The world-wide spread of journalism convergence

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Abstract
Convergence is a likely destination for news media in many parts of the world, though the duration of the journey will vary from country to country. This paper defines convergence as well as it is possible to do so, traces its spread around the world, and describes some of the most common business models. It looks at the forces driving convergence, and factors common to the most successful converged operations. The paper also describes the uncertain scenario in Australia now the Howard government has announced plans to change media ownership laws. It ends with discussion about changes in curricula at journalism programs in the United States in the light of the spread of convergence.
Convergence is a global phenomenon. It is a likely destination for the news media in many parts of the world, though the duration of the journey will vary from country to country. Some media organisations are eagerly embracing the concept, seeing it as a way to deal with an uncertain future. Others are hanging back, waiting to see what evolves. In the Crain lecture “Journalism at the turn of the century” on 23 February 2004 the chairman of the New York Times Company and publisher of The New York Times, Arthur O. Sulzberger Jr., opined that convergence was “the future” for the world’s media. His said company had been acquiring non-print media to allow Times journalists to tell stories in print, online, and on television. “Broadband is bringing us all together,” Sulzberger said. “We have to do it in papers, digitally and on TV. You can combine all three elements. News is a 24-7 operation, and if you don’t have the journalistic muscles in all three [platforms], you can’t succeed in broadband.” Sulzberger described the process as “a hell of a challenge” (quoted in Damewood 2004).

Around the world, news organisations have been embracing convergence at different speeds. In 2001 Juan Antonio Giner, founder of the Innovation International media consulting group, wrote that seven out of 10 newspaper executives said their reporters had formal duties in at least one other medium apart from the newspaper (2001a: 28). Newspapers were becoming “24 hour information engines,” just as broadcast organisations like CNN had become 24-hour news providers. “Media diversification is the past. Digital convergence is the present. Multi-media integration is the future,” Giner wrote in the online edition of Ideas, the journal of the International Newspaper Marketing Association (INMA). Earl Wilkinson, INMA’s executive director, noted after attending a newspaper conference in Singapore in 2001 that: “The major newspaper companies worldwide have accepted the multimedia, brand-oriented future for newspapers” (quoted in Giner 2001b). A year later, Martha Stone, at the time a senior consultant for Innovation International, wrote that in nearly every country on each continent mono-media companies were “transforming into multi-media companies, integrating editorial side operations from print, web and broadcast divisions.” The benefits of convergence were “overwhelming,” she said. Stone noted that 73 percent of the members of the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) had reported some form of convergence emerging at their companies (2002: 1). In Greece, Constantine Kamaras, CEO of Aenae Communications in Athens, said web strategies of successful publishing companies had dominated the World Newspaper Congress program in 1997 and 1998. But the central theme of the 2002 congress was convergence. He issued a word of warning about costs: “The problem is that publishers have greatly exaggerated expectations of convergence as a long-term cost-saver.” Kamaras warned that journalists who had to produce output in all media were spending less time doing the real reporter’s job: “they are in danger of becoming content packagers rather than producers” (Kamaras 2002: 41).

Media companies in south-east Asia and Scandinavia have embraced convergence most widely as of mid-2004. In south-east Asia the leaders included Star Publications in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; the Nation group in Thailand; JoongAng Ilbo and the
Maeil Business Group in South Korea; the Singapore Press Holdings group, which publishes the prestigious Straits Times newspaper; and the Ming Pao Group in Hong Kong. Scandinavian media groups were especially advanced. Aftonbladet and the Bonnier group were pioneers in Sweden. Norway’s leader was the Aftenposten and Nordsyske was their Danish counterpart. The Turun Sanomat Group in southwest Finland was one of the world’s leaders in multiple-platform publishing. Editor-in-chief Ari Valjakka said the key issue in Finland was people’s time: individuals spent an average of 7.5 hours a day in media-related activities. “The division of time between all possible information channels is fierce and that’s why you need to be involved in more than one [medium]” (Valjakka 2002).

In Europe, the Bertelsmann group – Europe’s biggest media company – was a pioneer in media convergence in Germany (though it cut back its involvement after running into financial problems in 2002). In the UK the leaders were the Financial Times, The Guardian, and the BBC. In Spain, the Marca Group captured 62 percent of the daily sports market through a combination of the daily newspaper (circulation 564,000) and a huge website that offered plenty of multi-media content. Other Spanish leaders were Recoletos, El Mundo, and Grupo Correo. In the Middle East, strategic alliances and mergers within the Arab media were expected to strengthen some companies as the media expanded significantly there. One of these expansions provided an early example of convergence. In Beirut, the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) and the London-based Arabic newspaper Al-Hayat were spending $12 million a year in a joint venture in which the newspaper’s 69 correspondents supplied news for LBC International’s bulletins, starting in 2002. LBC’s managing editor Salameh Nemett said if the venture succeeded another 24-hour news channel could emerge. Saudi money was behind this partnership (Khalaf 2003: 12).

In South America, Juan Antonio Giner listed the leaders as Clarin in Argentina; the Reforma Group and Televisa in Mexico; O Globo, the O Estado de S. Paulo Group and RBS in Brazil; El Universal in Venezuela; El Caribe in the Dominican Republic; El Nuevo Dia in Puerto Rico; Telefuturo in Paraguay; El Tiempo in Colombia; and Medcom in Panama. Giner calculated in 2001 that more than 100 newspaper companies around the world were on their way to full multi-media integration (Giner 2001b). Four years later the number had jumped to more than 500 (Northrup 2005). The Bell Globe Media group led the convergence charge in Canada. It owned the national daily The Globe and Mail, and a television news service, The Business Report. In the US, the pioneers tended to be grouped in Florida: the Tampa Tribune, the Orlando Sentinel, the Sarasota Herald-Tribune and Florida Today. Other leaders were The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, and The Chicago Tribune.

The American Press Institute has maintained a convergence tracker on its website since spring of 2002. It was the brainchild of API’s media center director Andrew Nachison and Jimmy Gentry at the University of Kansas. Gentry’s multi-media management graduate class assembled the information for the initial database, and a former student updates it in conjunction with API staff. As of September 2005 the tracker showed convergence happening in 33 of the 48 mainland states (MediaCenter.org 2005). In 2004 the Project for Excellence in Journalism, an institute
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affiliated with Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism, published a study of the state of the American news media. The Pew Charitable Trusts funded the study, which identified eight media trends. Convergence was one of them: “Convergence seems more inevitable and potentially less threatening to journalists than it may have seemed a few years ago” (Project for Excellence 2004).

Defining convergence

What is convergence? Just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, convergence has as many definitions as the number of people who try to define or practise it. Keynote speakers at a November 2002 conference devoted to defining convergence in the South Carolina capital, Columbia, found it difficult to agree. Charles Bierbauer, dean of the College of Mass Communications and Information Studies at the university, introduced the conference. Two years afterwards, when asked to reflect on the event, he noted that “we had more definitions than presenters (Bierbauer 2004). Some presenters at the Columbia conference such as Paul Horrocks, editor-in-chief of the 
Manchester Evening News, part of the Guardian Media Group in the UK, bluntly asserted that convergence was about survival. Horrocks said multiple-platform publishing offered many advantages in the crowded advertising and media markets common in most parts of the UK. “It is [about] delivering a product that we know the customers will want.” The Manchester group started on the multi-platform road in mid-2001. Horrocks said media organisations intending to introduce convergence needed a top-down commitment. “Journalists, by their nature, don’t like change. We have to convince them that we have to serve the customer to retain our jobs” (2002).

A year later Horrocks told a publishing conference that newspapers had to reinvent themselves to be more competitive and to satisfy consumers eager to receive information by different channels (Pascual 2003: 35). Gil Thelen, one of the pioneers of convergence who became publisher of the 
Tampa Tribune in 2003, said multiple-platform delivery should be designed “to help people live [their lives] more easily”. His newspaper, he said, reflected the fact that many readers led hectic lives and had less time to spend with the publication. “We want to make sure these on-the-run readers can scan the paper quickly and get a good sense of what’s important that day. Yet at the same time, we want to make sure that when these busy readers do catch their breath and find time to read the paper more completely, they’ll enjoy the context, depth and perspective on the news that only newspapers can provide” (2002).

A Swedish newspaper editor, Ulrik Haagerup, told the Columbia conference that convergence was not about technology but had “everything to do with mindset.” Haagerup said convergence was associated with the way that journalists viewed their role in society and how they demonstrated their expertise (Haagerup 2002). The differences of opinion reflected the fact that convergence varies from country to country, company to company, and culture to culture. Cultural factors are paramount in at least two senses of the word: Introducing and managing convergence involves appreciating the specific cultures unique to any organisation,
and the form of convergence that evolves will be a product of those unique cultures. John Haile was the pioneering editor who introduced convergence at the Orlando Sentinel: “The big thing I try to emphasize with anyone looking at how to practice journalism across multiple media is the critical need to address the culture of the organisation. Unfortunately, very few news organisations ever stop to deal with that, choosing instead to focus on the relationships, newsroom layouts, [and] titles.” Haile said success depended on having journalists who could “think multiple media” and who were comfortable working in or with various media (Haile 2003: 1).

A wide set of variables such as legislation, technology, audiences, and the society into which convergence is introduced influence the extent to which convergence is possible, and can also dictate the form that convergence takes. Larry Pryor, a professor at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California, has long maintained the need for a definition. A new medium needed a common vocabulary. “If we all have a different concept of what convergence means, we are making it difficult to progress.” Pryor suggested that if someone did not offer a meaningful definition, confusion could prevail because “nature abhors a vacuum.” Pryor said he was concerned that allowing the industry to define convergence would produce a simplistic definition with a limited scope. Convergence was more than “corporate conglomeration” or coordination of news production. “I’d prefer to see it defined by people who study the field and do the experimental work.” Pryor said the multi-platform reporting form of convergence was a new form of journalism. For him, websites and other new media forms such as email newsletters, email alerts, wireless feeds, cell phone content, and blogs represented a new medium with “a unique identity and logic of immediacy and transparency.” These had some links with traditional media and could draw from them, but convergence also required the ability to produce original content in multi-media forms. This form of journalism was expensive and experimental, Pryor said. “Convergence is what takes place in the newsroom as the editorial staff works together to produce multiple products for multiple platforms to reach a mass audience with interactive content on a 24/7 basis. Anything less is not journalism convergence, in my view” (Pryor 2004).

This paper will not discuss corporate convergence, where big companies merge because of the mutual benefits of amalgamation. Probably the best known of these was the $US 165 billion AOL-Time Warner merger announced in January 2000. It was touted as convergence because analysts and executives saw advantages in combining Time Warner’s content with AOL’s networks. Noted Gordon Pitts: “AOL coveted a guaranteed supply of ‘content’ – entertainment, news, sports and information – to distribute over its powerful Internet portal, as well as access to broadband ‘pipes’ to ensure that its portal and web applications would have entry to households and offices.” AOL chief executive Steve Case wanted to consolidate his company’s high stock price by merging with a company with more tangible assets (Pitts 2002: 3–4). Pryor described this form of convergence as an economic model that was “peripheral to journalism,” and this paper adopts that same approach. It will also not discuss the technological and perhaps utopian form of convergence where many pieces of digital equipment converge in a single box in the living room or study (for more on this read Stewart Brand’s The Media Lab, published in 1987).
A trio of academics from Ball State University noted that scholars and practitioners rarely defined convergence in terms of media behaviours. Larry Dailey said that an important question was not whether an operation was doing convergence, but the degree to which it was converged. He and his colleagues proposed a “convergence continuum” to provide a conceptual framework for understanding this innovation from the perspective of behaviour. They identified five levels of activity among news organisations: cross-promotion, cloning, “co-opetition,” content sharing, and full convergence. At the cross-promotional level the least amount of cooperation and interaction occurred among members of different news organisations; convergence was a marketing tool. At the cloning level, one partner republished the other partner’s product with little editing. “News outlets at the cloning level do not discuss their news-gathering plans and share content only after a story has been completed” (Dailey et al 2003: 6). The term “co-opetition” is an amalgam of competition and cooperation and represents a new form of business in which organisations that originally were competitors work together when it suits both parties. Walter Keichel, editor of the Harvard Business Review, said the essence of the theory could be reduced to two sentences: “Cooperate with others to increase the size of the pie. Compete in cutting it up.” But he inserted a cautionary note: “The others with whom you may wish to cooperate could include businesses with which you compete on other fronts” (Keichel 2001).

At the co-opetition stage, news organisations both cooperated and competed. According to Dailey et al, “At this level, the staff members of separate media outlets promote and share information about some stories on which they are working.” Dailey noted that at this level, years of competition and cultural differences combined to create mutual distrust that limited the degree of cooperation and interaction. “For example, a newspaper reporter might appear as an expert or commentator on a television station’s newscast to discuss a current issue, but the two staffs are careful not to divulge any information that might be exclusive to their news products.”

At the fourth stage on the continuum, media organisations regularly published information gathered by the cross-media partner. Dailey and his colleagues called this content sharing. “The partners also might share news budgets or attend the other partner’s planning sessions. Collaboration on a special, investigative or enterprise piece is possible. In general, however, the news organisations produce their own stories without helping each other.” Full convergence took place at the right-hand end of the convergence continuum. At this stage the partners cooperated in gathering and disseminating news. “Their common goal is to use the strengths of the different media to tell the story in the most effective way. Under full convergence, hybrid teams of journalists from the partnering organisations work together to plan, report, and produce a story, deciding along the way which parts of the story are told most effectively in print, broadcast, and digital form.” Teams gathered and produced content for specific projects and then disbanded, Dailey et al said, and new teams formed as projects developed (2003: 6–8). A continuum gave researchers the flexibility to identify and measure varying degrees of cooperation and interaction at
news organisations, he said. The five circles on the continuum illustrated that a range of overlapping behaviours characterized each position as the degree of cooperation rose. “A partner’s place on the model is not fixed; it can move back and forth depending on the nature of the news and the commitment to convergence” (2003: 6).

For this author, convergence is more than co-operation (sharing of resources) or partnerships or cross promotion or content sharing – the main forms operating in the US. Full media convergence involves a radical change in approach and mindset among managers and journalists. It involves a shared assignment desk where the key people, the multi-media assignment editors, assess each news event on its merits and send the most appropriate staff to the story. Sometimes it will be an individual and occasionally that individual may even be an “Inspector Gadget” kind of journalist who does all forms of journalism. But most of the time teams will be assigned. Examples of fully converged newsrooms are rare; most are in transition (for descriptions of some fully converged newsrooms see Quinn 2005: 25-28).

The significance of the news event should drive convergence coverage. That is, the importance of the story will dictate the coverage, and influence the size of the team involved and the depth and breadth of the reporting. Multi-media assignment editors will decide on the most appropriate media for telling the story. A major city fire may require a team of still photographers, video-journalists, online specialists, and reporters. A routine press conference may need only one reporter. Kerry Northrup, who founded the Ifra-sponsored Newsplex (and organised the South Carolina conference) noted that assignment editors – people who allocated stories to reporters – were the key people in convergence journalism. Those editors needed a mindset free of any one medium: “A true multiple-media editor will be one who recognizes, for instance, that breaking news reporting is no longer a staple of printed journalism, and therefore that printed newspaper content must rise to a higher level while working in concert with its online siblings” (Northrup 2000: 33). Northrup was adamant that convergence was not just co-operation. “Convergence of any consequence worth the effort is measured by whether it gives news consumers something more than was available to them before the media combined, by whether it results in some added value for the local news and information marketplace. If not, it is just an internal work flow exercise that will not significantly reposition the media company” (Northrup 2004a: 22).

Juan Antonio Giner preferred the analogy of the circus. He suggested that newspaper companies in the early twenty-first century were experiencing what happened to the circus business half a century earlier. “The one-man circus became a one-ring family circus and the one-ring family circus became the three-ring family circus,” Giner said. But integration was merely “co-operation.” Different family circuses, with different cultures (animals, clowns, musicians, singers, jugglers, and acrobats) shared the same tent, but in each ring they still were acting as a single circus. Real convergence only came when circuses mixed animals and people under the same tent and appointed a “three-ring master,” he said. “My best advice is this: go to Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus and there, not at Florida newspapers, you will see the Greatest Convergence Show on Earth! They are the real integrators,
not the U.S. newspapers that still are in the era of three separate rings” (Giner 2001c). As of late 2005, media groups in Scandinavia and southeast Asia offered the best examples of three-ring convergence circuses.

Communication is a key factor in this full convergence process. If a story evolves to the point where one reporter is not enough, that reporter needs to be sufficiently flexible to know when and where to call for help, and sufficiently confident to know they will not be mocked if they ask for help. Staff on the multi-media desk must be trained to assess a story and send the most appropriate people. All information (image and text) must be fed into a central database from which relevant materials can be extracted to tell the story in the most appropriate way. Unused material must be archived to establish a knowledge base for future projects. Most reporters will remain specific to one medium, though the organisation will employ a core of people expert in reporting in multi-media formats, and with time the proportion of these people will grow. These people will be prized. All budgets need to be linked so that each convergence partner knows what the others are doing and covering. Editorial managers need to know enough about the strengths of each medium to be able to discuss potential multi-media facets of stories.

All of this necessitates a change of mindset and attitude among media managers, and a willingness to learn more about the potential of each medium to tell stories in different ways. The team is more important than the lone wolf reporter because teams produce better multi-media reporting. It also means that news organisations will need to invest in widespread training, to teach journalists skilled in one medium how to tell stories in another, as well as spend money on equipment. This form of convergence is expensive and complicated. Larry Pryor of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California noted that this was a huge task. It implied many things in terms of “cost/revenue sharing, news staff capable of functioning on all platforms, coordinated coverage, agreed-on deadlines, [and] shared newsroom space” (Pryor 2004).

Business models and convergence

One of the big issues that must be resolved is whether media organisations are embracing convergence to produce better and more varied content (better journalism), or as a way to market existing content to more audiences (better business). The two are not always compatible, so it is necessary to consider this dichotomy. Viewed as a business model, convergence appears attractive to some editorial managers and publishers. At one extreme, they perceive that converged and multi-skilled journalists could potentially produce more news for the same or little more money. They then think that their organisations should be able to cut costs because of increased productivity: more multi-skilled reporting means the organisation needs fewer reporters. This is one popular myth about convergence. Major opportunities do exist for cross promotion and marketing, where each medium recommends the next in the news cycle. But convergence does not cut costs in the content-producing areas.
Fred Hilmer, then CEO of John Fairfax Holdings, suggested three potential business models for convergence. Hilmer said it was impossible to do quality journalism without the money that advertising generated. The first scenario he outlined involved potential cost sharing. Some managers believed a “platform agnostic” approach could save money, he said. They expected lower costs through distributing and re-purposing content across several platforms. Hilmer described this concept as “way overblown”. He noted a business case existed for convergence as a way to save some costs, but any savings would be minor. “You would not turn a company upside down for that [aspect of convergence].”

The second convergence scenario involved the chance to reach as much of the audience as possible. Hilmer said the first law of media was that “everything fragments” and if an existing business fragmented and could not buy new media pieces, the original company would shrink. Fragmentation made it difficult to maintain relationships with customers. “You keep your reader contact through convergence,” Hilmer said. Media companies were fighting for a limited piece of people’s time. Convergence allowed those companies to extend the relationship. “An important part of the economics of a media business is you’re either a mass business or you have relationships with readers.” It was important to be able to identify readers, Hilmer said. This ability was a valuable asset because it was then possible to market and to obtain valuable information from them. Good relationships with readers produced a real asset—giving something to them meant they often did not mind giving something back, such as registration details, Hilmer said. “They [readers] start to use other forms of media because the first law of media is that media fragments. You keep them in the Herald brand through convergence. We’re seeing this particularly with the Internet. One of the interesting spin-offs is that the Internet has become quite a significant channel for driving print subscriptions because people like the brand.” Convergence was about “building brand equity with readers” (Hilmer 2004).

Fairfax’s manager for corporate affairs, Bruce Wolpe, said repeal of cross-media laws that prohibited ownership of a daily newspaper and a television channel in the same city would improve the quality of television programming across the country, in both metropolitan and rural and regional areas (Wolpe 2002: 4). Any restructuring of the laws would produce at least three commercial media companies evolving out of the three commercial television networks that currently operated, Wolpe said. Together with the public broadcasters, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Special Broadcasting Service (the latter shows almost exclusively programs from non-English broadcasters), these companies would comprise at least “four pillars” of national media companies. They would be more diversified, of greater scale, and would have more resources to invest in programming, journalism, and content than current companies. “This will result, by any measure, in a more contestable, more competitive market with companies that are more fully capable of providing quality media services and programming” (Wolpe 2002: 5).

The third convergence scenario Hilmer described concerned operating in a defined
geographic area such as a city. “Convergence is much more valuable if you’re converging in Sydney rather than if you converge a Sydney newspaper with a Brisbane television station. [With this form of convergence] you get much more power in the advertising market. … There’s a business case in terms of readers and geography.” Cross promotion and marketing were also attractive by-products of convergence, Hilmer said, noting they worked best in a specific geographic area such as a city. Hilmer said his job as a manager was to assess the business and financial rationale in new ideas. “There are all these sirens on rocks, ready to seduce you with fascinating projects.” Unless a new idea like convergence was viable he would not approve it. “If I don’t see a rationale I don’t get excited about it. That’s fundamental to my job as a manager” (Hilmer 2004). Mark Stencel, vice president for global strategy and partnerships at washingtonpost.com, said that in an era when huge new media companies were combining the best of traditional and new media, news organisations could still benefit from focused partnerships. “It would be foolish not to try to find ways to join forces—to share costs, to take advantage of the complementary strengths and capabilities of each other’s newsrooms, to help drive new users, viewers, listeners, and readers [to each other]—and, whenever possible, to make money.” Stencel asserted that it was possible to do so without diluting the newspaper’s editorial identity and integrity. “In fact, partnerships can help sites like ours reach users who might not otherwise have any reason to discover Washington Post journalism” (quoted in Tompkins 2002).

From the journalist’s perspective convergence offers a chance to do better journalism by giving reporters the tools to tell stories in the most appropriate medium. Technology frees them from the limits of individual media. Some print reporters are embracing convergence because appearing on television gives them added visibility—they enjoy being recognized in public places like supermarkets—and convergence skills also make them more marketable. They possess extra strings to their journalistic bows. Joe Brown, a senior editor at the San Francisco Chronicle, said convergence helped improve both forms of writing. “Across the board there is this misunderstanding between print and broadcast journalists. They sneer at each other. But once you’ve done it [broadcast journalism] you appreciate how difficult it is. You understand the limitations of broadcast [journalism] and the skills involved. You don’t take it for granted and you also understand the limitations of the other medium. I think that convergence helps [print] reporters understand what’s missing in their reporting. Print reporters who wind up doing television end up understanding what’s missing in their work” (Brown 2004).

The potential dichotomy, then, is the conflict between a business view of convergence – multiple-platform publishing as a tool for increased productivity and marketing – versus journalists’ aspirations where convergence offers them the potential to do better journalism. The latter form is unlikely to save money. One of the realities of modern media is the need to make money. It is a fundamental truism of media economics that journalism needs advertising and advertising needs journalism: advertising pays for good reporting just as good reporting attracts customers for advertising. John Haile was the editor of the Orlando Sentinel who saw the potential of new media, and the dangers of media fragmentation. Haile
emphasized the importance of protecting a company’s revenues, and believed new media and convergence offered a way to do so. “The issue driving my actions was the threat to our ability to do great journalism. I had long believed that the soundest foundation of a free and successful press was a financially successful press. As I looked to the future, I could see how that financial base could be eroded by the proliferation of new media and the almost certain fragmentation of our audience” (2003: 4). Audiences were changing, with the consequent threat of declining revenues. “If advertising dollars start dropping, you can bet newsroom budgets will follow. That will dramatically affect our ability to do good journalism” (quoted in Gentry 1999: 6).

In the best of all worlds the dichotomy mentioned above resolves itself in a balance where good journalism attracts enough advertising to sustain both the journalism and the need to make a profit. But when the equation is out of balance, such as during the economic recession of the early years of the twenty-first century, or when managers get greedy, the dichotomy is magnified. As long as the equation is balanced, convergence can work. How this dichotomy is resolved has profound implications for how all forms of journalism, including convergence, are practiced in the future.

Digital technology makes convergence possible, but these tools cost money and take time to learn. Kerry Northrup has often maintained that convergence does not save money: “The business side needs to understand convergence is not a cost-cutting strategy. It is a growth strategy.” Convergence positioned media companies to expand their share of the market. “This is not to ignore that there are cost efficiencies to be realized through deploying editorial resources across a range of media activities rather than duplicating them for each media unit. However, it is unrealistic for a publisher to expect to go from working in one dominant medium to working in two, three or four without more people and technology.” Businesses engaging in convergence to cut expenses would be disappointed by both the “financial and journalistic results,” he said. Convergence was an important new form of journalism, Northrup said, because it addressed the needs of the audience. “Convergence offers the audience new ways of absorbing news rather than just offering journalists new ways of presenting it” (Northrup 2003: 3).

The convergence process also requires significant organisational change. Newspaper consultant Andreas Pfeiffer said newspapers were moving inevitably in the direction of convergence. But he issued a word of caution: “What has become clear, however, is that implementing this vision is far more challenging than may seem from a safe distance. Setting up systems for multi-channel publishing is a complex and costly task. While defining a multi-channel publishing system is relatively easy on the conceptual level, making it work is far more challenging” (Pfeiffer 2000). The Media Center at the American Press Institute in Reston, Virginia runs courses on convergence for both journalists and editorial managers. The center’s director, Andrew Nachison, has identified the essential dichotomy and noted that the business approach was winning in the United States: “We hear editors talking about brand extension and market penetration. They have absorbed the business jargon. The
industry has co-opted business models and approaches. This is a more troubling trend, though in some respects it’s nothing new” (2004).

Convergence is attractive to both media managers and practitioners because it satisfies consumer demands and lifestyles. It also protects an organisation’s journalistic franchise in the sense that multiple-platform publishing – increasingly an alternative phrase for the more nebulous term “convergence” – allows wider coverage of an area and permits cross-marketing of a single product. Organisations embrace multiple-platform publishing for a variety of reasons, and produce multiple forms of convergence. It would be safe to say that no two media groups produce the same form of convergence. Their reasons are connected with the values and background of the people making the decisions.

**Forces driving convergence**

Several forces are driving convergence. The key ones are the changing lifestyles of news consumers and consumers in general, fragmentation of audiences (discussed earlier in the business models section) and the subsequent rise in the amount of time people spend with various forms of the media. As the Tampa Tribune’s Thelen has pointed out, people’s information-seeking behaviours are changing and media organisations need to adapt to respond to that need. Howard Tyner, a former editor of The Chicago Tribune who became a senior vice president of the Tribune Company, has maintained that the business of journalism was about “eyeballs” – getting as many people as possible to look at media products. A media company’s aim was to deliver content to consumers. “We need for our news and information to go to the eyeballs of web consumers and TV viewers and cable customers and even radio listeners although they aren’t using their eyes. We go where the audience is” (Tyner 2004). In essence, convergence increases an organisation’s chances of reaching the largest number of eyeballs.

The change of news habits, the number of people whose eyeballs embrace the media, needs to be understood in the context of increasing consumption of media in the western world, combined with shrinking markets for individual media. The 2004 Communications Industry Forecast showed that in the United States in 2003 the average consumer spent 3,663 hours a year using all forms of media. That’s more than 10 hours a day reading, listening, watching and surfing for any combination of professional and personal reasons. It represented an increase of almost an hour a day since 1998, the report said (Larsen 2004). Ifra’s Northrup said the American situation could be transposed to other developed economies. “It is one of the reasons the U.S. Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank and most other monitors of the world’s financial pulse say we have now officially transitioned from the industrial economy to an information economy” (2003: 3).

As well as using a lot more media, people are using it in multiple forms to fit everything into their busy days. James Rutherford, executive vice president of the company that published the 2004 Communications Industry Forecast, pointed out that
consumers were using two or more media simultaneously to cope with the range of media choices and the competition for attention. “The result is a media generation consuming more information in less time than ever. Time is the most precious commodity.” Analysts at Rutherford’s company, Veronis Suhler Stevenson (VSS), predicted the time an average American spent with media would increase by another hour a day by 2008. The previous VSS forecast published in 2003 said that by 2007 American consumers would devote 10.6 hours a day to the media, more than any other activity in a given day (quoted in Northrup 2003: 3). In a fragmented market the ability to reach as many potential audiences as possible becomes highly attractive, and may ultimately decide whether a news organisation survives. As examples later in this book show, convergence makes it possible to reach more audiences. The advertising pie—the total amount of money available to media organisations—may not change much. Sometimes recessions may even reduce the size of the pie. Convergence improves a media company’s chance of reaching as many people as possible.

Fostering convergence

It is possible to tease out several factors common to the most successful converged media operations. The most vital factor is management buy-in, in the sense that management is seen to support and expect convergence. At the Orlando Sentinel in Florida, for example, new recruits join the paper with the understanding that they would operate as multi-skilled reporters. The core of the converged newsroom is information, and an appreciation that modern reporting should not be bound to traditional notions of journalism as a linear process devoted to one medium. Rolf Lie, editor of Norway’s Aftenposten, believes the future is not about paper or electronics, but about information. “Today’s journalist should say: I’m not working in a newspaper, I’m working in news,” he said (Lie 2000: 1). This involves a change of mindset, which is another of the factors common at news organisations that have successfully embraced convergence. It is a manager’s responsibility to foster that mindset.

In Hong Kong the Ming Pao’s chief editor Paul Cheung said the move to a multimedia environment could only be successful if accompanied by a corresponding change in the attitudes of journalists. The transformation must occur first in the minds of editorial managers: “From my point of view, the chief editor has an important role: He must be a leader in terms of the changes” (Cheung 2001). Ulrik Haagerup, editor of Nordjyske in northern Denmark, looked at the situation from a different perspective but came to the same conclusion about mindset. “It is only in English that ‘newspaper’ has something to do with paper. Media convergence has nothing to do with technology or architecture. It has everything to do with mindset. People out there are moving fast. They are changing the way they use their news media and we have to change with them. Put the customer first,” he said (Haagerup 2002). Cultural factors can encourage or inhibit convergence. A conservative newspaper that sees itself as a paper of record will have difficulty partnering with a tabloid television organisation. Saints will not work with people they perceive as
sinners. Similarly print reporters who look down on television journalists, perhaps mocking them as poor spellers who only skim the surface of news, are less likely to welcome broadcast people into their newsroom. Ifra’s Northrup said that cultural issues, the stereotypes that journalists held about other media, and developing an appropriate mindset among journalists were the most difficult but essential concerns that managers needed to deal with when converging newsrooms and staff from competing media (2004b).

Another common factor involves placing people with different skills in the same physical space to generate trust and the sharing of ideas, which leads to synergy. At Ming Pao chief editor Paul Cheung said that parent company Ming Pao Enterprise Corporation hired senior journalists and photographers to help with the move to multiple-journalism (Cheung 2001). News organisations need to flow information and content through the organisation in such a way as to make content available for multiple platforms. Forrest Carr, news director for WFLA-TV in Florida, which partners with the Tampa Tribune to provide converged news, said all the Tampa newsrooms shared story ideas via custom-built software called Budget Bank. (By mid 2005 the company was trialling a new browser-based platform integration product from CCI-Europe called NewsGate). Intranets also permit the easy distribution of information (Carr 2004). These and other web-based technologies are vital because data and information are the lifeblood of modern media organisations.

**Convergence in Australia**

Laws in place in late 2005 prevent a media company from owning a television channel and a newspaper in the same city. In 1987 the Hawke-Keating Labor government introduced legislation that prevents any one proprietor from owning more than 15 per cent of both a newspaper and television station in any one metropolitan market. For this reason, convergence has not evolved in this country. The then treasurer Paul Keating famously said, “You can either be a prince of print or a queen of the screen.” The Liberal-National Party Coalition, in power since 1996, intends to change that law but the Labor Opposition wants to maintain the status quo. In October 2000 the then communications minister Senator Richard Alston declared that the Coalition government had gone through too much “pain and grief” when it tried to change cross-media ownership laws without support in the Senate. In July 2004, in the lead-up to that year’s federal election, Opposition leader Mark Latham said that Labor would ensure the media ownership laws did not change if it gained power. “We support the cross-media laws that maintain different owners for TV stations and newspapers in a capital city and I think that is the best thing we can do for diversity,” he said (quoted in O’Loughlin 2004: 5). But numerous commentators and analysts have predicted legislation change (Bosiljevac 2005; Lewis 2005; Samuel 2005).

And since 1 July 2005 the Coalition has had control of the Senate and has promoted law change. It had the “best chance in years” to implement its communications policy, “The Australian’s chief political reporter wrote on 8 August 2005 (Lewis 2005:
1). In September 2005 the Coalition announced it would introduce a new law early in 2006 that would allow media companies to merge freely. Communications minister Helen Coonan told the National Press Club in Melbourne on 31 August 2005 that the simplest way to protect media diversity was to stop concentration of ownership by requiring a minimum number of media companies in regional and city markets. The minimum numbers of commercial media “voices” would be four and five respectively, she said. Foreign ownership restrictions would also be lifted. The new law would not include the ABC, SBS, pay television, the Internet or regional newspapers (Koutsoukis and Catalano 2005: 3).

News Corporation boss Rupert Murdoch and Australia’s richest man, Kerry Packer, have both expressed interest in buying into other media. In late October 2005 analysts Ernst & Young released a report in which they predicted minimal takeovers and mergers in the wake of law change, in the short term. Most media stocks were “fully priced” and foreign companies were reluctant to invest in Australia for that reason, noted Bryan Zekulich, Ernst & Young’s partner for media and entertainment. “The current premium prices of media and entertainment assets in Australia is likely to inhibit smaller deals, paving the way for larger-scale transactions in the future,” Zekulich said. He would not elaborate on what “future” meant. New Fairfax CEO David Kirk, who started that month, said high share valuations had reduced the number of merger opportunities. “It’s not obvious there are a lot of potential synergies in putting media companies together,” he told Australian Financial Review. Ten Network chairman Nick Falloon told the same newspaper that high share prices were discouraging change. “It’s unlikely that anyone would buy any media asset at the moment given the uncertainty that has been going on for years,” he said (quoted in Shoebridge 2005: 54).

Given the deadline for this paper, it is not possible to elaborate further on what will happen in Australia. Unfolding events will certainly provide material for further research. What is certain is that the Internet is making a comeback post the dot-com boom and bust at the turn of the century. News Corporation chairman and chief executive Rupert Murdoch chaired a special three-day meeting in Sydney in September 2005 to discuss how News Ltd in Australasia would develop its existing and newly-acquired Internet interests, and how these would integrate with print publications. Earlier that year, Murdoch had astounded analysts with his volte face about the Internet. In a widely-reported landmark speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington on 13 April 2005, Murdoch noted the potential and power of blogs and other user-generated content. Murdoch described a “revolution” in the way young people were accessing news. “They don’t want to rely on the morning paper for their up-to-date information. Instead, they want their news on demand, when it works for them. They want control over their media, instead of being controlled by it.” Murdoch said he worried about publishers’ ability “to make the necessary cultural changes to meet the new demands”. The new world of relating to the “digital native” required a “transformation in the way we think about our product” and too many editors and reporters were “out of touch” with readers (Murdoch 2005). One attendee at the Sydney meeting said user-generated content was “absolutely the key take-away idea” (quoted in Sinclair 2005: 16). Newly-
appointed news.com.au editor Hugh Martin said readers wanted to comment on current stories or express their own ideas in conversation with other readers. “We’re working to develop that.” He described the chance to integrate communities as “very exciting,” noting that opportunities existed for traditional journalism on the web and reader-generated material to “exist side by side” (Martin 2005).

Convergence and education

Given this is a conference about journalism education, what changes need to occur at journalism programs to cater for convergence? Media companies get a competitive advantage when they create content that cannot be easily reproduced elsewhere. Former Fairfax CEO Fred Hilmer has pointed out that to produce this type of content “you have to have good people”. That was the reason he had established a large training and development department within Fairfax. Human beings created the unique content needed to obtain competitive advantage in the media world. “Put crudely, 45 per cent of our costs are people, and 100 per cent of our output is created by people. We have printing presses, but they do not create the content.” Education and training were vital to improve content (Hilmer 2004).

In the United States, Professor Edgar Huang and a group of his graduate students conducted a national survey of universities and media (daily newspapers and commercial television stations) to ask how journalism schools should prepare students for media convergence. The study measured the level of general support for convergence education among journalism professors, editors and news professionals, to determine if a new model of journalism education was needed. “The goal of the study is to provide evidence that will help journalism educators make informed decisions about how to respond to media convergence in their curricula and courses.” Huang’s team received 223 responses from professors (a 44 per cent response rate), 151 responses from editors (29 per cent) and 142 from news professionals (35 per cent). Almost half of the news professionals surveyed (48 per cent) said they routinely produced news content for multiple-media platforms. The majority of the respondents (84 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that journalism students should learn how to write for multiple-media platforms, and three in four respondents (78 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that all journalism majors should learn multiple sets of skills such as writing, editing, television production, digital photography, newspaper design, and web publishing. Almost two thirds of respondents (63 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that journalism students should still have a specialization, such as writing, photo-journalism, broadcasting, and new media. Huang and his team asked editors and news professionals what skills students needed to learn. Good writing topped both groups’ list, with multi-media production second. The Huang survey showed that more than half of the journalism schools in the United States (60 per cent) had adapted their curricula or developed new courses to prepare for convergence (Huang 2004).

Camille Kreaeplin and Carrie Anna Criado of Southern Methodist University found that 85 per cent of the 240 university programs they surveyed had adopted or were in
the process of introducing convergence to the curriculum. But these changes have been “fairly minor” (Kraeplin and Criado 2002). Huang’s team concluded that more convergence in the curriculum was “an urgent necessity”. Over time a wait-and-see strategy would disadvantage journalism schools. They suggested that schools needed to provide cross-media knowledge and experience to help students find cross-media jobs in the future.

Multi-dimensional news reporting over multiple platforms would be the way tomorrow’s news was presented, the team concluded. “Therefore, dealing with media convergence in college journalism education is an urgent necessity. The wait-and-see strategy will place a J-school in a disadvantaged position over the long run.... Media convergence poses both challenge and opportunity to J-schools for them to reconsider their current curriculum design, sequence setting, faculty composition, teaching methods, and internship approaches.” Journalism schools needed to place good writing as the top priority for all journalism students “regardless of sequences or specializations,” closely followed by multi-media production skills, Huang’s team said. Many professors were concerned about their low levels of technology skills. Team-teaching was one way to solve that problem (Huang 2004). It would be interesting to note if or how Australian journalism programs are preparing their students for convergence, and this would provide material for future research.

Conclusion

Convergence is happening in many newsrooms around the world, especially in Scandinavia, South America, and south-east and southern Asia. A form of convergence is likely to evolve in Australia and media here can learn from developments in other countries. It is important to appreciate that the introduction of an innovation takes time and often generates resistance. Paul Saffo, director of the Institute for the Future in Menlo Park, California, applied what he called the 30-year rule to change. For the past 500 years, he said, it had taken about three decades (roughly a generation) for a new idea to “fully seep into a culture” (1992: 18). New media analyst Roger Fidler wrote that slowness of change was a “rule rather than the exception” with emerging technologies. “The 30-year rule may not be foolproof, but it does put the development of new technologies into a more realistic perspective” (Fidler 1997: 10).

Convergence produces many challenges for journalists and publishers. Both groups need to find a way to gather and fund news for different platforms without compromising the needs of their audiences, and while maintaining ethical business practices. In essence they need to find ways to blend the twin aims of telling the truth and making money. Ari Valjakka, editor-in-chief of one of the world’s most successfully converged media companies, the Turnun Sanomat Group in Finland, has warned of the danger of trivialization of quality journalism when a journalist “shovels” a story from one medium to another without producing content appropriate for the medium. “But when you utilize the strengths of different media – speed of [the] web, text-TV and radio; ‘visuality’ in television and background
material in print – this danger turns into strengths” (Valjakka 2001). Managers’ editorial and social values remain a key issue. Under wise and ethical leadership, convergence offers opportunities to do better and more socially useful journalism. It remains to be seen how that scenario unfolds in Australia.

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