

Life & times

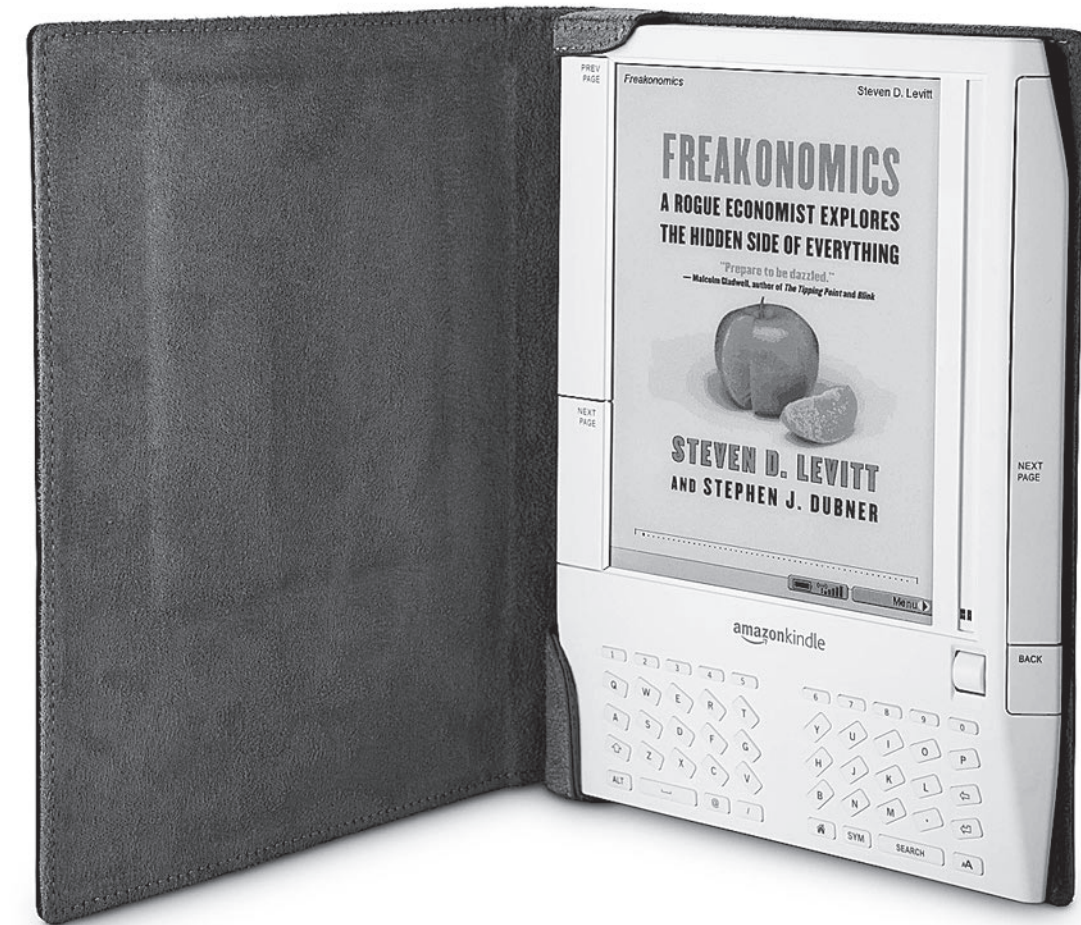
How to re-Kindle journalism

Craig Gamble
FAST LIVING



Twitter has a lot to answer for, and a lot to say. Recent stories generated by Twitter feeds include the first Twitter from space (though it was routed by email from space, and then someone at NASA tweeted it), FBI agents arresting a man in Oklahoma because of what he'd said on Twitter regarding his planned "war against local authorities", and cyclist Lance Armstrong tweeting on the results of his recent drugs case: "Just got the word from the French agency AFLD on the Showergate incident. Case closed, no penalty, all samples clean. Onward."

Now this: details from a staff strategy meeting at the *New York Times* have been published on Twitter. The meeting concerned something rather close to print media's heart right now: the ways in which a big newspaper like the *New York Times* can start to make money from its online content. According to information released in several tweets, the paper is looking at a membership program with graded levels of access and prices for content, in an attempt to recoup "lost revenue" from those using its copyrighted material without permission. It also hopes to make money from licensing content to third-party software developers. In many ways, the details of these plans are not as important as the paper's obvious intention to explore them, and soon. Newspapers, particularly in the United States, have struggled to cope with dropping readership and plummeting revenues, and to find a workable strategy to get the most out of their often excellent content. No less a person than Rupert Murdoch has condemned the current model of newspapers and how they make money (ironic considering the fortune he has amassed from just that). He believes the model is "flawed"



and raises questions about the culture of free content being so widely available on the internet.

Recently a couple of new ideas have emerged that might just point a way forward for print media. The first is, possibly, the new Kindle. I've talked about this device before, an e-book reader designed and sold by online retailer Amazon. The new bigger version called the DX, sporting a 9.7-inch screen (the device is about the size of a sheet of A4), has been hailed as a possible saviour of traditional newspapers. Newspapers can sell subscriptions to the paper that can be read on the Kindle, saving on printing costs and hopefully appealing to a new stable of readers. Perhaps a more interesting model is a new website, True/Slant,

launched in April in the US (true-slant.com). The site is a kind of cooperative, with a range of articles on politics, sport, culture, science and food. It will combine the most popular content and contributors on its home page, but also offer individual pages to all contributors. Journalists will be paid a small amount for their work, but will also be given a share of the revenue generated from advertising on their individual pages. Readers will be offered RSS feeds from contributors they particularly like. It is hoped that this and other features will help journalists build up a dedicated following for their work. As well as advertising on the content pages, True/Slant will also include whole pages devoted to advertisers, who

Old/new: An early, battery-operated version of Amazon Kindle.

will be allowed to run blogs, etc. on their products. These pages will be labelled as advertising content. It's an interesting new way for journalists to attempt to make a living from digital media, and as many contributors are also employed by traditional magazines and newspapers, some of the hoped-for success of this site may rub off on their more old-school print cousins.

Another model launched in April is the venture, Journalism Online (www.journalismonline.com). This company plans to act as a kind of clearing house between websites and the reading public, making it easy for people to buy articles they are interested in. Its website will link to original content elsewhere, and allow readers to either buy articles or parts of articles for a fee, or subscribe to all available content through the site through a monthly or annual fee. This emulates some online music stores by making it easy for the public to pay for content. Many newspapers are fighting what seems a losing battle against illegal use of their copyrighted material. A venture such as Journalism Online is betting that the illegal activity won't happen if people are offered a simple way to pay. Certainly this has been tried and has failed in the past (the *New York Times* for instance had a short-lived option called TimesSelect), but we are now much more used to buying online, so the model may have a chance.

The huge amount of free content available on the internet is often wonderful and interesting, but can be also poorly researched or badly written. To get good journalism online there needs to be a way for the writers to be recompensed and due credit given to gatekeepers, editors or publishers who are committed to upholding quality research and writing. Without these things in place, we might all eventually end up with nothing more engaging to read than twitters from space.

If you're a serious public-pool swimmer, mind you obey the code

SLOW LIVING



Sometimes, the beauty of the ocean and the pull of nature take second place to the appeal of one's local pool. There are no waves, no sharks and no sand at the aquatic leisure centre. For those that are keen enough to "do laps" there are two options: serious and casual. But people like me upset the politics: I am a serious, slow, casual swimmer. I am serious about getting fitter but also about not getting into the cold 50m pool on winter mornings – I

generally opt for the indoor, heated, 25m affair. This bath-like, soupy environment suits the slow swimmer; the joints grind more easily and no one will elbow you out of the way. It is even possible, should one need it, to swim 1km in two hours.

The outdoor pool is competitive; there is a "friendly" nod or two but no time for idlers. I have tried it, and on occasions, have enjoyed the feeling of bare skin soaking up the sun's rays or the sky's downpours. Breathing to the left, one sees the sun rising, to the right, a dark band of steel-coloured cloud.

But one shoulder charge, one kick in the ribs, one "Mr Walrus" creating a wash just as I inhale, is enough to

see me slip back into the "baby" pool.

There are codes to be observed in the warm pool. Regulars do not like their lanes being used by anyone who appears young and fit. If you have "the look" of a fast, serious swimmer you must very quickly dispel this notion. A few slow arm strokes will do the trick. There is no fashion either; one may wear a bright orange goggle-and-snorkel set with impunity. Floral swimsuits and huge rectangular trunks are as ordinary as black Lycra. It is, however, a good idea to have bad eyesight, and if one doesn't, a smear of Vaseline onto the surface of the goggles is essential.

My colleagues and I differ on this



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point. The issue is one of floating debris. I'm all for swimming amongst it. Yes, a wafting piece of detritus may seem off-putting, but at least the chlorine ensures it will be clean detritus. If one swims slowly enough, there is ample time to brush away Band-Aids, hair-balls and skin-strips before they become tangled in your bathers. The pale, slightly yellow objects, which always seem to float 10cm from the surface, are best ignored, but if one is using the Vaseline method, the correct thought to have is "leafy sea-dragon – how cute".

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