Chapter XVII

E-News: Community Interaction through Journalism

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the development of the E-News project which examined an interactive journalism approach in Rockhampton, Australia. This project provided an opportunity to examine how the introduction of this new technology into regional media and communication brings into question the traditional roles of the journalist, the editor, the graphic designer and the audience in the production and ‘consumption’ of written material. Such an approach provided the opportunity for grass-roots journalism to be examined for its capacity to provide a clearer insight into the nature of a community journalism-based approach such as the E-News system. It also allowed the examination of the resultant interaction that
occurs between users and community. The experiences resulting from the E-
News project provide a framework for discussion regarding the potential
of approaches such as E-News for community informatics in regional areas
resulting from online news environment.

INTRODUCTION

Online development in the area of media and communication has taken
many forms in the last decade. Information Communication Technologies (ICT)
has enabled many areas which were traditionally physically orientated to emerge
and explore a new dimension of online interaction. This chapter looks at the
impact of community informatics on regional communities through exploration of
collaborative issues in an educational context.

The nature of interaction between ICT and journalism is examined in the
context of the issues that arose during the E-News project, and its implication for
regional media and communication. This interaction occurred through collabora-
tion between IT students at the University of Queensland’s Ipswich campus and
journalism students at the Central Queensland University’s Rockhampton
campus. It investigates the development and implementation of a real-life online
journalism scenario.

The E-News project provided an opportunity to examine how the introduc-
tion of new technology into regional media and communication brings into
question the traditional roles of the journalist, editor, graphic designer and
audience in the production and ‘consumption’ of written material. The aims of
the project were two-fold. First, it examined the development of an online
environment for reliable information delivery for regional community-based
journalism. The underlying assumption in this approach was that by enabling
online collaboration, it is possible for a range of participants from varying
backgrounds with non-technical levels of computer literacy to meaningfully
interact in a news-based environment. The second aim was to examine how
education could assist in addressing multi-disciplinary issues between all parties
involved and the end consumers of the service: the community. The application
of an educational framework to analyse a digital news perspective can reveal
valuable lessons for community informatics.

The changing role of the traditional journalist because of ICT has been a
rapid one. Despite this, the traditional definition of journalism has not changed,
but has evolved along with the technology. Journalism still involves the collation
and production of news and news articles for public consumption. What have
changed are the process and the people able to conduct the preparation and
publishing of news. Because of the increasing ability to post stories remotely or
work online using ICT, community members can now share concerns, and
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