

TRENDS IN ONLINE JOURNALISM: A CASE STUDY APPROACH BASED ON *EUAUSTRALIA ONLINE*

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Synopsis

This paper takes stock of current changes affecting journalism, and as a case study brings up to date the record of progress made with an online publishing enterprise, *EUAustralia Online*, first reported on in 2007. It perceives the development of news publishing on line as being in two sectors: media corporations moving to occupy the online publishing field, through complex business stratagems and product-making, and small publications enjoying low production costs and the ability to strike up relationships with numerous users, even on a mass scale. Recent developments in both major publishing and niche publishing are appraised in a literature review, considering both broad-scale industry trends; and pressure from fresh advances in information and communication technology to produce ever-more sophisticated media artefacts, like multi-platform news coverage. The paper also recounts the pattern of work on *EUAustralia Online*, showing how such publications, ubiquitous ‘blogs’ or newsletters, may be placed in a prospective online order, where large and small operations might co-exist.

Introduction

The authors in this study report on experience with the production of a small online publication. It follows up a 2007 article (Duffield) on the inauguration of the publication, *EUAustralia Online* (www.euaustralia.com; here called *EUAustralia*), and as on that occasion it discusses also the broader publishing context — the advance of online journalism worldwide. It addresses the current process of change occurring in mass media, driven by developments in information and communications technology (ICT) and by other economic and social forces — producing historical impacts like, previously, the advent of industrial-scale printing, radio, television, videotape and communication satellites. All of those provoked major adjustments. With digitisation and advances in interactive tools, the global explosion and democratisation of information flow have generated speculation about an impending collapse of media industries and journalism as it is known. Such analysis itself demands some investigation, to determine how much of the discussion currently being aired and encouraged in mass media, is itself forming part of a ‘media beat-up’. Certainly however major adjustments are occurring, some of which will be outlined here.

Durable outlines of an online news industry are becoming clear. As has been noted over a decade, online media use has proliferated with millions of people taking up the option to use cheap off the shelf hardware and proprietary software to make products of a near-professional character. Content of it in the journalism field is mostly fresh news made by existing news organisations; fresh news made by small independent producers, usually for specialised outlets and audiences; a large volume of recycled, ‘repurposed’ content; and bundles of personal opinions, hard information and commentaries shared interactively. All those have varying multi-media formats and interactive foundations.

Change has been imposing new business models on mass media enterprises, and while corporate entities have been hard at work adapting to new forms, it has encouraged the start of small scale publishing ventures at many levels. The authors of this paper have been working on the production of a small online publication, which has now been regularly produced over two and a half years. They have demonstrated and drawn inferences about key elements and dynamics in such publishing, like, workable stimuli for getting user attention, potential for revenue, content issues

including intellectual property rights, and emerging standard production devices like cross-media presentations, or SEO scripting. More abstract questions have also been addressed, to do with ethics, quality of product by various standards, and accountability. In the outcome a set of conventions and common practices now found in online publishing will be described.

The authors in this case formed a team to work on the production of *EUAustralia Online*, set up in November 2006 with the goal of providing news and information from Europe for Australia, operated for the first six months from Brussels by the principal researcher as its editor. It sets out to occupy a niche, where interest in specifically activities of the European Union, in relation to Australia, can be serviced.

This team of three members, one academic (the principal researcher) and two students from the Journalism discipline operated under a program for the preparation of graduating students for an Honours year, called VRES (Vacation Research Experience Scholarship). With the publication well established, but in 'down time', not having published new material frequently for several weeks, it was possible to commence easily with a new publishing effort, in the four months period from commencement of the VRES scheme on 1.11.08 to the reporting seminar on that program on 12.3.09. The period of intensified publishing, put under study here, was made up of the three calendar months December, January and February.

Action was organised for production work, together with conduct of a studied examination of the process as an aspect of online publishing generally. In a parallel set of activities; editorial conferences and individual work on preparing and posting articles was matched by review meetings, held to examine and reflect on the experience of publishing, and the journalistic principles that could be identified underlying the production activity. These sessions, each of over two hours, occurred on 24.11.08, 16.12.08, 6.1.09 and 28.1.09.

Preparation for this reflective work included reference to readings, a search of current literature on online journalism being made for the purpose. The student participants wrote short digests to use in the discussion, to be able to generalise — to put their observations on their journalistic practice on *EUAustralia Online* into a broad context. As will be shown, practice was informing the reading and discussion, and *vice versa*. Overall statements will be produced in this article relating the environment of thorough-going, global change in mass media to realities of grass roots publishing, and to journalistic practice more generally — its past and present status and likely future prospects.

The following sections of the article will: restate and specify the outlines of the methodology applied; provide a literature review accounting for the current contexts of online journalism; give a report on the process of publishing *EUAustralia Online* during the four months period of the study, and with reference to that practice, deliver conclusions on the state of practice in the current general circumstances of online journalism.

Methodology

The methodological approach is qualitative and interpretative; it is in the field of creative practice, based on a case study of online publishing. The methods are: a search and review of current literature on online journalism, to inform practice; structured journalistic practice, with the production of a portfolio of articles frequently appearing in a publication with well-defined aims, publishing protocols, and clientele; and systematic reflection on practice in a frame of consultation with a colleague group.

Literature on the background to the publishing enterprise, and pertaining to production experience with *EUAustralia Online*.

Broader context

A signal fact of online news is that established media organisations have set out to become the main portals and capture the largest available audiences, whether to service them at a good level of profit using new business models, or, as a by-product of keeping the main mass following, to block off potential new rivals. These corporations (in Australia the large commercial firms linked to newspapers or broadcasting, like Fairfax publications or Nine, and the ABC) have competed hard for user numbers, just as they do in the traditional media of print or broadcasting. They have sought to maintain the position they hold in those traditional media, as the main choice among most of the public, and to date have had much success with it. That is not yet on a financial scale the commercial enterprises consider worthwhile, but they are proceeding now to rapidly develop their products and develop the business models. At the same time, despite this, the smallest online news organisations are able to draw users *en masse*, enforcing the claims made by, among others small community broadcasters over the last three decades, that available audiences outside of the block following of mainstream publications are very large. It could be as well, that the online format, with its ready availability, low cost of access, inter-activity and diversity, may be making *new* markets, i.e. bringing in new users who do not otherwise use mass media, or users who have expanded their media use in the direction of online. The global exposure of online outlets obviously gives them access to numbers of potential users beyond the dreams of alternative, specialist or local publishers of the past.

Figures quoted by Flew (2009), for June 2008, identify the Fairfax outlet smh.com.au as the leading Australian news site, registering 4,231,304 unique browsers, followed by ninemsn news 3,825,126, and News Limited's news.com.au 3,066,292. Comparable figures for leading independent, online-only outlets, for unique users in August 2008: *Crikey* 117,750, *Online Opinion* 67,500 and *New Matilda* 15,227.

Those facts assist the proposition that different operators of different kinds, and sizes, might co-exist; though a drive by major corporations to force some fundamental change in relations must be expected. It has to be borne in mind that while the Internet has been capturing audiences and market share for advertising, it is well dispersed, not to date producing the concentrations of revenues traditionally achieved by daily newspapers — in their heyday a very limited number of channels of mass communication — notably through the classified advertising pages. So business practice in the retail area at least will need to be innovative in aggregating small purchases.

The celebrated declaration to an audience of journalists by the News Corporation chairman, Rupert Murdoch (6.8.09), that his companies would begin charging for online services, 'this financial year', may have signalled the start of a protracted battle on several fronts (Chacksfield 2009; Steffens 2009). The program of change could focus attention on intellectual property issues, with a fresh attack on unlicensed re-use of published material at both wholesale and retail levels. The Google corporation quickly endorsed the opinion of sceptics, in response to Murdoch's statement, that users would hardly buy a product, e.g. quality information, available free elsewhere on line, except in specialised zones like finance (Hartley 2009). Google itself stands to become a key protagonist in any new campaigns on legal or contractual issues to do with copyright on material *at wholesale level*, published by the likes of News Corporation, then picked up and redistributed by others.

Collection of access charges from *retail* users must deal with both the very dispersed and piecemeal market, and the presence of competitors able to trade on low production costs. Whereas devices for online commercial transactions are common and well used, News Limited and its large competitors will need to test whether the lead they have built up with client support, their brand familiarity, and convenience of access, will impress the consumers enough to cause them to pay.

It is to be expected that the product to be offered to online consumers on the major portals will be different to the product currently on offer free of charge. It has been a large challenge to these operations, with their principal expertise and interests in press or television, to develop new kinds of offerings. Already they have worked on structural remedies, drawing together specialist operations from different media to create multi-platform products, (*see* case studies in Foust 2009: 61–81). Where automated content management is deployed to transfer materials from a basic press format, to online, will the resultant product provide the dazzle required to persuade a customer to buy it? It would be naive to expect established media companies to invest their hopes in simple sale of new items produced as text; they would grasp the need to look for customers who might pay, if it allowed them to browse through a great range of attractive offerings. Thus the economic need to turn a good profit from online may now produce innovation with products. Here the periodic exhortations of Rupert Murdoch to his journalists, that they must concentrate more on the market, less on concepts of social responsibility that win awards, would fit the plan.

News Corporation is far from alone in putting money into new products and trying them on targeted audiences. For instance, customers who have paid on line for archived reports from Fairfax publications, find themselves on an email advisories list, ‘Fairfax Digital Announcements’, announcements@email.fairfax.com.au, (24.9.09), which takes them to stories on the revived *National Times* masthead. This publication attractively sets out a plethora of services and entertainments: news features, columns and in-house blogs, custom video clips, a ‘multi-media’ feature, and a memberships plan and feed-back section, which says ‘tell us what you would like us to cover and join the debate’.

The chief of News Corporation must of course hope to inveigle competitors to play a similar commercial game to his own, within the constraints of corporate law governing collusion. He was already telling the Society of American Newspaper Editors in 2005 they would need to make radical adjustments to work done on line, especially in order to serve a youth market showing no interest in the daily press:

We’ve sat by and watched while our newspapers have gradually lost circulation ... The trends are against us. Fast search engines and targeted advertising as well as editorial, all increase the electronic attractions by a factor of 3 or 4. And at least four billion dollars a year is going into R and D to further improve this process ... We must challenge — and reformulate — the conventions that so far have driven our online efforts. (Murdoch 2005)

Beyond doubt necessity is the mother of invention in the case of newspapers facing glum balance sheets, suffering from special structural and market problems, and general impacts of world recession. The Murdoch pronouncement on pay for access coincided with the announcement of a US\$3.4 billion annual loss for his company (Steffens 2009). The newspaper industry has been most open in publicising the scale of this crisis, in tandem with efforts to obtain forms of relief congenial to shareholders, for example, in laying off staff and demanding salary restraint, and in lobbying for new regulatory arrangements; (for treatments of the impact of falling newspaper circulations, revenue or advertising sales, *see* Burrell 2009, Flew 2009, Tuinstra 2009).

On the latter point, on lobbying, concerted efforts by media corporations have invoked intense discussion in the United States legislature; first, on regulations, the reduction of any impediments to cross-media operations in single markets (given that technology and production values now impel a mixture of formats); and secondly, on tax concessions in the name of maintaining a socially responsible press as a mainstay of democracy, and protecting jobs. This is the ‘media beat-up’ aspect of the situation; while newspapers are undoubtedly suffering from long-term decline and now the assault of the Internet, ‘crying poor’ may have its uses. American legislators may make use of a comprehensive and erudite report prepared for them (Kirchhoff 2009), setting out the issues and facts, including the extent of circulation decline, Internet incursions into the advertising market, and the extent of indebtedness, commencing:

The U.S. newspaper industry is in the midst of a historic restructuring, buffeted by a deep recession that is battering advertising revenues, long-term structural challenges as readers turn to free news and entertainment on the Internet, and heavy debt burdens weighing down some major media companies ... Publishers are experimenting with new business approaches, but there is no widely agreed-upon model to restore the link between newspaper content and earnings, which has been partially severed on the Internet. Newspapers depend on advertising for about 80% of revenues. Even after investing major sums in technology, and attracting millions of online readers, less than 10% of overall newspaper ad dollars are Internet-driven ... (Kirchhoff 2009: 1).

Applications

While corporate publishers may be moving to a fresh assault on the Internet, hope survives among the smallest publishers that the economy and eclectic spread of that system will enable them to co-exist with large publishing operations and survive. Returning to *EUAustralia Online* as the case study for this paper; this publication provides for a niche market of those wishing to 'keep an eye' on the EU. In the period under review it has produced stories on several topics including politics, the environment, diplomacy and war, European culture and Australian/ European ties. Craig (2005: 218) notes that in the online market, the pressure of continual deadlines can take its toll on news sites, especially in relation to competition from other news sites. In the case of *EUAustralia Online*, an objective of one-story-per-day was set up, and proved to be demanding, though there was no strong competition in the specific area of service. The 'one-a-day' standard for postings is endorsed by Foust, in a comprehensive account of practical online journalism (Foust 2009: 15). A positive aspect of the observable demand for content was the 'reward' factor; that when content is produced regularly and often, the number of users will accumulate. That becomes a constant of online publishing which helps the small operator; users on line are instantly responsive. The audience profile will be such that it seeds more growth, having a balance of unique users and returnees, a 'repeat-visit and accumulating' factor (Duffield 2007: 30).

The objective of the site being to deliver specific content to a suitable audience, there was an opportunity to provide background and depth on issues and do follow-up stories. Such activity is identified as an option for online publishers in Craig (266), while the site, in its visual presentation may not seek to 'dazzle' audiences (Craig 2005: 262). Its primary function is to emphasise content, showcasing it with clear and simple formatting; and that practice is another of the orthodoxies in a good range of online publishing (Craig 2005: 228). The presentational aspect may be secondary, though important, which is an outline of policy in the case of *EUAustralia Online* (Duffield 2007: 27).

Online publications must take stock of many limitations of the system, including limits to the use of online sources for their reports — the importation of material from the Internet. While a vast resource of information can be trawled, the dross has to be sorted out and material found which will be of interest to the particular audience. Coping with the embarrassment of riches on the World Wide Web (WWW) is a well-known minefield for journalists wanting to provide verifiable information (De Wolk 2001: 70). As a service operating mostly off-shore from Europe, with limited funds, *EUAustralia Online* relies heavily on online sources for its stories. To make up for this limitation it uses multiple sourcing (Duffield 2007: 28), including trusted official sources (e.g. governmental sources, not least *Europa* — www.europa.eu), along with private, less institutional sources it knows or can validate. As a protocol to protect credibility it applies the test question: 'is this information verifiable from two sources or more?'

Findings shared by several observers produce this set of truisms or expectations that editors can follow: There is pressure inherent in Web-based operations to refresh copy, for even the smallest publication at the standard of at least one new posting per day; decisions on the presentation of the information on the site, and the relationship between presentation and content, may become crucial; credibility of the content likewise will be important, e.g. in the recognition of the site by search

engines, something that will be difficult to ensure if seen to be relying excessively on online sources. Online is low cost; that fact permits very small operators to exist, while major production houses have to exploit the fact of the low cost in their business models. In both cases best practice will demand simple ways to keep up a flow of product, illustrate and present it effectively, obtain information, and ensure its credibility.

More lessons from experience are now commonly recognised, when it comes to considering the further development of online news products. Technological imperatives as to how products are to be assembled, in terms of both content and presentation, are strengthening. New ways of story-telling can and must be ventured into, because of the compelling impact of the products available, especially through more development of multi-media formats. Craig (2005: 265) notes that finding new ways to tell stories is a well-worn track, while still more possibilities are opening up. Combining, and integrating many forms and functions in one package — through text, static and mobile graphics, animation, sound, moving images, links, or compartmentalised screens — can provide completely new experiences for audience members (Craig 2005: 268). It appears from visitor figures built up by online outlets that online *makes* large markets, i.e. it will bring in people who otherwise would not have attended to journalism, or increase and accentuate the participation of those who do.

Products like *EUAustralia Online* will continue to rely on technology as the driving force, to determine their future directions. For example producers may draw on practices found in photo journalism. Employing such devices as slide shows, animation and info-graphics may not be new forms of story-telling but can be brought in to new ways of delivering essays of photo journalism, on line (McAdams 2005: 5). Scope exists for yet more utilisation of programs for organising empirical information to put into news stories, such as dynamic tables, maps and graphs (De Wolk 2001: 70). Online sites may engage in ‘adaptive interactivity’ conceptualised by Ray (2006: 44), to entice already established audiences to interact more with news content — and so build the market. It does, though, demand yet more time and effort from producers, to develop packages with a large array of subject matter and devices for access (McAdams 2005: 10). An example of accumulation of resources for further packages is given, where *EUAustralia Online* provided four reports during the review period on a crisis over Winter gas supplies to Europe. On that base of information, copy, images and links, the option was present to assemble more devices to produce an online package, to background the issue and provide a platform for further coverage, should the gas problem come back into prominence on the news agenda.

The option for user generated content (UGC) is taken up widely in news publishing online, at this time mostly on a monitored basis, i.e. with journalists chairing and in places editing the traffic. Systems that exist on interactivity, where resources are pooled and content drawn entirely from participants’ contributions, have been mooted as a future path for all journalism (Bruns 2005: 6–13), although not meeting all points on quality checklists such as Deuze’s grading system for quality or successful online services (Deuze, in Rao 2003: 132). Current easy options for small news operations include use of hyperlinks to associate users’ proposals, and creating discussion forums (McAdams 2005: 14). Ray (2006: 44) encourages the idea of spending resources on inviting audience members to contribute to editorial content, and Beckett (2008) makes an impassioned call to revolutionise journalism by constructing large networks of journalists and citizens, to collaborate on all aspects of news surveillance, reporting, backgrounding and production. Now-standard devices for fostering continuing audience attention and loyalty, being SEO headlines and RSS feeds (really simple search), are deployed with evident good effect in the case of *EUAustralia*, in view of the responsiveness to postings — addressed in the following section.

The advent of the Internet has boosted the community media movement, formerly based mainly on not-for-profit broadcasting, principally small radio stations, linked effectively through national networks (e.g. NPR in the United States, CBAA in Australia). Meadows (2009) has documented evidence from a recent large scale survey showing major public use of these community stations in

Australia, e.g. more than 25% of all users tuning to a community station more than once a week, and much activity in more specialised fields, like the heavy reliance on the sector in indigenous communities. That sector again has begun with companion websites for stations, and is identified with the trend to successful ‘hyperlocal’ media using online platforms. Foust points out the level of interest in hyperlocal on the part of corporate providers as well, giving the case study of the Loudoun County publication located on the *Washington Post* site, (Foust 2009: 69). Long-term hopes on the left wing for building up non-capitalist media, or even supplanting it, have been reinvigorated; for example, Atton and Hamilton (2008: 135) propose that with the advance of new media, activists will be the journalists of the future.

Experimentation with a small publication, *EUAustralia*

As in 2007 *EUAustralia Online* has continued as a ‘simple yet well-stocked publication built on modified web log (‘blog’) software, published as an edited newsletter’, with options for inter-activity where users of the site might seek to respond to postings (Duffield 2007: 33). The editorial team of three used conferencing to scout story possibilities and coordinate coverage, though most day-by-day work was carried out on an individual basis from various locations. The operation is off-shore from its main gathering area, in Europe, with reporters going there periodically to report from the field; in the period under review, all of the news gathering was done in Australia mostly using online sources. These are, as mentioned above, institutional sources (such as NATO, Greenpeace, Council of Europe, IFJ); media sites may be used for corroboration, as ‘second source’ material, e.g. Deutsche Welle, or BBC News. *Le Monde* is used extensively as a primary source. The publication is included in Listservs delivering notifications on new developments from the above sources and several others. The home page of *EUAustralia* presents a central double column with seven posts, in their counter-chronological order, each with a conventional one or two short lead paragraphs up to 30 words, clicking to a second level, normally in news or news feature style, of about 500 words. Each post has at least a thumbnail image on the first level.

The previous report on experimentation with this title (Duffield 2007) referred to its strategy of finding a niche market of users with an interest in news of mutual concern in Australia and the EU; adopting the slogan ‘European news for Australia’. It started with a concentration on activities of the European Union at Brussels, for its bread-and-butter fare. The report showed that the service focussed on news content as its main selling point and *raison d’etre*, though there was an incremental development of its production values, e.g. through more extensive use of images and embedding of video content. Whereas it was obviously not structured on an interactive model and received very limited direct feedback from users, it obtained significant audience boosts whenever it began reporting regularly in any volume. In that connection, after the volume of posted reports (or stories) more than doubled as of March 2007, from an average of 25 per month to 66 p.m., site visits went from 69 per day (2064 average per month) to 175 (5362). Several of the 66 reports referred to were packaged in multiple-story postings, so the average of actual *postings* per month was closer to 40; and it was inferred that a daily posting would provide a breakthrough point on the way to accumulating appreciable audiences for a blog or newsletter. (This notion of a daily posting, as a measure of viability, as mentioned above, has been affirmed in practice elsewhere, e.g. by Foust 2009: 15).

The publication has continued along the same lines as in 2007, showing in practice that a mass audience can be brought in for modest cost with some daily journalistic effort. In the three months of publishing under review in the present study (December 2008–February 2009), the three journalist-contributors together posted a total of 101 reports, just over 1.1 per day. That was a sharp increase from the ‘down-time’ performance of just nine or ten postings for each of the three previous calendar months. Site visits for that preceding three-month period averaged 54.75 per day (4902 p.m.). In December with the increase in activity they rose to 186 per day (5785 for the month), and for the three months of review averaged 245 per day (7360 p.m.). An additional feature of the statistics for *EUAustralia* is that it gathers a significantly high percentage of unique visitors

as opposed to returnees, each month more than 60% of the total visits; indicating a positive performance in drawing attention through search engines, and suggesting a good reputation for information on the site.

Not uncommonly for online publications a plurality of users are in the United States, with large audiences also in the target areas, Australia and Europe. There is some following in other parts of the world but very marginal in terms of numbers. Recent figures from *EUAustralia* statistics: site visits, USA 2442, Europe (EU plus Russia and Ukraine) 2389, and Australia 1226. Visits from China 422, New Zealand 56.

***EUAustralia*: Postings and site visits by month**

2006–07

Calendar Month	Postings	Site visits per day	Site visits per month
October 2006	25	19.65	609
November 2006	27	41.90	1257
December 2006	19	59	1829
January 2007	25	97.84	3033
February 2007	21	128.43	3596
March 2007	41 (45)	147.23	4564
April 2007	43 (46)	158.53	4755
May 2007	41 (47)	154.68	4795
June 2007	41 (44)	194.60	5838
July 2007	38 (52)	221.26	6859

Some postings carry multiple reports, represented e.g. 41 (45)

2008–09

Calendar Month	Postings	Site visits per day	Site visits per month
September 2008	10	154.5	4635
October 2008	10	145	4501
November 2008	9	185	5572
December 2008	28	186	5785
January 2009	38	302	9370
February 2009	35	248	6952
Total postings, site visits; average visits p.d.	130	203	6815

Can inferences be drawn from the actual story content offered? When stories were being searched out to write, content was sought on the following principles: the service would have to opt in to 'red line' news particularly if originating in Europe, i.e. the main stream of major world headline stories, and also it would join in on a spectacular story in Australia getting global attention. Therefore *EUAustralia* posted five reports during January and February 2009 on the running story of the time, the fighting in Gaza, (mostly citing European interventions and commentaries on events); and it reported on the Australian bushfires using some dramatic images. However it mostly concentrated on news originating in Europe that might have a connection to Australia or could hold special interest for Australian users. This could be specific, such as the Australian Defence Minister's visit to NATO at Brussels, to discuss the Afghanistan commitment, to something less directly connected, such as EU responses to the military coup in Fiji, part of the Pacific Region and an Australian field of interest. Eye-catching colour and light seasonal stories that might be characteristic of European

culture, presumably of universal appeal, were included, e.g. stories about Christmas, like the Italian priest in trouble for telling children something true about the existence of Santa Claus.

Conferences of the *EUAustralia* production group examined current statistics to try to link statistical responses to the content of reports. It was agreed, that whereas the online format gives stories durability, with users continuing to check them over months, spikes in attention appear to happen where the site catches exactly on time, a new development in a major global story. It is surmised that with the Gaza story, the fact of large numbers of people searching for news of that particular crisis situation at any time of day may have brought increased attention even to this small publication. A strong audience performance was recorded at the time, and if content was controlling numbers, that story was the most obvious link, among the list of published articles.

An experience of ABC News Online (abc.net.au) corroborates the notion of major numbers coming available to publications active at the instant a major story breaks, where its seizure of the moment in being among the first in the world to report the death of the singer Michael Jackson multiplied site visits exponentially (Ford 2009). Time zones of course will be a key factor in 24-hour publishing on line; reporters on location at the right time, or production teams fully geared-up at a particular moment will take the lead; as always in news publishing, perhaps more with online than ever in the case of 'traditional' media. With the *EUAustralia* experiment, improved figures coming up from time to time evidently also coincided with reports on major sport that contained sets of results. Judging by these observations it should be very instructive to make a detailed study of links between prominent stories and audience responses, taking in factors such as exact time of publication and which search methods were being used. Story content in *EUAustralia*, for the period under review is given in the **Appendix**.

The capabilities of the site used for *EUAustralia* permit experimentation with forms and the kind of extension of services mentioned in the literature review, above, such as: 'new ways of story-telling' packaging text, static and mobile graphics, animation, sound, moving images, links, or compartmentalised screens, to provide 'completely new experiences for audience members' (Craig 2005: 268); new ways of using images, as in McAdams (2005: 5); more dynamic tables, maps and graphs (De Wolk 2001: 70), or Ray's (2006: 44) 'adaptive interactivity'. Time and resources can be found for extensive development work within the scope of this training operation, as a further stage. An option for more illustration and reach to audiences has been provided for it in the meantime, by the explosion in use of video in social networking software. Numerous open source or handout offerings are immediately available e.g. from the video sharing website 'Your Tube' created in 2005. Journalists embedded three videos in reports, in the exercise under review. Stills for *EUAustralia* are obtained from open source locations, e.g. sxs.hu, or not-for-profit institutions, and from an archive of original pictures made by journalists on reporting field trips for the publication. (Copyright was purchased for one agency photograph from the Victorian bushfires, koala 'Sam'). Such development is imperative for small operations because of the expansion of online offerings by the major commercial news operations, which must raise consumer expectations for both news content and presentation. Whether small operations — the independent magazines, blogs or newsletters — will be crowded out, has to be considered, (and is addressed in the following section).

Discussion and conclusions

This paper has reviewed recent trends in the field of online journalism, dividing the field into two sectors: large professionally operated commercial outlets linked to existing media chains, and smaller outlets ranging from commercial online-only services to private web logs. In the review of literature it identifies divergence between these two sectors, with the media corporations engaged in a drive to dominate the field, with increasingly sophisticated products, marketing devices and business plans. The small operators however are not being left behind, in that, advances in ICT have given them the opportunity to continue to make high quality products, especially with the advent of

video sharing sites. These operators stand to continue to benefit from low costs for online, and to find viable, large audiences; drawing attention to the phenomenon of multiple markets being made, evidently with greater numbers of people being drawn into media use, more often, by the availability of so many diverse products.

In a case study approach, the paper recounts the experience of the researchers as producers of the small publication *EUAustralia Online*. This experience bears out observations of the online publishing phenomenon, drawn from the literature, and from a previous case study of the same publication, in its first year 2006–07. These observations have highlighted key aspects of the dynamic of online journalism, constants such as: the imperative of publishing each day; the efficacy of extended communication (e.g. RSS feeds) in attracting users, as well as SEO; the value to users of transparency with sourcing and editorial integrity of the product, based on such standards as care in establishing information, hence reliability. The product receives reasonable care with presentation, such as regular proof reading of copy, which distinguishes it clearly from wholly amateur productions. The study on hand cannot resolve the question of the day, as to the future shape of online publishing, be it as a field for ever-increasing interactivity among individual users, removed from central editing; gross commercial dominance of the field; building-up of ‘pro-am’ operations among journalists and others; or a new lease of life for ‘activist’ journalism. It does however endorse the general perception of trends, among informed opinion, which cites the evidence of continuing growth in the two sectors, and urges the view that these have good chances of continuing to co-exist, each profitably in their own terms.

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A P P E N D I X

EU Australia Online included these main offerings:

December 2008

World headline news: ECB moves on financial crisis; EU summit on the crisis. *Australian linked stories*: BHP bid for Rio Tinto; Australian Minister at NATO; Australia — EU wine deal; Wallabies play in Europe; OECD review; 'Australia' film reviewed; 'Australian' flu virus; skulls returned from UK museum; AC-DC concert in Europe; Australian climate change policy vs EU. *General Europe incl. feature material / soft stories*: Christmas and New Year messages, colour stories; Russian tries to copyright wink 'emotion' symbol; EU climate change policy, world climate meet at Poznan; French car industry subsidies; bad weather in France, Italian floods; PM Gordon Brown 'saved the world'; Greek research backs healthy siestas.

January 2009

World headline news: Gaza crisis; world financial crisis; EU welcomes Obama inauguration. *Australian linked stories*: German survivors remember HMAS *Sydney*; soldier death in Afghanistan and Australia–NATO consultations on Afghanistan; Britt Laphorne murder case; EC head Barroso to visit Australia; EU actions on Fiji coup; Sports, Australians and European in tennis. *General Europe incl. feature material / soft stories*: Europe gas supply crisis; France youth turmoil; Sarkozy Middle East adventure; EU joins piracy patrol off Somalia; battery hens regulations; Slovakia joins Euro; EU health controls on personal music players; EU rules against Microsoft; storms in France and Spain; Mediterranean boat people; atheists campaign on Spain; Spain air crash; vodka named after Putin.

February 2009

World headline news: World financial crisis incl. EU summit on crisis; Gaza crisis. *Australian linked stories:* Australian bushfires, incl. EU support message; Australian's Afghanistan VC; Defence Minister back at NATO; EU sanctions Fiji; Barroso cancels Australian trip; action on illegal forest products ex PNG and Asia; EU film festival in Australia; Australia and EU combine on languages teaching. *General Europe incl. feature material / soft stories:* Education reforms in EU; EU green towns awards; EU finance for 'Slumdog Millionaire' film; Venice tourism; 3 million buy dot-eu domain name; Swedish nuclear changes; EU and Google map oceans; French–UK warships collide; EU protects sharks; EC spies alert; Charles Darwin aged 200.