he argues, "a lot of trees died as we all ran stories about Clinton's shortcomings. We got it out there. I agree that we didn't dot all the i's and cross all the t's. We, or at least I, never said, 'Look, this guy will never be on the level.' But I still don't know that I should have said that back then—even though I'd certainly say that now. I just don't think it is our responsibility to warn the country that someone is unfit to serve. After all, we've learned that history is full of those who turn out to be abler and better than their record to the point of their going to the White House would suggest. We need to be modest with respect to saying who's fit to lead and who isn't. Such modesty isn't just becoming. It's damn necessary."

Fair enough, but Clinton has clearly rocked Broder and the columnist remains troubled. "For both journalists and politicians, talent is no substitute for character," Broder says. "We simply have to do a better job of exploring people's pasts without invading their privacy, a better job of illuminating the character patterns that are at someone's core. We can do that without engaging in psychobabble. I feel in my gut and know in my head that it's reportable." Even so, Broder worries that "this period that I've been working in will be seen in retrospect as one in which the whole credibility of our system of representative government went down the tubes." Broder equates his pessimism with those who recall that "for 25 years *The New York Times* told us everything that was going on in the New York City public schools except that they were failing. I'm afraid," says the reporter who is the class of the field, "that my generation of journalists will be seen to have told people everything about what's going on in politics except that the system is collapsing." ■

# COVERING SEX, THEN AND NEXT TIME



Did the press in 1992 tell us too much about Gennifer Flowers and other Clinton escapades, or too little?

And, in the wake of the Monica Lewinsky catastrophe, what sort of "character" reporting should we brace for next? In this candid roundtable talk, top political journalists and a former Clinton press secretary find there are few easy answers.

**F**OR MOST OF US WHO COVERED BILL CLINTON AS HE RAN FOR PRESIDENT AND WON the office he'd sought since childhood, the work was a joy. Rarely had we encountered a politician of such dazzling intellect and, as we learned in early 1992, of such large flaws as well. This reality was a conundrum. The question: How to balance the candidate's amazing command of policy with his obviously questionable system of moral values? At the time, and even in retrospect, we applauded our approach. We gave enormous coverage to the tales of womanizing, draft-avoidance, pot-smoking (or not), and Clinton's incredible ability to avoid uncomfortable inquiries. In short, we felt we had put it all "out there" with enough specificity for voters to reach an informed decision about Clinton's fitness for office. Now, two years into his second term, few can help but wonder if we served our constituents adequately. Should we have allotted even more space to the flaws? Should we have warned the nation that a Nixonian end might await this terribly ambitious young man? In the service of considering how the media might better perform their role in the years to come, we gathered some of those who led the way in reporting about Clinton back then (a time that seems like it was eons ago): David Maraniss of *The Washington Post* (whose *First In His Class* is widely considered the best biography of Clinton), Jonathan Alter of *Newsweek*, Ronald Brownstein of the *Los Angeles Times*, and me (I was at *Time* magazine in 1992). For a view from the other side, editor in chief Steven Brill and the panel were joined by Dee Dee Myers, Clinton's campaign and first White House press secretary. The transcript was edited for clarity. It can be found in its entirety at our AOL site (keyword: brills) and at [www.brillcontent.com](http://www.brillcontent.com).—Michael Kramer

**KRAMER:** What, if anything, given what we know about President Clinton now, should we have done differently back then? And what, if anything, should we think about doing differently in the future? What is our proper role? Are we in any position—or should we have been in any position back then—to somehow go further than many of us did, and declare Clinton unfit to be president?

**ALTER:** It's not factually accurate to say that Clinton was given a free ride and launched by the national press without any caveats. However, there was a lot of positive press about him, and he was in kinship with the basic Democratic centrism of the pundit class in America at that time.

The story that I wish I had back was the one that I did on Gennifer Flowers. I was very conflicted about the sex issue, as

**"I think it may be asking too much to think there is going to be a clear set of rules next time. It's going to be pretty chaotic." — Ron Brownstein**



Governor Bill Clinton, Hillary, and Chelsea in 1984.

was everybody else. *The New York Times* was barely covering it. The problem was that in our reporting resources, we devoted them to knocking down Gennifer Flowers, not to determining how recent and how serious Clinton's philandering problem was.

**BRILL:** So you should have sent out a dragnet of *Newsweek* reporters to find out if Clinton was screwing around recently or at the moment? The implication of that is that if you were running *Newsweek's* political reporting for the year 2000, the first thing you would do would be to have your reporters do an audit of every candidate's current sex life to see if they're lying.

**ALTER:** No, but when there's reason to believe, if there had been a lot of rumors out about one of the 2000 candidates...

**BRILL:** So, if someone just drops something in the mail and starts a rumor, then you unleash the dogs?

**ALTER:** You don't unleash the dogs. But

you make, maybe, more inquiries.

**BRILL:** But it is relevant, though?

**ALTER:** It is relevant.

**BRILL:** If someone is just having an affair?

**ALTER:** *Currently* I draw the distinction between what's happened in the past. We don't want to open up everything that ever happened in somebody's past.

**BRILL:** What's the statute of limitations, three months? Six months? A year?

**ALTER:** Well, the one that was clearly established by Gary Hart is at a point when you're going around telling people that you might be running for president.

**KRAMER:** But the burden of David [Maraniss]'s work, I think, is less a question of timing than pattern, right? And anything that is reflective of lifelong patterns of behavior is both relevant and essential to put out there, right?

**MARANISS:** It's true that I was looking for patterns of behavior. It's also very true that I was really uncomfortable with the whole issue of sex as how I wanted to explain someone. Because I wanted to put Clinton into a broader context of all the forces of his life and all of the motivations of his behavior. And I thought that it was incredibly dangerous at any point, but especially early on, to just focus on one aspect of that and not present the whole person and why he does things. But it's just a personal bias of mine that the subject of someone's private sex life makes me very uncomfortable, and I don't want to deal with it unless I think it shows a pattern.

**BROWNSTEIN:** I think it may be asking too much to think there is going to be a clear set of rules next time. It's going to be pretty chaotic. Although one dynamic—which I think is an unfortunate dynamic—is going to make it likely that there will be a lot of policing of sex lives. And in light of what's happening with Clinton, I'm struck that several of the candidates have been asked and to my surprise—and I think they're making a mistake—are answering sort of the cover-the-waterfront question: Have you ever been unfaithful? And once they do that, if they do that, then the justification becomes, we're not writing about sex,

we're writing about honesty. And so, in a way, I suspect that there will be quite a bit of that.

**KRAMER:** It seems to me it was less a question of sex or the specifics of any of the other allegations, all of which one could describe as being "in the past." He didn't smoke [pot] or did smoke a long time ago; he didn't dodge the draft contemporaneously. He had done it a long time ago. But what they all had in common were the veracity issues. This is what David was writing about at the time. And it's coming up in a big way right now, but it's still going back to questions of truthfulness. And I think that's more important, isn't it, than the specifics of it?

**BROWNSTEIN:** I think that for his critics, and I include the critics in the press corps, but certainly the conservative critics, all of these things are really only symptoms. And I think that you look at the arguments that are raised against him from his opponents, and it comes down to fundamentally that it is illegitimate that this guy is president. And in some ways, I always felt that was what was being debated. All of these specifics, whether it was Whitewater or the draft or Gennifer Flowers, was sort of a surface, and below was this debate. And I think there is a substantial portion of the press corps who—not for ideological reasons, but from dealing with him on a daily basis—accept more of that argument—that basically, this is someone who is not trustworthy; you can't take his word. And that, therefore, all of these stories are simply validating an underlying point and that's why they have a lot of power.

**MYERS:** But I think if you roll the clock back to the fall of 1991, when I went to work for Clinton, there was some criticism that he tried to be all things to all people. And certainly there were terms like "Slick Willie" coming out of Arkansas. But there certainly wasn't that attitude in the national press corps at the time. People never said to me, "Gosh, do you think he'll make it because of his character problem?" People said to me, "Gosh, do you think he'll make it? I hear he's a womanizer." So the womanizer thing was out there, distinct and separate from these broader concerns that have emerged about his character. I think to look back at it as if this was a legitimate question because it got to a greater truth about him, it's true in



hindsight, but I don't think it was necessarily true at that time.

**BRILL:** Suppose that in retrospect there had been a lot more reporting about the Gennifer Flowers accusations and if it had turned up that this was something more than a 12-minute affair, something other than the way Bill Clinton represented it. Should that have been dispositive for his campaign?

**ALTER:** No.

**BRILL:** So then if you're not saying that, then are you saying that anyone did anything wrong in the way they handled and ultimately dismissed the Gennifer Flowers thing?

**MYERS:** I think that there was too much coverage of Gennifer Flowers. I think it made people sympathetic to Clinton and made it appear, at least in the early months, that the press was out to get him. I think people got a little defensive on his behalf; that this not-very-credible woman, who may or may not have had some kind of relationship with him, was on CNN live on this press conference. And I think it partly was that the press corps had gotten too intrusive, and there's no excuse for this story.

**ALTER:** That's very true, Dee Dee. People think that it wasn't covered. It was covered endlessly at the time. But what happened was, there was not reporting. It was covered as a talk-show sex story to sell the papers and to get ratings. And there was very little effort, perhaps *The Washington Post* excepted, to have actually found out: Does this guy have a serious womanizing problem or was this an isolated thing that took place?

**KRAMER:** In the midst of all these little things that had come up, here is Maraniss writing these couple of stories that knocked the rest of our socks off, or should have, and they kind of landed like a thud, right, David? Nobody else pursued them. You were making points, later elaborated in your book, that I think should have caused us to pursue it.

**MARANISS:** Well, I think you're giving me too much credit. From the beginning, my essential goal was to try to explain Bill Clinton, and that meant both the forces of darkness and light that were in him. And I think it was funny that the stories I wrote were interpreted in vastly different ways by different people. I could write a story about his credibility, or about the way he dealt with the forestry industry in Arkansas, or the



chicken industry, or his staff. And by presenting both sides of the argument—because his flaws and his talents are so inextricably linked in my opinion, and that was the basis of my understanding of him—people who hated him could look at a story I wrote and find some ammunition there, and people who liked him could look at the same story and see the positive side of it. So I don't think that my stories necessarily dropped like

semantic games that came out recently. So that when he describes oral sex as not being sex, to me it was so obvious that it came from the patterns that he developed in Arkansas, where he used semantic definitions to define what abortion was or whether capital punishment was legitimate or not. He had been using religion in those aspects for so long.

Similarly, a story I did on Clinton and race relations, where I always thought it

Gennifer Flowers sheds tears for the cameras after presidential candidate Clinton denies having had an affair with her.

**"There are a couple of people in our business who I know had pretty awful personal situations....They should be a little less sanctimonious." —Jonathan Alter**

bombs. I think people didn't quite know what to do with them because of that.

**BRILL:** Give an example of one of those stories and what the reaction was. And maybe if you were the editor of a competing newspaper, what you think it should have been.

**MARANISS:** Well, two stories stick out in that respect. One was about what I called his ethical and moral evolution and intellectual development, where I thought I made it clear that I thought his religious roots were authentic, but [that] he has used them for incredibly political purposes and even used them in the

was his strongest idealistic motivation, and yet in studying the roots of it in Arkansas, you could see this incredible struggle between his idealism and his ambition, where at key points in Arkansas, as happened in the White House later, if his job was on the line, if his career was at stake he would, in essence, give up friends or some concept he believed in, even on civil rights, in those regards. And that's the way I tried to frame all of my stories about him.

**BRILL:** Isn't that the real lesson that people should learn, that Gennifer Flowers or sex may be a little piece of this sort of



David Maraniss covers the 1996 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

moral compass/reliability/convictions issue, but there are lots of other pieces. The problem is that his policy toward the forestry industry is kind of boring stuff compared to Gennifer Flowers.

**BROWNSTEIN:** I think to some extent some of the assumptions under this conversation are anachronistic. The reality of the media system is every allegation is going to come out somewhere and prob-

ably force its way into the mainstream media as it migrates from out to in. But I think the public has very clearly said that they want to see these guys in 3-D, the allegation isn't all and that even moral failure or personal failing isn't all. And the kind of work that David did on Clinton in '92 is really in some ways the model not only of Pulitzer Prize-winning journalism, but also very predictive of what the country was looking for in assessing these guys, rather than the "gotcha" fact, whatever it was.

exactly right? We just threw out all that we could about these stories and the people decided, so be it? Or do we have some greater responsibility? Do we need to change these things? Jon?

**ALTER:** Well, I just think that the distinction that I laid out in 1992, between current and past behavior, however one wants to define it, is the distinction to keep in mind. I don't think we want to

that Paula Jones could go ahead with her suit? Would we be talking about impeachment today?

There are a lot of factors that had to intersect here. It was not only Clinton's recklessness, which is certainly the major causative factor. It is also the change in the political environment that is allowing or encouraging opponents to sort of expand the battlefield and use the legal system in this way.

**MARANISS:** My feeling about 2000 is that if the press focuses on sex again, it will probably be fighting the last war. And it's not the lesson of everything that happened to Bill Clinton.

**KRAMER:** What is the lesson?

**MARANISS:** The lesson is to study the candidates and find out where their vulnerabilities are. And with Al Gore, it's not going to be sex. It might be something else entirely. Or with George W. Bush. But what are the forces that shaped them, how do they respond to different situations, what can you learn from their life's patterns? All of those types of questions can have absolutely nothing to do with sex, and yet raise just as serious questions about any single candidate.

**ALTER:** I think the larger point is, there was a lot of debate in '88 and '92: Should the press be a character cop? And if nothing else, we've learned that, for better or for worse, we have to at least try to be.

**"My feeling about 2000 is that if the press focuses on sex again, it will probably be fighting the last war." — David Maraniss**

**KRAMER:** Are we all sitting here saying that in retrospect we did everything

open up everybody's bedroom door for their entire life. We will just get some kind of a eunuch as president. We don't want that.

**BROWNSTEIN:** I think a part of the reason we're struggling here is because we're looking for hard and fast rules in an area where there are never going to be any. And so predicting exactly how each one of these incidents plays out, if more occur in our future, is really futile. Because it's all going to be, in many ways, unpredictable. Like, for example with Clinton, what if there was no legal proceeding? What if the Supreme Court did not rule

**MARANISS:** Yeah, but we've let character be defined so narrowly.

**ALTER:** Absolutely, character has to be defined very broadly.

**KRAMER:** I think what happened back then was that many of us were charmed by the kind of political centrism that Clinton represented because it basically dovetailed with what we privately thought. In some way, we defined character to be substantive character, by which I mean, many of us wrote that he's got the strength of character to stand up against the entrenched forces of traditional Democratic liberalism, that kind of stuff. That moved us away from the kind of character questions that seem to be hobbling him today.

**BROWNSTEIN:** But the fact is, all of Bill Clinton, I would argue, was on display.

**KRAMER:** But you can't then describe this as some kind of happy result because look at where we are today.

**BROWNSTEIN:** No, I'm not saying it's a happy result, because, even for someone who has evidenced flaws, this is still an exponential leap into mystifying behavior. It's sort of hard to say, "Shouldn't we have known he was going to do something like this?" I mean, even he probably didn't know.

**KRAMER:** No, no, no. But it's a question of balance. How do we properly apportion our consideration of these various aspects so that people have a better understanding of these guys?

**ALTER:** There are two things that worry me in this regard. The first is that a lot of what you were talking about was done with Clinton. We had feeding frenzies, one after another, that related to his character in 1992.

**KRAMER:** Right.

**ALTER:** And, I don't think it was done at the expense of coverage of a lot of other serious things. I don't think we want this fiasco to justify, after the fact, every silly feeding frenzy we had with some revelation about his past. The worry is that because the primary schedule is now getting so much shorter, you are going to have some people skate right through and other people will be subjected to these feeding frenzies, and that we won't do a good screening.

**BRILL:** Is it inevitable that some or more or maybe all of the candidates running will have had some kind of a civil suit brought against them in their lives and their opponent will charge that their tes-



timony in the civil suit is a lie? That is the stuff of all civil litigation: everybody always says the other guy lied when he testified. So you'll have all these stories about some guy who is guilty of perjury. And it will take its 24-hour turn on MSNBC or maybe a week's turn on MSNBC. You'll have legal commentators [commenting] on whether it really was perjury or really wasn't.

**ALTER:** And we won't be covering their position on terrorism.

**BROWNSTEIN:** That makes me look forward to getting on a plane to Iowa, really anxious to get out of bed. It's sort of a Pottersville version of all of this.

**KRAMER:** Doesn't anyone feel that we need to kind of rethink how we go into this process again?

**BROWNSTEIN:** Yeah, I guess I do, Michael. But I'm not really sure it's under anyone's control.

**KRAMER:** Sure, it's under your control.

**BROWNSTEIN:** Most people are honestly willing to take a full view of these candidates and not see them in any one-dimensional term. And our challenge and responsibility is to give them that. However, the reality is, there's going to be someone, there's going to be something. You know, as they said in *All The King's Men*, there is always something on everybody. And when that something comes out, there's going to be a big

chunk of the media for whom that something is the only thing. And it's going to be blasted out into the atmosphere and we'll have to see whether that just sort of overwhelms everything else.

**ALTER:** For the purposes of this discussion we should talk a little bit about tabloid media, because this is how this kind of reporting started. Dealing with the Matt Drudges of the world is now a part of our daily lives, and it's a change. I was reminded of Clinton, in New Hampshire when the Gennifer Flowers story came out, saying, well, that comes from the same magazine that prints stories about space aliens.

It seems like such a quaint response now, seven years later, because the tabloids are so much a part of our lives. I think for the media, a lot of the question is: If the tabloids dig something up, how much of it do you present without having done your own reporting? In that sense, we were doing the right thing in 1992.

**BRILL:** Even if you say that, there's a presumption here that *Newsweek* or *U.S. News* or *The Washington Post* count. What I mean by that is: If you have a meeting at *Newsweek* and say we're not doing this at all. And even *Time* does the same thing...

**BROWNSTEIN:** No one is in control any more. Everything will come out. And the issue is not whether any bad thing you ever did is going to get out somewhere. The issue is whether that is seen as the totality of who you are. And what's striking to me is how insistent the country is on refusing to accept that proposition about Clinton. I think they will refuse to accept it about other candidates. But with the press, I think the trend is more in the other direction. You've got this tabloid world. And now you have not only the tabloid world, you have an amplification system, with the MSNBCs and so forth that tape this and give you this echo-chamber feeling.

**KRAMER:** Dee Dee, how would you want the press to be reporting differently, going into the next cycle?

**MYERS:** I think that David raised the point that, like politicians, the press is always prone to fighting the last war. And I think that is the danger. People will go look into people's sex lives without thinking much about whether it's relevant. And I think that the press may be

As Clinton's press secretary, Dee Dee Myers (left) answered the media's endless questions about his reputation as a womanizer.

Jonathan Alter  
interviews  
President Clinton.



susceptible to very narrow definitions of character, instead of the more complex sort of really trying to understand who these people are and what motivates them, what their weaknesses are and what their strengths are.

I think there's almost zero chance that in the next election cycle, we're going to have a stepped-back, thoughtful look at

make this an issue, by issuing these blanket denials that they have never been unfaithful? So reporters can now say we're not writing about sex, we're writing about their honesty.

**KRAMER:** I keep trying to get us away from sex. But if I gave you incontrovertible proof that Henry Hyde was having an affair now, would you publish it?

**BROWNSTEIN:** I guess I would, yeah.

**KRAMER:** Why?

**BROWNSTEIN:** Because so much of this is about, in the end, lying about sex. And I think there's enough question about whether these people who are sitting in judgment meet the same standards that they are applying here. Make the question harder. How about, Michael Kelly [of *National Journal*] or Chris Matthews [of *CNBC*], or Tim Russert [of *NBC*] or anybody else who is unfailingly critical about Clinton?

**KRAMER:** Well, what about that?

wives like crap, committed adultery. And I do think they should be a little bit less sanctimonious.

**KRAMER:** Why don't you report that?

**ALTER:** I'm not saying they're disqualified from commenting on this, but they should be a little less sanctimonious. And I'm not ready to out them.

**KRAMER:** Why not?

**ALTER:** Well, because I just don't like that spiral. But they should watch it.

**MYERS:** If hypocrisy is an issue with elected officials and candidates, why isn't it an issue with journalists?

**BROWNSTEIN:** That's an extremely good question. But Jon's point is right. It is spiraling up and out so that everyone not only in the arena but near the battlefield is a combatant.

**BRILL:** I've been bothered by this for a while. One of the things about adultery is that it's a lie, and it's a lie to the people who are the closest to you and who supposedly trust you the most, right? So suppose you're the editor of a magazine interviewing someone to be a reporter. We all know that at the end of the day, what you depend upon is how much you trust that person. The person goes out, interviews people; does he make up stories? You have to trust the people in journalism that you employ. So why wouldn't it be relevant to find out whether this person has lied to the people who are closest to him and trust him the most?

**BROWNSTEIN:** This is a conversation, Steve, that you're better off having with religious leaders or ethicists, than [with] working journalists.

You could argue that it's pretty reckless to go on TV and say this is immoral, if you've done the same thing. So you could say there's a recklessness hook. You can find the hook. But I would argue that most of the country would like to find ways to ratchet back in the other direction, not to escalate to the point where everyone who is remotely connected to public life in any way is subjected to having their entire life exploded across the front page of *The Washington Post*.

**MYERS:** I think it will be healthy if the country engages in a discussion about whether journalists' private lives are fodder for the mill. If we did, I think we would have a national collective consensus among journalists that we've gone too far. And that would be good for the country. ■

**"I think it will be healthy if the country engages in a discussion about whether journalists' private lives are fodder for the mill." — Dee Dee Myers**



Ron Brownstein (left) and Bill Clinton walk the streets of Los Angeles, assessing the damage caused by the riots following the Rodney King verdict in May 1992.

who's running, what's in the best interest of the country, what these individual candidates want to do to move it ahead.

**ALTER:** I'm just not as pessimistic as that. I think on one level everybody will be so sick of sex that it will barely get any discussion at all in the year 2000.

**MYERS:** Yeah, well you can see how sick they are of it right now.

**BROWNSTEIN:** But what about the question of whether the candidates are being forced, early on, preemptively, to

**BROWNSTEIN:** Tim Russert asked David Brock on live, national television if he wrote an article reversing his earlier criticism of Clinton because he was in love—I think was the phrase that he used—with Hillary Clinton's ex-press secretary. That is an astounding thing to do. So, I don't know exactly where I come down on that.

**ALTER:** There are a couple of people in our business who I know had pretty awful personal situations, treated their

(continued from page 29)

case, only doubleclick knows that you've been to both [www.brillcontent.com](http://www.brillcontent.com) and [www.monicaewinsky.com](http://www.monicaewinsky.com)

[Ms. Dyson] believes cookies can tell a site where the visitor came from. In fact, this is done via the referer field of the "http" request, which has nothing to do with cookies, or via the aforementioned data handoff techniques. Cookies could be used to store this information for later use, but in most cases this is done via a database on the server; it's more reliable and useful.

You need to get someone who really knows technical issues to review such matters before they get into print.

ROBERT J. WOODHEAD  
(via e-mail)

**Esther Dyson responds:** I'd like to thank the writer of this and other letters for correcting the technical errors contained in my September column. He is clearly more technologically knowledgeable than I am. That said, I don't believe that these errors undermine my larger theme: the ever-expanding

reach of the Internet poses serious privacy issues for all of us.

### GLORIOUS FAILURE

Those unforgiving naysayers unable to allow *Content* its growing pains and to slam Steven Brill on the basis of partisanship seem to be missing the point of the magazine. Tiptoeing through the minefield of "truth" (in all its deceptive guises) is an extremely dangerous and (as Mr. Brill has found) unforgiving undertaking. It is also, Mr. Brill's arrogance/idealism aside, an impossible undertaking. But therein lies the reason Mr. Brill's new magazine is such a treat: It is the unabashed struggle in *trying* to get it right that makes for the interesting read. Most newspapers and newsmagazines operate under the auspices of authority and infallibility, ever-suspect in that they rarely own up to their mistakes or biases at all. The starry-eyed folk who want to see a purity of practice and performance now! now! now! don't see that the inner-workings of *Content*'s revealing struggle

for resolving issues of process and behavior is as laudable—and controversial—as anything.

I see *Content* (and, by extension, Mr. Brill) as one giant, glorious failure. However, most other mainstream newsmagazines are merely failures, neither giant nor glorious, and aren't able to do for journalism in a year what *Content*'s done in two issues.

EDWARD WALTON  
(via e-mail)

### OUT OF THE MUCK

Well, finally, a fresh voice gurgles up from the quagmire of political propaganda from all arenas, and fabricated journalism that would make the storytellers of the Old West turn green with envy. Thank you. I hope you will remain true to your purpose as the years go by. I would venture to say that a large percentage of the American public is tired of being presumed ignorant by the media.

ANNA MARIE BANGS  
Bellingham, WA

### GRAPHIC MISTAKE

Graphs seem to be the Achilles heel of your excellent new magazine. The graph on page 42 of the September issue shows dramatic increases in daytime "clutter" [the number of non-programming minutes per hour] for all three networks between 1991 and 1997, with CBS showing a dramatic drop in 1997. But the drama is all an artifact of the extremely restricted range of values on the graph's Y axis. This is deceptive.

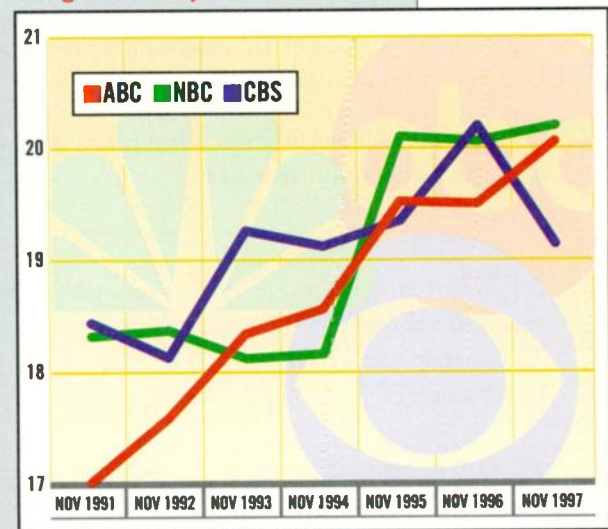
Tampering with the Y axis might seem to magnify modest or trivial changes in data, but it's an old trick that doesn't fool anyone anymore. Your graph does not give the reader more information than a simple table of numbers would have.

I suggest you invest in a copy of *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* by Edward Tufte.

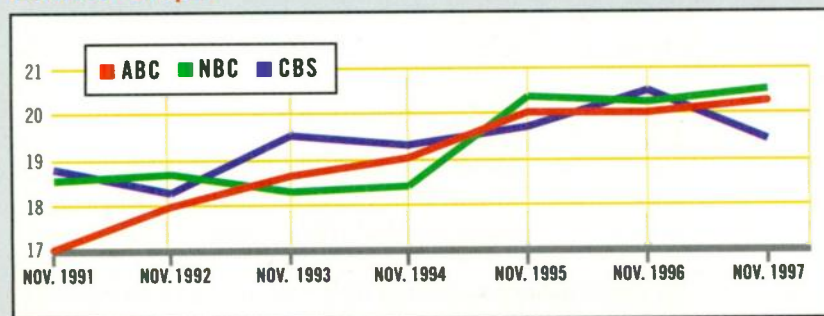
MICHAEL DELIZIA  
West Bloomfield, MI

**Editor's Note:** Mr. Delizia is correct. Though not inaccurate, our original graph was visually misleading. We plan to heed his book-buying advice.

### Original Graph



### Revised Graph



**67.6 million** Estimated number of people who watched televised coverage of President Bill Clinton's live speech on August 17 in which he admitted an inappropriate relationship with Monica Lewinsky

**2** Ranking of August 16-22 in all-time weekly sales for home shopping network QVC, a fact partly attributed to channel-hopping after the president's speech<sup>1</sup>

**\$30.9 million** Total amount spent on Internet advertising by Microsoft Corporation in 1997

**\$18 million** Total amount spent on Internet advertising by IBM in 1997

**1** Microsoft's ranking in the top 25 Internet advertisers for 1997

**2** IBM's ranking in the top 25 Internet advertisers for 1997<sup>2</sup>

**143** Estimated number of advertisements encountered daily by consumers in 1945

**260** Estimated minimum number of advertisements encountered daily by consumers in 1997<sup>3</sup>

**49** Number of hours of TV watched per week in a household with Internet access

**57** Number of hours of TV watched per week in a household without Internet access<sup>4</sup>

**51.8** Percentage of 10- to 17-year-olds who correctly answered the question "Can you tell me on what kind of TV program you would see Peter Jennings, Tom Brokaw, or Dan Rather?"

**94.6** Percentage of 10- to 17-year-olds who correctly answered the question "Can you tell me what TV show has characters named Homer, Bart, and Maggie?"<sup>5</sup>

**1016** Mean SAT score in 1997

**1152** Mean SAT score of college graduates who majored in print journalism in 1997

**1103** Mean SAT score of college graduates who majored in broadcasting in 1997

**1060** Mean SAT score of college graduates who majored in public relations in 1997<sup>6</sup>

**0** Number of U.S. newspapers ranking among the top 10 in worldwide circulation

**5** Number of Japanese newspapers ranking among the top 10 in worldwide circulation<sup>7</sup>

**3** Number of Pulitzer Prize categories for journalism in 1917 (the first year of the award)

**14** Number of Pulitzer Prize categories for journalism in 1998<sup>8</sup>

**26** Number of hours on NBC, ABC, CBS, CNN, and FOX devoted to one-hour TV newsmagazines in July 1996

**63** Number of hours devoted to TV newsmagazines in July 1998<sup>9</sup>

**179** Number of segments devoted to President Clinton's sex scandal on network morning news shows in July 1998

**56** Number of segments devoted to Clinton administration news not involving the sex scandal in July 1998<sup>10</sup>

**100** Estimated number of daily media calls Paula Johnson received in the first week after she gained national attention as a mother in the Virginia "switched at birth" story this summer

**20-30** Estimated number of daily media calls she received one month later<sup>11</sup>

1. Nielsen Media Research; QVC, Inc. / 2. InterMedia Advertising Solutions / 3. McKinsey & Co. / 4. Nielsen Media Research study for America Online, Inc., 1998 / 5. *Television in the Home 1998: The Third Annual National Survey of Parents and Children* (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 1998) [Correct answers are "News" and "The Simpsons"]; / 6. Educational Testing Service; *1997 Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates* (University of Georgia) / 7. Editor & Publisher [Numbers 1, 2, 4, 7, and 8] / 8. Pulitzer Prize office / 9., 10. NewsTV Study, July 1998 / 11. Paula Johnson



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