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Over the years, the way we get our news has evolved from simply reading the newspaper, watching the television or listening to the radio. Today many people are getting their news online, through podcasts or even on their cellular phones. The media are moving in a new direction. The lines of traditional newsgathering and news presentation are being blurred by what is called media convergence. With this new, fast-paced style of media, how would a major story, like the assassination of a president, be covered when compared to the “old” style of news coverage that was used when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963?

Before we get started, we must first try to define the phrase “media convergence.” Simply put, the idea of media convergence can be characterized literally. We have a variety of news presentation methods: television, radio, newspaper and magazines. Media convergence takes all of these methods and combines them into one big interactive news story on the web.

We also have a variety of specialized areas in which news professionals acquire their information. With media convergence, our professionals are moving toward using more than one method of newsgathering. By this I mean to say that rather than sending a five or six person team to cover a story (photographs, interviews filming and transmitting the information back to the home base), an organization might only send two or three to do the same work. In some cases there may be only one person. And now with the power and growing popularity of the Internet, a news source like a newspaper is also

putting together multimedia packages with video, audio and links to other information sources. This is something that was not traditionally practiced.

Now let's look at a few more specific and professional definitions of convergence. In the 2005 book *Convergent Journalism: an Introduction* by Stephen Quinn and Vincent F. Filak, convergence is simply defined as doing journalism and telling stories using the most appropriate media. Larry Pryor, a professor with the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California, defines convergence as the actions of editorial staff members working together to produce multiple products for multiple platforms to reach a mass audience with interactive content, often on a 24/7 timescale (Quinn & Filak, 2007).

Professor Rich Gordon of Northwestern University identifies convergence in the United States with at least five forms: ownership, tactical, structural, information gathering and presentation (Quinn & Filak, 2007). I won't get into the specifics of each; but you can get a general idea of each category from their names alone.

Wikipedia defines media convergence as a theory in communications where every mass medium eventually merges to the point where they become one medium due to the advent of new communication technologies. Wikipedia also states that as a communication theory, media convergence aims to bring together all forms of media into one single device (Wikipedia, 2007).

So now we have a working definition of media convergence. We can now begin to develop ideas as to what we think would be the best way to cover a presidential

assassination in an ever-changing journalistic world and the high demand for instant gratification of today's fast-paced society.

By covering the assassination of an American President, I must first say that I will not name a specific person to avoid any conflicts. I will use a hypothetical president that we can all assume to be equally liked and disliked by everyone. In this case however, I may assume that this event takes place in the current year, so global events will be taken into consideration when applying critical thought. I will also assume that the assassination will take place in a public place (as this is the most likely event) so media professionals as well as amateur photographers, videographers and bloggers will most likely be abundant.

John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas while in a presidential motorcade through Dealey Plaza. During this event, there were thousands of spectators and no warnings of what was about to happen. There were a few amateur cameramen filming the event when it happened. Most of the media were waiting at the Dallas Trade Mart, where President Kennedy was set to give a speech, because the motorcade event was not thought to be as important as the destination. There were no live radio or television broadcasts of the motorcade (Wikipedia, 2007). The amateur films were taken into custody by authorities for evidence.

After watching some of the news footage on the web that aired in Dallas approximately fifteen minutes after the shots were heard, I have come to some conclusions about the coverage. Obviously, there were problems with technology and getting the news out quickly. I give them kudos for their punctual breaking news bulletin

announcing that President Kennedy was shot considering there was no live coverage of the motorcade. As the story developed, they announced that he had died. They also had interviews with spectators including Abraham Zapruder, the man who captured the last twenty-six seconds before President Kennedy was shot (Wikipedia, 2007).

Today, an event like this would have extensive coverage from all angles, including the motorcade. There are an abundance of personnel to cover every minute of such an event. Even if it were not broadcast live, there would be film crews and reporters everywhere. That is one advantage we would have today without even taking convergence into mind.

If a presidential assassination were to take place today, the first thing that would come to many minds is terrorism. Because of the campaign that the United States is involved in with Iraq and the Middle East, this is the most logical conclusion. Without taking any kind of ethics or morals into consideration, many bloggers would start an electronic uproar on the web. This would happen almost instantaneously. These actions would pose some challenges for the news professionals who are trying to tell the real story. Amateur photographers and seemingly endless numbers of people with video cameras would probably play some kind of role in what is published; but with the amount of coverage we have today, it may not be the same as with the case of the Zapruder Film.

With the kind of coverage we have today on major breaking news, any footage captured of the assassination would probably be broadcast throughout the country. The shock value would be so high that news stations couldn't afford not to broadcast it. This is, of course, taking into consideration that any footage captured would first be approved

for release by the proper authorities. There would most likely be those people who would upload their footage to You Tube or some other similar streaming video site, as was the case with Saddam Hussein's execution and Steve Irwin's sudden death by a stingray. In turn, some or all of this footage would be promptly removed until it was reviewed and approved for mass viewing with the appropriate viewer discretion advisories.

Although I have somewhat digressed with the issue of amateur or "citizen" journalism thus far, I think it is necessary to include this information as it is becoming, more and more, a part of what the general public sees and hears. Amateur journalists are a growing part of the media. In some cases, they are providing compelling and accurate information about what is going on in the world. They are even getting paid to do it.

So what about the professional media? What do we do? As I had mentioned briefly before, there would be instant coverage and images. This would follow the traditional news gathering and presentation formats with an additional blurb about more information on the web. The real convergence, from a presentation standpoint, would be found on the Internet.

News websites will take a different approach in presenting the story. A story such as the presidential assassination would be the dominant image, if not the only image on their homepage. There would most likely be a powerful image to capture the eye. It would be so compelling that almost anyone would investigate further. The story would probably be presented in a nonlinear fashion so that anyone visiting the site can choose what parts of the story he/she wants to read, watch or listen to. There would be numerous video clips from multiple sources, slideshows, links to other sites and blogs and places

for visitors to comment. Some of these things would not be available immediately (i.e. slideshows) due to production time and organizational approval. It would be a wealth of information, presented in small, quick portions. There would also be full story versions and links to chronological timetables of the events as they unfold. In response to any false or inappropriate information by amateurs, there would also be public apologies and disclaimers about rumors from unreliable sources. There is no standard set in stone for how a story is presented on the web, but most would be similar in content and presentation, especially at first, due to immediacy.

Convergence, from a news gathering standpoint in covering a presidential assassination, would be very intense and quite different from past practices. As convergence has come into being with journalism, there are a few changes and adaptations that must be made. This all has to do with the collection of information.

A story like this is huge; so it will take more than your average story would require in terms of the team you send in. The team, however, will still be smaller than it would have been twenty, ten or even five years ago. If I were on a team or in charge of a team, I would make sure that everyone had a camera. This would enable any one of us to shoot stills or video if the opportunity arises. Everyone would also be equipped with a cell phone or Bluetooth so that communication among the team is possible and hands free. There would probably be one person who is the stronger shooter so he/she would be assigned to the place most likely to produce the strongest images. This person would still be responsible for a variety of other tasks as well, but his or her main focus would be photography.

The team would have a base unit, like a van or larger vehicle, with wireless internet capability. This would allow the team abroad to send images, quotes, sounds and stories produced on the field for quick editing and/or sending to the home base (i.e. if you were working for the St. Petersburg Times it would get sent to the appropriate person there). In addition to things being wired to your home base; there would be a blog created and updated live as the events unraveled. To somewhat effectively cover a story of this proportion, you would need a team of at least five or six to do it. If you didn't have that many, you would have to work even harder.

All of the items mentioned above would have to be carefully considered when publishing, especially on a live blog. This also goes for live video, if that is part of the assignment. Excellent judgment would have to be used before publishing any kind of information on the web or over the wire. In some instances, it may take a quick call to a superior before making the post or going live.

In comparison to the Kennedy assassination, coverage of this kind of event today would be much more involved. The technology has advanced so much since then. We can get more images and words to more people almost instantly. But no matter how you look at it, the same kind of basic journalistic skills are used. There was a live television broadcast with Walter Cronkite within fifteen minutes of the three shots fired at President Kennedy. For what they were working with, they were on top of their game. The media made quick decisions and claims as accurate as they could with the technology they had. The public got informed. Everyone was devastated. Today, we might take it to the next level or beyond, but we still practice the basic skills of journalism.

Works Cited

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