

**Tampa media trio**  
*Media General's experiment in convergence  
 brings together the Tampa Tribune, WFLA-TV and  
 Tampa Bay Online news site—all under one roof*

The new \$30 million, 121,000-square-foot facility was designed to encourage the three staffs to interact.

**By Al Tompkins and Aly Colón,  
 The Poynter Institute**

**T**he week before WFLA-TV boxed up 45 years of history, filling the old tin-roofed newsroom that once served as the station's prop room and carpenter shop, someone taped a sign to a newsroom door: "No one can limit your dreams, so don't be afraid to dream large. The Big Move 2000."

Indeed, WFLA's big move last month is a dream for the station in Tampa, the nation's 13th-largest TV market. But it involves more than just relocating to its new four-story, concrete-and-glass, fully digital "news center" overlooking the scenic Hillsborough River in downtown Tampa. The "news center" is also the new home of WFLA's corporate siblings, the Media General-owned *Tampa Tribune* and Tampa Bay Online (TBO).

Together the three news organizations have launched a new kind of "converged journalism." No doubt other newspapers and television groups across the country are watching this media marriage to see if a large-scale multimedia cooperative can capture

greater audiences, strengthen its brands, and slow the steady loss of TV-news viewers and newspaper circulation.

Dozens of television stations and cable operations have launched partnerships with newspapers that involve occasional joint ventures on special projects or community service efforts. (See story on page 50 for combinations in other markets.) But the Media General convergence in Tampa is significantly different in its nature and size.

WFLA News Director Dan Bradley says the television station, the *Tampa Tribune* and TBO will share their journalism minute-to-minute, 24 hours a day, every day. They share space on what has been dubbed the "superdesk," which coordinates crews, provides news research and tracks news developments. The move also signals a change in the way journalists at all three media organizations will work. Reporters, who once filed stories just for television or just for print, may find themselves working on a TV story, writing a newspaper article and producing an online version as well.

The convergence works in other areas

too. Newspaper photojournalists will carry still and video cameras on assignments. Video journalists are learning what newspaper photo editors look for, since their pictures may be used in the paper, on TV, online or for all three.

"It boggles my mind," says WFLA Managing Editor Susan DeFraties. "On a typical day right now, I have eight or nine reporters I can send out on daily news assignments. With the convergence, I have access to more than 100 *Tribune* reporters who are out there gathering news."

Media General's goal is simple, says DeFraties: to become the information powerhouse in this market. "We want to have it all—if the public wants to be told about it, read it in depth, or if they want to get online quickly to check it out."

For the *Tampa Tribune*, the convergence resembles a moth's attraction to light. The newspaper's staff wants to bask in TV's glow but fears being changed by it.

The attraction is understandable. Television offers a much larger potential audience for the newspaper. The



▲ The 'superdesk' at Media General's new facility coordinates news crews, provides research, and tracks breaking stories for WFLA, the 'Tampa Tribune' and TBO.

*Tribune's* 1999 circulation was more than 235,000 daily and 327,000 for the Sunday edition. But the Tampa television market includes 1,485,980 households, and WFLA is the longtime market news leader. With convergence, the *Tribune* stands to reach thousands of new potential readers. The online site, TBO, benefits from television's reach and the newspaper's reputation and content.

"The single greatest challenge we have is to overcome our [work] cultural differences," Bradley says.

The three sides tried to bridge that gap during more than five months of "pre-nup talks." In those discussions, the issues began to surface about the deep-seated problems that a converged newsroom would face. However, new opportunities grew out of those meetings. The newspaper, TV and online groups launched a series of joint projects, one exploring whether schools should require children to wear uniforms.

Later, the new Tampa media alliance undertook an investigative project they called "Prisoners in Their Own Homes," which looked into how judges sentenced those convicted to serve jail time under house arrest. WFLA's story found that people under house arrest were not, in fact, at home. They were often out committing other crimes. And Tampa Bay Online built

an extensive database that allowed Internet users to pinpoint anyone who was under house arrest in a particular neighborhood. The project was a dress rehearsal for the kind of convergent



◀ Overhead view of the TV and online newsrooms on the second floor and the 'Tampa Tribune' newsroom on the third.

news story that the three teamed up to report last Dec. 30.

That morning, WFLA was sitting on a huge story. Station anchor Gayle Sierens landed an exclusive interview with Dewey Brandon, a man police suspected had killed his wife and two young daughters. Four months after the murders, police cleared Brandon, and Sierens was the only journalist that Brandon wanted to talk to after he was cleared.

"The newspaper wants the story," Multimedia Editor Steve DeGregorio told WFLA's News Director Bradley in a hurried speakerphone conversation. "They would like the story before you run it on TV," Bradley agreed.

Sierens wrote an in-depth newspaper article that included many details she had to leave out of her TV story because of time restrictions. The *Tribune* later played the story on the front page of the metro section. The same day the newspaper and TV story ran, TBO streamed long segments of the exclusive interview that did not air on television.

At the afternoon editorial meeting that December day, everyone agreed the Sierens interview was the lead story for the evening's newscast. But by 3:10 p.m., a Tampa hotel worker walked into the

Radisson Bay Harbor Hotel and shot four people to death, injuring three others. The gunman shot another person to death while attempting to steal a getaway car. The station and the newspaper instantly began working on the story, sharing information. *Tribune* reporter Peter Howard phoned in a television report. And at 6 p.m., WFLA aired a live interview with *Tribune* photojournalist Dave Kadlubowski, who was among the first reporters at the scene.

A day that began with the newspaper's asking to break a TV

story ended with the TV station's benefiting from the newspaper's presence at a major, breaking news story. The online coverage took in information from both broadcast and newspaper journalists.

"We are merging the collection and dissemination of information," says WFLA's Bradley. "But we are not merging newsrooms. There may be some stories we choose not to share. But I think that will be rare," he adds. "We will each have to make our own editorial decisions. There may be times when we disagree. We have to stay independent, but I think we can do that and share our information."

After five months of dialogue at the management and staff levels, the marriage is settling into something of a routine. WFLA consumer reporter Steve Overton and health reporter Irene Maher file weekly newspaper columns. The *Tampa Tribune's* religion reporter, Michelle Bearden, files newspaper stories on Wednesdays that also mention the story that she will cover on TV. Four days a week, the *Tribune's* business editor Bernie Kohn files business briefs on WFLA's early-morning newscast.

The three groups—Internet, television and print—are so serious about making this marriage work that they built their new \$30 million, 121,000-square-foot facility specifically to allow and, in some ways, encourage the staffs to interact.

The first floor of the building is the television studio space. The television and online newsrooms fill the second floor, and the newspaper's newsroom is on the third floor. The television management and sales staff occupy the fourth floor. The newspaper publisher's office, printing press and business offices will remain in an adjacent building that is the *Tribune's* former home.

This arrangement will force the converged newsrooms to share more than news stories. "The television and newspaper newsrooms share the same air," Bradley says, looking skyward from his desk. The television newsroom has an atrium that opens into the newspaper newsroom one floor above it.

"It gets interesting," he adds, "when, at 4 o'clock, the television newsroom is getting loud and the noise is spilling into the newspaper newsroom. Have you ever been in a newspaper news-

room? They are quiet as libraries."

Like any marriage, this one has some rough spots to work through. Newspaper reporters complained the TV folks were making constant use of the building-wide paging system, a common practice in boisterous TV stations but unheard of in newspaper newsrooms. The TV staff was asked to attend telephone etiquette classes to learn how to stay off the loudspeaker system.

As staff began to work more closely, they discovered a disparity in the pay levels between television reporters and newspaper reporters. Religion writer Bearden used to get extra pay for filing

TV stories in addition to her newspaper stories. With convergence, the extra pay will dry up. *Tribune* managers say they know they will have to address the pay issue if newspaper staffers routinely appear on television.

And then there is the issue of workload. Reporters and photojournalists worry the marriage will mean more work without more money.

"The last newspaper story I wrote, I wrote on my own time," says veteran WFLA reporter Lance Williams. "But the fun part of it is, there are no restrictions on my story. It is hard to write a minute and thirty-second story. But

## Taking convergence to another level

Once a month for the past six months, WFLA-TV and *Tampa Tribune* staffers have come together to trade tips and techniques at a gathering hosted by the station's photojournalists. The name of the session is apt, given their new relationship as media partners: "Another Level." While the sharing of resources is nothing new for Newschannel 8 and the *Tribune*, moving in together in March has certainly taken the relationship to another level.

"Being in the same building and closely working together is a brand-new relationship for all parties," says Rich Murphy, WFLA's chief photojournalist. "All of this change will certainly affect the visual journalists across the company and culture. We must all come to appreciate each other's worlds and learn new ways to do our job."

Steve DeGregorio, multimedia editor, is working with Allyn DiVito, senior editor for photography at the *Tribune*, to coordinate a video-training program for the papers' 23 photojournalists.

Media General has committed \$750,000 over three years to purchase digital equipment for 24 photographers. This accounts for a \$31,000 equipment allowance per *Tribune* photographer in addition to an aggressive cross-training relationship with WFLA photojournalists.

By 2002, each *Tribune* photographer will have in a camera kit two Nikon D-1 digital cameras, a Canon GL-1 video camera and complete accessory kits.

"We know that we need to move in that direction, too," says Murphy, the WFLA photo chief. "When the still guys hung out with us, they kept telling us that in our entire package, there were only two or three stills that could work as frame-grabs." Murphy recalled. To fill that gap, the station plans to equip its photojournalists with digital point-and-shoot cameras.

The task would be simpler, of course, if video or still images were interchangeable among platforms. Journalists already working in converged settings have discovered that video that works fine for television may not work on the Web, for example.

The convergence of cultures requires ironing out bugs, such as salary inconsistencies. According to the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) and recent Radio Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) surveys, there is \$10,000 to \$12,000 earnings gap between print and video photojournalists.

"We have solid anecdotal and survey statistics that show that the average print photographer earns about \$10,000 more than their TV colleague. Entry-level salaries are vastly different," says Bradley Wilson, executive director of NPPA. However, Wilson also maintains that, at the top end of the scale, TV photojournalists make a lot more than their print colleagues. WFLA's Murphy says he's confident that those issues will be resolved in a fair manner.

Says Multimedia Editor DeGregorio: "We're trying to create a culture here that values information no matter where it is, and photographers are a critical part of this project."

—Kenny Irby, *The Poynter Institute*

## Media collaborations

When Denver's KUSA-TV decided to dig into a big school story last month, News Director Patti Dennis managed to enhance her staff with three education reporters. And thanks to the station's partnership with the *Denver Post*, it didn't cost her a cent.

When a sheriff's deputy was shot in Lexington County, N.C., WGHP-TV needed background information on deadline. Cheryl Carson, the station's vice president of news, plugged the hole in the story with a quick call to the *Winston-Salem Journal*.

These stations and newspapers are among dozens around the country teaming up on projects resulting in cross-promotion, close cooperation and even—can this be true?—mutual admiration.

Last month's announcement by Tribune Co. that it plans to acquire Times-Mirror has intensified interest in the trend.

"We really haven't begun to do convergence to the dimension that Tribune has done or Media General is planning in Tampa," says Marty Haag, senior vice president/news of Belo's broadcast division, "But we have really moved forward a lot in the last six months."

Haag ticks off several examples—a TV reporter files for Belo Interactive; KENS(TV) creates MySanAntonio.com with the *San Antonio Express*; wvec-TV streams video to the *Virginian-Pilot* Web site. Even so, Haag says, it's too soon to assess the results.

"Instinct tells you it's like chicken soup: It can't hurt," he says.

Of course, there's the resource issue.

"We have one education reporter, and the *Post* has three," says Dennis. "Working with a newspaper expands your resource base without costing you any money."

The newspaper can benefit as well. The recent KUSA-*Denver Post* project produced a week-long drumbeat of promotion for the paper on the station's seven daily newscasts.

Carson of WGHP characterizes the station's partnership with the *Winston-Salem Journal* as "a great relationship that took a while to happen."

The station and paper share space in a small local office where the paper pays the rent and the station pays for cleaning. "We're beginning to understand each other's worlds, even though we know we live in different worlds," she explains.

—Bill Mitchell, *The Poynter Institute*



WUSA-TV studio is located on the first floor of Media General's new building.

writing for the newspaper is freeing. Compared to writing for TV, when you write for newspaper it seems like you can write forever."

"Right now, it is novel," Williams says. "But if two or three times a week they are asking me to turn in a TV story and a newspaper story, then I will have a problem. I worry what happens to the quality of the story. When would we have time to go out and report?"

"No one will be asked to work one hour longer without pay," the *Tribune's* Assistant Managing Editor for Organizational Development Patti Breckenridge insists. "One worry among the newspaper folks is that they will be forced to appear on TV. We have said nobody is going to have to do extensive on-air work without training."

But future hires at the newspaper will be brought aboard with the understanding that they will work as television and online reporters, too. Breckenridge says that recent applicants have been attracted to the newspaper expressly because of the convergence.

"The point is, more people will see our stuff than before. I don't think people will see a story in the newspaper, then see it on TV and say that TV story was better than the newspaper version. They just don't see news that way," WFLA reporter Williams says.

The Tampa partnership model could become more common if the Federal

Communications Commission relaxes its dual ownership rule, as many media observers believe it will. This year, the Newspaper Association of America is asking the FCC to repeal the 1975 rule barring ownership of a major daily newspaper and a local television station in the same city, with at least three NAA-supported bills pending in Congress to repeal the dual ownership ban.

Management at top newspapers and television stations has been careful not to claim this convergence will save any money for the company. In fact, *Tribune* Executive Editor Gil Thelen wrote in an article for the newspaper that the three media will enter this year larger and stronger than in 1999. "The combined staffs will add 10 people this year," he noted. "If convergence leads to fewer journalists reporting, producing and editing weaker journalism, we deserve to lose customers and public trust."

The newspaper expects it will get a higher visibility in the community by appearing nightly on WFLA's market-leading newscasts. WFLA's anchors recently held up a special section of the *Tribune* on camera and told viewers to check out a story that was reported and written by *Tribune* senior reporter Patty Ryan. Almost immediately Ryan saw television's effect.

"I heard from people I hadn't heard from because they had seen it on TV," Ryan says. She even got e-mail from



viewers outside Tampa because of the broadcast. That kind of exposure excites newspaper executives, who recognize the relative marketing impact compared with their television colleagues.

But the benefits of such exposure come with a host of challenges for print media, which, for the most part, is unaccustomed to the bright lights, hot mikes and the need for compelling visual images.

"The very nature of going on TV is intimidating for those of us hiding behind the anonymity of the byline," says Ryan. Television made her realize her work would be judged on two elements that hadn't mattered to her before: personal appearance and being able to think on your feet.

"I like to put a lot of thought into what I write. So thinking quickly [on the air] concerns me," Ryan says. "A 'talk back,' in its purest form, is live. If I screw up, I can't backspace. The whole world hears it."

Although WFLA had been informally offering their newspaper siblings some guidance on working in the television environment, the *Tribune* also arranged for more-formal training at the University of South Florida. Now *Tribune* reporters can get help from an adjunct professor who has worked as a television reporter.

The Tampa convergence project may produce many intangible results. TV reporters may also get a credibility boost by having their bylines appear in print. And print reporters may get more news tips because people see them on TV. The Tampa Bay Online site will benefit the most from the credibility, content and promotion it receives from being associated with the newspaper and TV station. But other media companies will be looking for more solid proof that convergence is worth the effort and investment, namely higher television ratings, increased newspaper circulation and more online traffic.

However, whatever happens, the Tampa convergence experience raises at least two concerns. If journalists spend time contributing to each other's media, when will they have time to gather news? And more important, will similar media convergence mean that fewer independent voices produce the news or, perhaps, some voices will be lost?

To Bradley, WFLA's news director,

the most significant aspect of convergence is that it puts the viewer, reader or Web user in control of when and how they want to see the news.

"The information we gather doesn't belong to us. It is the readers', the viewers', the users' information. We have an obligation to get it out there on as many platforms as we can." ■

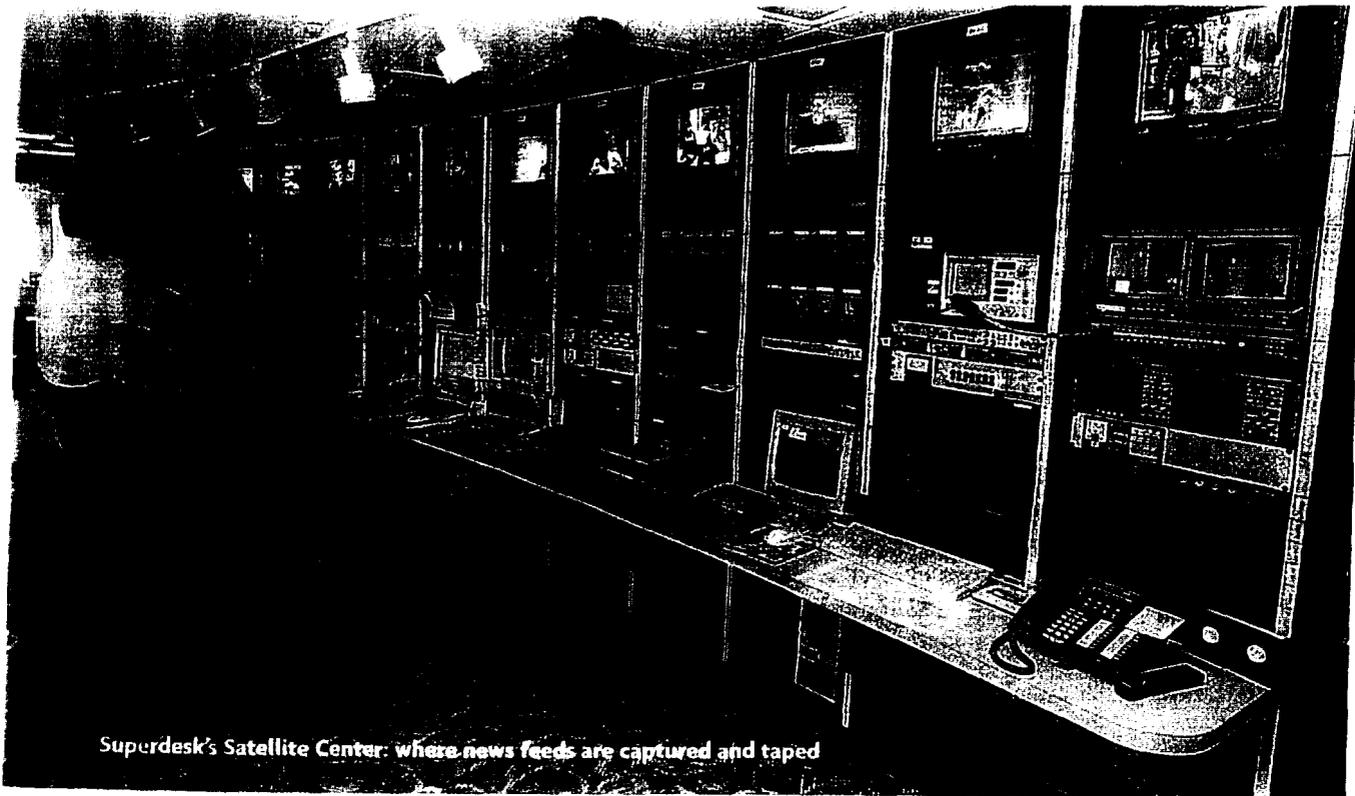
This series of stories about the Media General Tampa news facility was produced for BROADCASTING & CABLE by The Poynter Institute, a school for journalists in St. Petersburg, Fla. The project was reported by Poynter faculty members Al Tompkins, Aly Colón, Kenny Irby, Nora Paul and Bill Mitchell, editor of Poynter.org. The stories were edited by Chip Scanlan, group leader of Poynter's reporting, writing and editing program.

# THE MULTIMEDIA NEWSROOM

*Three Organizations Aim For Convergence  
In Newly Designed Tampa Headquarters*

BY ALY COLÓN

**R**ocky Glisson, an assignment editor for WFLA-TV, Tampa Bay's NBC affiliate, occupies the "hot seat" on the oval-shaped "superdesk" at Media General's Newscenter facility. From his perch, on the top level of a three-tiered, starship-like deck that rises several feet from the second floor, he surveys a state-of-the-art newsroom that hugs the Hillsborough River, visible through the newsroom's glass walls. He also can see and



Superdesk's Satellite Center: where news feeds are captured and taped



In the "hot seat": morning assignment editor Rocky Glisson begins the day at 4 A.M.

talk to reporters, producers, photographers, and editors who stop by, their voices floating upward through a wide atrium toward the third floor where the staff of the *Tampa Tribune* newspaper works.

The words "hot seat" and "superdesk" represent just the most obvious descriptions for this futuristic news desk, one designed from the outset to serve a multimedia mission. It includes not only Media General's TV newsmen, but those from its daily newspaper and online site as well.

**T**he idea of converging operations isn't new. Back in the 1950s, some newspapers owned television stations and shared news functions. But the move by Media General speaks of a much broader approach. Rather than having their newsmen working for just one medium, the company sees possibilities for converging their different news operations and thereby multiplying the number of platforms through which they distribute the news simultaneously. For the convergence of the physical mediums of the computer and television to take place in such a way as to provide substantive news content, it will need to be accompanied by a multimedia newsroom.

Is Tampa's Newscenter the newsroom of the future? If it is, it means substantive changes in the way journalists do their jobs.

This particular spring morning, for example, Glisson keeps glancing at fourteen TV monitors that stretch across the wall book-ended by two large clocks. His ears stay tuned to seven scanners just in front of him, and to the multi-line phone nearby.

As he does his morning monitoring, he gets tipped off to a broken water main gushing during a drought and water restriction period in Tampa. He alerts one of his photographers to check it out and confirm the information. Then he tells Doug Anderson, WFLA's assignment manager, who shares the top deck with him.

Anderson assigns a WFLA reporter and photojournalist so they can get video for the morning and evening news blocks, and he tells the producers about it at WFLA's 9 A.M. news meeting. He also tips off the newspaper's photo team leader, Todd Chappel, who sits below, on the second deck on the superdesk. Chappel in turn sends one of his photographers to snap a shot for the next day's newspaper edition.

Steve De Gregorio, who sits next to Chappel, makes a note to pass the information on to the *Tribune's* editors at the newspaper's 10:30 A.M. budget meeting. As the multimedia editor, he's the liaison between WFLA, the *Tribune*, and TBO.com (Tampa Bay Online). He scrolls through the news budgets of the three organizations, looking for additional opportunities of convergence.

Just down the desk from De Gregorio, Jim Riley, TBO.com's interim content editor — online's equivalent of a TV news director or a newspaper managing editor — stops by to talk to his staffers on the superdesk. They update news for MSNBC and remain alert for ideas they can use on their Web site.

Glisson glances about, monitoring the activity. "This is quite a different newsroom from the one I came into twenty-eight years ago," he says, his tone

underscoring just what an understatement that is.

The new, \$40 million, 120,000 square foot, temple of convergence is Media General's answer to the challenge of the future, establishing the Richmond-based company's Florida Gulf Coast news outlets as the dominant source of information in the Tampa Bay market.

They face stiff competition. Tampa Bay, the nation's thirteenth largest television market, includes such news competitors as CBS's WTSP-TV, Fox's WTVT-TV, and ABC's WFTS-TV, as well as the *St. Petersburg Times* just across the bay. (The Poynter Institute,

which I am employed by, a nonprofit school for journalists, owns the *St. Petersburg Times*, but operates separately from the newspaper.) But Media General's local news executives see this convergence as their opportunity to big-foot them all. While WFLA, the *Tribune*, and TBO.com maintain separate newsrooms and make their own individual news decisions about coverage, they hope that sharing the same space will lead to a synaptic intimacy that creates a pervasive, powerful presence.

"The work," says Gil Thelen, the *Tribune's* executive editor and vice president, who notes he was the chairman of the ASNE change committee in the mid-1990s, is "just what my career prepared me for over the past twenty years. Now I have the big one."

Other news organizations, such as the Tribune Company (see previous story), the A.H. Belo Corp., KUSA-TV in Denver, and the *Denver Post*, the *Orange County Register*, and the *Sarasota Herald Tribune*, have either shared resources, formed partnerships, and/or offered crossover news between television, newspapers, and online sites. But Tampa's approach appears to be the first such attempt to put all three news mediums in one place at one time. They plan intentionally, and strategically, to increase the opportunities for each of them to not only work with, but also work within, each of the other's setting. And they'll be working with each other constantly, every minute of every day.

These interrelationships began before they moved in together during the early part of March, when both the ninety-



Media General's four-story, \$40 million complex sits on the banks of the Hillsborough River in downtown Tampa, Fla.

# Tampa's media barn

## New complex unites WFLA-TV, Tampa Tribune and TBO.com

By **KARISSA S. WANG**  
*Staff Reporter*

In what is touted as one of the most comprehensive examples of local news convergence, WFLA-TV, Tampa, Fla., last week moved into a new \$40 million complex.

The complex also houses the Tampa Tribune newspaper and TBO.com, the Tampa Bay Online Web site, all owned by Media General Broadcast Group.

"We believe this is the future of media," said Rick Rogala president and general manager of WFLA. "Media General's work down here is a laboratory. We're really building the blueprint on how this will be done in the future."

The high-tech structure—which was two years in the planning and 18

months in construction—sits next to the old Tampa Tribune building on the banks of the Hillsborough River in downtown Tampa.

The state-of-the-art structure has four floors with an atrium so staffers from the third-floor newspaper newsroom can see their colleagues at WFLA on the second floor.

The second floor is also the nerve center. There is a multimedia desk with 12 seats for a multimedia editor, photo editor, assignment editors and an editor for TBO.com, which has a newsroom next to the desk.

A training room and three TV studios are on the first floor, including the news studio and a cavernous 5,500-square-foot production studio that will be used for town meetings, political debates and commercials. About 450 people work in the build-

ing.

The facility is broadcasting in digital format, and Mr. Bradley said it will be equipped for high definition in the future. The station's 23 cameras have been converted to digital. There are four robotic studio cameras, and a fifth will be installed in the Tampa Tribune newsroom.

Although the cameras in the field shoot in DVC digital tape format, the footage is loaded into one of six computer servers. All 11 edit rooms can access the video from the servers.

Dan Bradley, vice president and news director for WFLA, an NBC affiliate, said the newspaper and television operations will have "separate editorial decision-making [and] separate editorial management."

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# New era for WFLA-TV

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Cross-ownership of newspapers and TV stations, barred by Federal Communications Commission regulations, became a hot issue earlier this month when Tribune Co. agreed to acquire Times Mirror, which owns three newspapers in markets where Tribune has TV stations.

Some cross-ownership situations, such as Media General's, were grandfathered when the prohibition was put into effect.

Before last week, there had already been some crossover between print and television in Tampa.

Every morning, the Tampa Tribune business editor has a local business report on WFLA. Tribune sports reporters have reported on the air from major events such as the World Series.

When WFLA anchor Gayle Sierens had an exclusive interview with a man suspected of killing his former wife, she wrote an article that appeared first in the Tampa Tribune, and later that day her interview was on the newscast. Her entire interview and outtakes were streamed on TBO.com.

"There will always be a degree of competition," said Mr. Bradley, referring to both print and television operations. "We're leveraging [the strengths of the various media] and helping each platform operate independently—but with more resources."

Tampa Tribune television critic Walt Belcher said he was asked not to write about local television for a few months because of the appear-

ance of a conflict of interest. But after a search for an independent television critic failed, Mr. Belcher said he now has the green light again.

"I might learn something from this, because too many of us who are critics are newspaper people, and we take potshots at TV," Mr. Belcher said. "We often don't understand how TV works. I guess the danger is I'll get too cozy and friendly with the people. We try to run disclaimers in all my stories that alert the reader we are the same company."

Mr. Rogala and Mr. Bradley pointed out there is still a vast cultural difference between print and television that needs to be worked out.

"We were separated by a river—and miles and years and years of mistrust," Mr. Bradley said. "Newspaper journalists move much more deliberately and ponderously, they have much more time."

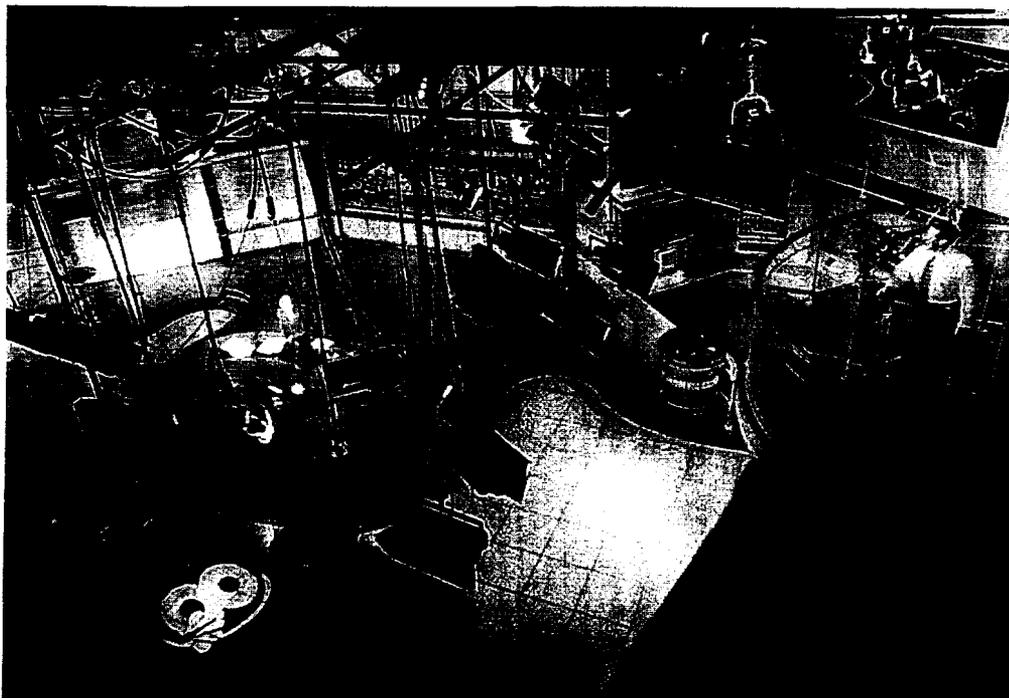
Eric Deggans, TV critic at the competing St. Petersburg Times, said convergence can be a good thing but cautions that monopolizing a market with leaders in both print and television could affect a company's news product.

"I think news organizations have to be very strong journalistically to avoid conflicts of interest and to avoid the abuse of power that can come by owning so much of the media landscape," Mr. Deggans said. "The concern is that there will be a party line regarding stories. We need to see how they tackle issues like that. I think people in this market have serious concerns about it."#

two-member WFLA staff and the approximately 210 *Tribune* news and editorial staff shifted all their people and equipment without missing a deadline. And it shows itself in different ways.

*Tribune* newspaper reporters appear on, and prepare packages for, WFLA-TV. WFLA-TV reporters write by-lined stories that appear in the *Tribune*. TBO.com creates additional news information that allows viewers and readers to drill for even more detailed and widespread information and links, enhancing the credibility of its Web site by displaying on TBO's opening screen the WFLA logo and the *Tampa Tribune* flag, both of which have broad recognition and reputations in the Tampa Bay marketplace.

The TBO.com operation welcomes the opportunity to go beyond "shovelware," the reusing of information already provided on TV or in the newspaper, hoping that its stronger information base will lead to more creative



Television studios: Newspaper reporters make frequent appearances here, two floors below their newsroom

breaking news — use the paging system or an intranet setup — to the core news values and practices each believe in.

"An ongoing concern is how to integrate the entrepreneur into a traditional culture," Thelen says. "This will be a challenge for the company to adjust to. We want to place a high value on exper-

it went through an editor, citing credibility concerns. Meanwhile, TBO's Riley wondered what took priority on the Web.

Right now, the three, while trying to work together, act more like unilateral news organizations rather than converged ones, says De Gregorio, the multimedia editor. Each news organization tends to think of itself first, and then, if it remembers, the other two. Currently, the television and newspaper voices dominate the convergence conversation, with the online operation looking for a place to fit in. For De Gregorio, a former TV executive producer, the three organizations resemble the legs of TV camera tripod. "We're a tripod with one leg not lockable," he says, referring to the challenge facing the smaller and less experienced online news operation.

The expectation is that eventually all three partners will contribute equally to the process. "It's not whose idea it is, it's who's in the best position to drive the story," that should determine who takes the lead, says *Tribune* managing editor Donna Reed. Meanwhile, the three news organizations strive to adopt a musketeer approach. But this one for all and all for one attitude is bound to find some bumps along the way.

"Convergence is a contact sport," Thelen says. "It happens one staff collision at a time." ■

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## 'WE WANT TO PLACE A HIGH VALUE ON EXPERIMENTAL RISK-TAKING RATHER THAN THE TRIED AND TRUE'

news presentations. WFLA welcomes the additional staff on the newspaper that can be called upon to help them keep up with the news in the Tampa television market of almost 1.5 million households. The *Tribune* sees the benefit of getting wider exposure within, and outside, its own circulation area, which in March totaled 245,246 daily, and 336,203 on Sunday.

All this enthusiasm comes tempered with the philosophical and cultural challenges the integration of these different mediums must address. In the weeks before the move, representatives from the television station, the newspaper, and the online site began gathering at what they've dubbed "prenuptial" meetings, meetings designed to smooth out any differences and pave the way toward happy union.

Discussions during these sessions have ranged from specific, logistical arrangements for alerting everyone to

imental risk-taking, rather than on the tried and true journalism story."

The conversations have been wide-ranging and passionate: their goal to become a unified, dominant information source for Tampa Bay challenged by the differences in their approach. How different became evident during one prenuptial discussion on the way they might cover a future hotel shooting spree similar to one that occurred a few months ago at a local Radisson and left several people dead.

Dan Bradley, WFLA's news director, trying to envision such a scenario, saw the opportunity for the reporter who first arrives on that kind of a shooting scene to let television and newspaper know immediately. The reporter could then file something, if reliable, directly to the online site. But Lawrence Fletcher, the *Tribune's* senior editor for news, questioned whether he would be comfortable putting anything online before

# THREE-POI

*Print, Web, and TV operations now live under the same roof in Tampa. Big Brother may not be catching, but everyone else is.*

Since the *Tribune*, WFLA, and TBO.com — all Media General Inc. properties — moved into the same building several months ago, crossover coverage, or “convergence,” has become standard procedure. From TV reporters penning newspaper columns, to online staff commenting during newscasts, to print photographers shooting video for broadcast, this pioneering union of three separate entities has made editors and producers look at local news coverage in a fresh, expanded way that they say improves the overall product. The total, they argue, is greater than the sum of its parts.

“We have a variety of excellent journalism that is produced, and being under the same roof makes all the difference,” says Gil Thelen, *Tribune* vice president and executive editor as well as a 20-year newspaper veteran. “We are quicker and more urgent in our reporting, and that is a positive.”

Raise high the roof beam, carpenter: Gil Thelen (left), *Tribune* executive editor

BY JOE STRUPP

**B**RIGHT LIGHTS ABOVE THE BUSY WFLA-TV NEWSROOM in Tampa, Fla., beam down on Lisa Greene as she stands, a bit fidgety, next to a large-screen video monitor awaiting her cue. The 35-year-old *Tampa Tribune* reporter, whose experience spans 15 years at daily newspapers, but none on TV, is about to “go live” on WFLA’s 5:30 p.m. newscast with a report on expanding Amtrak service in the city.

Earlier in the day, Greene started writing an Amtrak story for the next morning’s *Tribune* and Tampa Bay Online, the paper’s Web site, but has been asked by TV producers to provide insights during a short, on-air chat with anchorwoman Stacie Schaible. “I like to pretend that nobody’s really watching,” says Greene, who hopes the dark pants, white-and-blue sweater, and pearls she’s wearing — her usual newsroom attire — are appropriate for TV. “I still get a little nervous,” she confesses. “But it gets easier each time.”

When the camera switches to her, Greene

is direct, but slightly shaky as Schaible asks her what obstacles may halt the project and what routes would be added if daily Amtrak service through Tampa jumped from two stops to 13 over five years. After the short discussion, Schaible reminds viewers to look for Greene’s story “in tomorrow’s *Tampa Tribune*.”

Using *Tribune* reporters on TV is nothing new in the Florida Gulf Coast city.

# NTplay

Others inside "The News Center," a massive \$40-million Media General structure opened last March to house its three Tampa properties, say the combined approach gives each operation advantages in using talent from other staffs, borrowing story ideas, and sharing resources. "The [*Tribune's*] ability to cover and know about things that we don't have the resources for is unlimited," says Dan Bradley, news director for WFLA, the NBC affiliate in Tampa. "We cover a lot of the same stuff, but we can be more immediate, and they can take it more in-depth."

Recent circulation and ratings reports indicate at least a small bump in attention for the combined effort. WFLA says overall ratings were up about 3% in July, compared with a year ago, while the 11 p.m. newscast continues to beat head-to-head competitors. The *Tribune's* daily circulation rose from 201,002 in July 1999 to 206,694 this July, although Sunday circulation dropped from 292,400 to 279,811 over the same period. At

TBO.com, meanwhile, page views were up 35% in July compared with May.

But the mixing of online, TV, and newspaper coverage also has created a host of sticky new issues and concerns, including time management for editors and producers, compensation for those who do crossover reporting, and training for reporters unfamiliar with print or broadcast styles. Some have been reluctant to embrace their fellow journalists for fear that such cooperation may dilute news coverage and editorial independence.

"It clearly limits the number of voices in the community," says John Sugg, editor of the alternative *Weekly Planet* in Tampa and a former *Tribune* staffer. "The newspaper becomes a PR tool for the TV station, and vice versa."

Newsroom officials say such worries are unfounded. "We've been very sensitive to people who view this as a consolidation," says Michael Kilgore, *Tribune* marketing communications director. "But it is really more eyes, more ears, and more mouths."

## Full house

For motorists driving along South Parker Street in Tampa, The News Center squats like a giant concrete block. A high tan wall wraps the facility like the rim of a prison. Numerous satellite dishes nest on top and a tower bearing NBC's famous peacock logo sticks straight up. Situated on the western edge of the downtown Hillsborough River — where college crew teams and occasional dolphins share the currents — Tampa's one-stop news site boasts the city's largest group of reporting, writing, and editing professionals in one location.

Located next to the *Tribune's* former building — which still houses the newspaper's marketing and business offices — the new combo is structured to allow the three news operations to share and share alike. WFLA studios occupy the first floor, with the TV station's newsroom located one flight above. *Tribune*

"It's like corraling wild horses. There is a lot of negotiation."

STEVE DE GREGORIO  
MULTIMEDIA EDITOR

**FLORIDA METRO**  
Tampa slips in FAMU law school race

Florida pols back Gore's selection

Passenger who landed plane credits divine intervention

Greasy Fingers and

**By BILL HEERY of The Tampa Tribune and BYRON BROWN of News Channel 8**

**Growth law panel digs in for big task**  
A new commission begins the job of overhauling the state's growth management laws.  
**By PETER E. HOWARD of TBO.com**

**By PETER E. HOWARD of TBO.com**

Synergy at work: Print reporters, TV anchors, and Web editors now share byline space in the new Tampa Tribune.

Hot weather: WFLA forecasters get star billing on the newspaper's data page.

**STORM TEAM 8**

staff commandeer the third floor, while TBO.com shares space on both the second and third floors. TBO.com's 14-person staff includes five newspeople, WFLA's team has 10 reporters, and the *Tribune* boasts 125 reporters and editors, 65 copy and design people, and 23 photographers.

An atrium between the first and second floors makes for easy shouting between levels, passing along of film and video, or sounding an all-points bulletin when a big story breaks. "There's a lot of yelling to each other, but it makes for easier communication," says Doug Anderson, WFLA's assignment manager, who shares information with *Tribune* and TBO.com editors from his post atop the second floor multimedia center that resembles the bridge of a Starfleet ship. "Things happen very quickly," he observes, adding that it's become second nature to be in close contact with colleagues.

"We've had some cultural adjustments to make with copy editors working right over the TV newsroom," says Patti Breckenridge, *Tribune* assistant managing editor. "They



Airing it out: *The Tampa Tribune's* Lisa Greene (top) discusses segment with WFLA's Susan DeFratis.

Lisa Greene's Amtrak story, where a newspaper reporter simply goes on an evening newscast to promote the story in the next day's paper. On other occasions, editors may

ask a TV reporter covering an interesting story outside the *Tribune's* readership area to write a version for the newspaper. Or a camera operator on assignment for TV may shoot a still photo for the newspaper. Nearly half of the *Tribune's* 23 photographers carry video cameras, while two of WFLA's camera-people also pocket digital still cameras.

TBO.com's special projects team leader, made history by becoming the first Web staffer to earn a byline in the *Tribune*, with a story on a new state commission.

Along with the special cases are a handful of regular features. *Tribune* Business Editor Bernie Kohn tapes a segment for each Monday morning newscast; Adrian Phillips, a 24-year-old TBO.com producer, appears on the WFLA morning news three times weekly to discuss new Web sites; and Irene Maher, WFLA's medical reporter, writes a biweekly column for the *Tribune*.

"A wealth of information now flows

**"[M]ore eyes,  
more ears, and  
more mouths."**

— MICHAEL KILGORE  
"TRIBUNE" MARKETING  
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

can get a little loud down there; we've had to pass some earplugs out."

### *Stand-up triple*

Ask Steve DeGregorio if he feels like the ringmaster in a three-ring circus, and you're not likely to get much argument. As the *Tribune's* multimedia editor, DeGregorio — who spent 11 years at WFLA prior to jumping ship in 1999 — has the task of finding stories that play well on the TV, online, and newspaper outlets. Starting at WFLA's 9 a.m. morning meeting, then continuing at TBO.com's 9:30 a.m. gathering and, finally, the *Tribune's* 10:30 budget session, DeGregorio must not only pick appropriate convergence story ideas but also convince people in each organization to collaborate.

"It's like corralling wild horses," DeGregorio says with a cynical smile. "There is a lot of negotiation for the most part and a lot of planning to bring it together and make sure you do not duplicate information."

The standard approach usually resembles

"It's all done on a case-by-case basis," says DeGregorio. "There are no hard-and-fast rules, no exact science." Among recent examples of crossover reporting are:

- A *Tribune* story about a passenger who landed a small plane when the pilot was ill carried the bylines of *Tribune* reporter Bill Heery and WFLA anchor Byron Brown. The double credit occurred after Heery used elements of Brown's TV script for background.

- A WFLA report on local swimmers at the U.S. Olympic swimming trials in Indianapolis was delivered by *Tribune* sportswriter Bill Ward. Anchor Brown interviewed Ward then reminded viewers to check TBO.com for more information.

- A gripping report on dog bites ran as a two-part series on WFLA, a front-page story in the *Tribune*, and a TBO.com package.

- A *Tribune* story on the removal of a statue from a shopping center included a picture by Photo Assignment Editor Jay Connor, who also shot video for WFLA.

And, just two weeks ago, Peter Howard,



through this building," Susan DeFraties, WFLA managing editor for news. Kirk Read, TBO.com general manager, adds that convergence "has totally opened up an audience for us. ... We have a tremendous amount of resources."

### Camera-ready reporters

While editors praise most convergence ideas as positive steps to expand coverage, they also note a few examples of how the partnership fell flat. Among them was the chat room TBO.com created three months ago to allow government sex-crime experts to answer questions about sexual predators following a *Tribune* series on the issue.

"We set it up and not many people took part," says Jim Riley, TBO.com content manager. "We also set up a fan chat room during [Tampa Bay] Buccaneers [football] games, and no one came because they were busy watching the game."

The News Center triad has also hit some bumpy roads getting some newspaper reporters — a species traditionally known as schlubby dressers — to spruce up for TV. Whether it's finding a blazer for a business writer who wore a golf shirt to work, or asking an unshaven Web reporter to buy a razor for a last-minute broadcast spot, editors need to remind many to anticipate, and prepare for, on-air stints. "After a while, we had meetings and decided to put together a clothes closet," says DeGregorio. "We are keeping some stuff in there in pristine condition in case it has to be used."

So far, the most extraordinary example of multimedia coverage belongs to Jackie Barron. The 30-year-old WFLA reporter completed a News Center "hat trick" in June and July when she covered a federal murder-for-hire trial for WFLA, the *Tribune*, and TBO.com. Between June 4 and July 15, Barron spent about four weeks in San Antonio, where the federal trial of Sarasota's Allen Blackthorne had been shifted, providing daily updates for all three mediums.

But the time invested by Barron was huge. For several weeks, Barron would awaken at 6 a.m. (Texas time) to write a journal-type column for TBO.com on the previous day's events, then head to court to cover that day's proceedings. At 10 a.m., she'd leave the courtroom to phone in a report for a TV newscast before beginning to work on an evening TV report due at 2:30 p.m. By 3 p.m., Barron was back in court for the afternoon session, which often ended as late as 7 p.m., giving her just an hour or so to file a next-day newspaper story.

"My brain was mush by the end," says Barron, who normally runs WFLA's Sarasota bureau. "There were times when I sat down to write a script for TV and would start putting in attribution like it was a newspaper story."

Editors stress that Barron's case is the exception rather than the rule. They claim that having reporters pull double- or

triple-duty is only done when circumstances require it. "It is not our envisioned future that everyone on TV write for the paper and everyone at the paper is on air," says the *Tribune's* Thelen. "This multimedia effort does not serve the community if it turns into a homogenized mediocrity."

"One of the early road rules was that standards would be maintained."

— DONNA REED  
"TRIBUNE" MANAGING  
EDITOR

But other News Center leaders believe the future of news coverage requires reporters and editors to be skilled in all three areas. To prepare, they put all *Tribune* reporters through a daylong TV training session at the University of South Florida earlier this year. At the same time, TV reporters who write for the paper are given special editing and writing attention when their work appears in print. "If one of their reporters writes something that doesn't deserve to be published, it isn't," says *Tribune* Managing Editor Donna Reed, who adds that a news convergence stylebook is being created to address questions among all three outlets. "One of the early road rules was that [journalistic] standards would be maintained."

Across Tampa Bay, at the rival *St. Petersburg Times*, Managing Editor Neil Brown says his shop is keeping an eye on the *Tribune*, but not with intense worry. With a 110,000-daily-circulation lead over the competition, Brown says the *Times* still beats the *Tribune* with basic, hard-core journalism. "I think [convergence] creates a serious distraction, potentially,

The "Tribune"  
can take a story  
"more in-depth."

— DAN BRADLEY  
NEWS DIRECTOR, WFLA

in how they cover the news," he says. "There is a risk of dilution."

Along with concerns about journalistic quality and time management comes the question of compensation for reporters who perform crossover work, as well as redefining job descriptions and hiring rules for incoming reporters. So far, no staffers have received extra pay for going beyond their regular workload, and many say they would like to see the issue settled before convergence becomes more routine.

### What's the three sum?

"Compensation is a key issue that they have not addressed," says TBO.com's Howard, who spent five years in the *Tribune* newsroom, during which time he did two packaged TV reports and about a dozen live interviews for WFLA. "I think this is an opportunity of a lifetime, but they have to put [a policy] in that is consistent."

Marsha Taylor Holland, *Tribune* human resources director, agrees that

Convergence "has totally opened up an audience for us."

KIRK READ, TBO.COM GENERAL MANAGER

pay scales and job classifications need re-working. "Job description is definitely going to have to have a big overhaul," she says. "One approach would be to pay for each time a reporter engages in convergence, but we have not finalized it yet."

Others wonder how the cozy, inbred relationship between the newsrooms might affect their coverage of each other. *Tribune* TV writer Walt Belcher offered a chilling example, saying editors forced him to lay off criticism of WFLA for nearly a year prior to the opening of The News Center, supposedly to avoid ill will between the staffs. "I told them that maybe I should just stop writing about

# TV or not TV? Few newspapers are

## But sometimes two-into-one just doesn't go

BY LUCIA MOSES

**N**EWSPAPERS, WITH THEIR RICH news-gathering resources and the space to tell in-depth stories, and TV with its mass-audience reach and visuals, seem to be a match made in heaven. That was the thinking at Belo's *The Dallas Morning News* a couple of years back when it began ramping up its news partnership with local ABC affiliate WFAA Channel 8, also a Belo property. Hotlines were set up in each newsroom so assigning editors could pass on news tips. Print journalists were encouraged to think about how their stories could extend not only to the Web but to TV.

But over time, cultural differences between the two media began to assert themselves. When the two decided to have their movie critics collaborate on a story, the *Morning News* felt that the two should play by the newspaper's ethical standards and refuse all freebies from sources, according to Managing Editor Stuart Wilk.

Then there was the question of how the *Morning News* would cover the station.

Because the two share Belo as a parent, the newspaper has often been criticized as being too soft on its sibling. But now that the two were official partners, the *News* decided it could no longer cover WFAA objectively. Rather than exclude that one station from its coverage, the *News* halted all TV criticism.

"Basically, we've called a timeout and let [TV critic Ed Bark] cover the news — comings, goings, ratings — but, for the moment, let's not weigh in on the critique level while we figure it out," says Wilk.

Welcome to media convergence. As newspaper-TV alliances become more common, both sides are finding that their cultures aren't easily reconciled, and often they are making up the rules as they go along. Says Wilk, "There is no playbook to consult in the broadcast-print relationship we're forging."

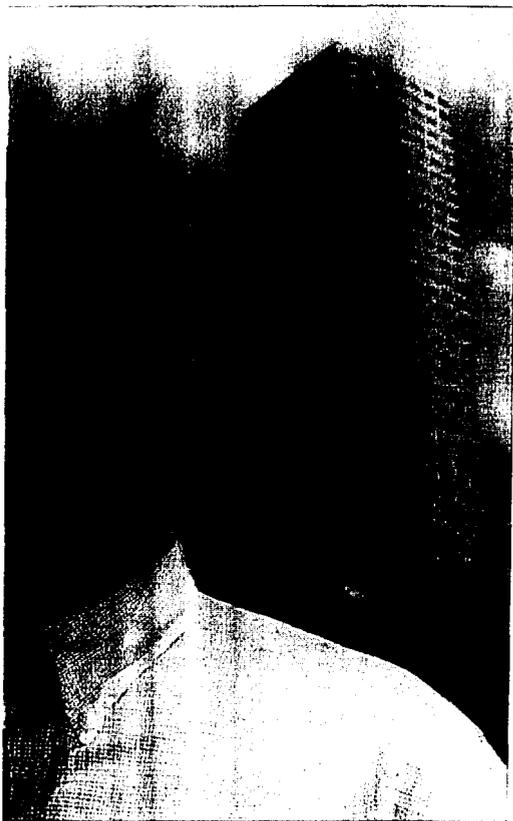
Print journalists have traditionally looked askance at their broadcast brethren. But in a world where news outlets risk getting drowned out, newspapers are looking to TV as a way to pub-

licize their names among a wider audience.

While it's hard to find numbers to back it up, the theory is that a mention of the next day's newspaper headlines on the nightly news can lead to increased sales the next morning, driving circulation and, ultimately, advertising revenue. "The days of thinking we're going to scoop ourselves [on TV], that's ludicrous," says Jay R. Smith, president of Cox Newspapers, which has alliances of varying degrees in most of its markets.

Examples of cross-pollination abound in markets big and small. *The Wall Street Journal* contributes news programming to CNBC through a partnership with NBC. In a three-way collaboration in Norfolk, Va., Cox's cable channel, Belo's ABC-affiliated TV station, and Landmark Communications Inc.'s *The Virginian-Pilot* produce a cable news show. And news-gathering relationships are blossoming in New York, Los Angeles, and Hartford, Conn., where the Tribune Co. has three new newspaper-TV combos.

In some cases, a shared corporate parent drives the partnership. But while the federal cross-ownership ban now prohibits newspaper companies from buying TV stations in their markets, it hasn't stopped



TV all together," Belcher says with a laugh. "I eventually went back to [covering WFLA] in February, but I still felt like I had to be careful and explain some things more clearly."

Belcher says that sisterhood with WFLA stopped him from reporting on a TV reporter moving to an Alabama station earlier this year. He wanted to write about speculation that the reporter's wife, another WFLA staffer, would also eventually leave, but did not address it after TV managers requested he avoid it.

### Three on a seesaw?

"I don't know that enough of it has shaken out for us to know what the dangerous effect [of convergence] will be," says Aly Colon, an ethics instructor at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in nearby St. Petersburg. "It will provide a change in perspective for each newsroom."

When it comes to criticism of his Tampa experiment, Media General Chairman and CEO J. Stewart Bryan III has one direct response: "They're all wrong," Bryan,

whose company owns 26 TV stations and 20 daily newspapers nationwide, boasts proudly of the growing Tampa convergence project, and says similar marriages between Media General-owned TV stations and newspapers in common markets will occur.



J. Stewart Bryan III

"I think it will show that by combining the strengths of three different mediums, you will be able to cover the news for the consumer better," Bryan says during a phone interview from his office in Richmond, Va. "This is not a scheme to save money — we're trying to find a way to cover the news stories in ways consumers

want them." Bryan says Media General, which is buying five Thomson newspapers in markets where it already owns TV stations, made the purchases with future convergence in mind. "We don't know what it's going to look like as a full-grown child," he says of the combined coverage trend. "But as a baby, it's in pretty good shape." □

## amera-shy

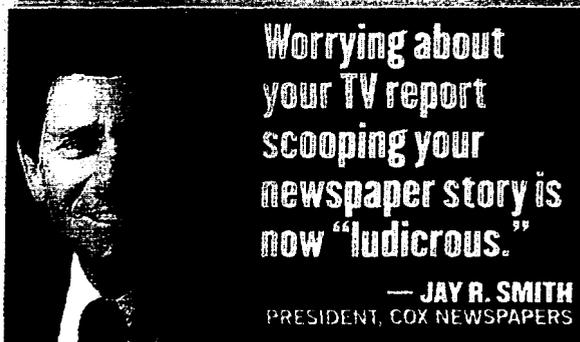
them from sharing newsroom resources with those stations.

The *Indianapolis Star*, for example, recently expanded its partnership with local NBC affiliate WTHR by hiring a news manager who reports to both news outlets. Jon Schwantes, a 13-year *Star* veteran whose new title is associate editor/director of news partnerships, is all too aware of the cultural divide he straddles as he tries to foster cooperation between the two newsrooms. To help break down mistrust, he's encouraged print staffers to get to know their TV counterparts, and vice versa, so they realize that "they do have common goals and see they don't have horns and spiked tails."

Schwantes plans to bring in talent coaches from WTHR to help train the print staff to go under the hot TV lights. While Schwantes says the first few weeks of his job have been "Human Relations 101," he's excited to be at the forefront of an industry trend: "You don't have a lot of opportunities to build something from scratch."

Schwantes opted to let the *Star's* TV writer, Marc Allen, continue covering WTHR.

Allen has no complaints. "No one's said, 'We have this partnership; you need to be nice to them,'" he says. "My credibility is too important to me, and too important to the paper." Overall, Allen thinks the partnership can give the *Star* more exposure, but says opinions of his fellow reporters run the gamut, ranging from "people who think we give them way more than they give us" to others "who like the exposure and like to be on TV."



Worrying about your TV report scooping your newspaper story is now "ludicrous."

— JAY R. SMITH  
PRESIDENT, COX NEWSPAPERS

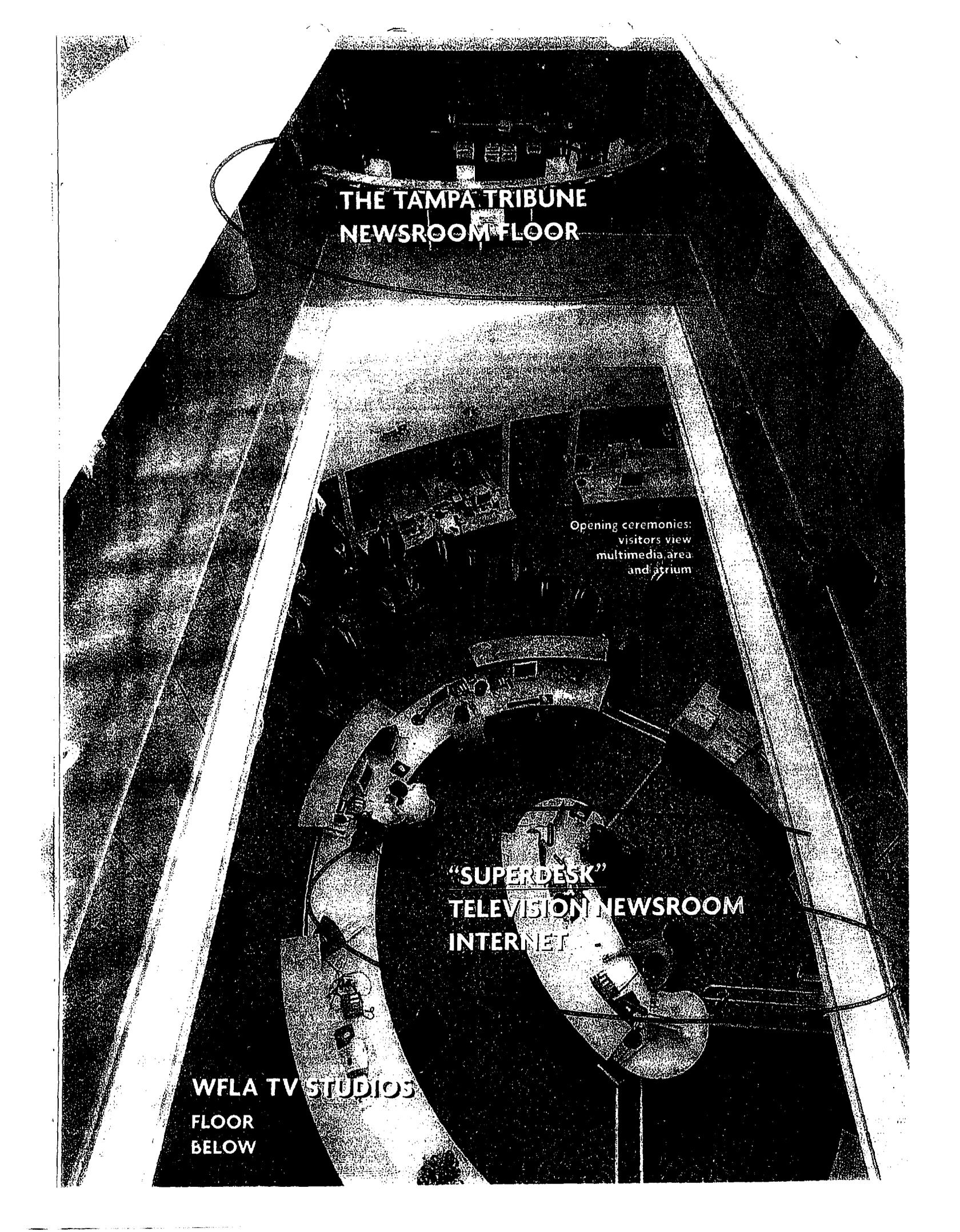
The *Star's* model for stepped-up convergence is the Tribune Co., where *Star* Executive Editor Tim Franklin last worked and was impressed by the company's aggressiveness in allying its print and broadcast properties in both Chicago and Orlando, Fla.

Tribune Vice President/Intergroup Development David Underhill says his company insists its properties remain editorially sepa-

rate, even when it means properties owned by Tribune get slammed by its own newspapers. "There's no question that it poses new sets of challenges, but if you get back to basics, it's pretty clear-cut," he says.

Not everyone would agree. The alliance between the *Chicago Tribune* and Tribune-owned WGN Channel 9 led the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) to file a grievance against the station after a WGN reporter (an AFTRA member) was asked to write a column for the newspaper without additional compensation. "I think that with the consolidation of media, it's a real danger," says Eileen Willenborg, executive director of AFTRA's Chicago chapter. She raises another issue as well, "You can't spread professionals so thin and still have a professional product." *Tribune* executives declined to comment.

And while it's clear that these alliances are fraught with a tangle of cultural and labor issues, many print executives point out that sharing is sharply limited by what they tactfully call "different priorities." As Cox's Smith puts it, "Let's face it: a lot of television news is 15-second or 30-second stories. What leads the TV news might make the fourth or fifth page of the newspaper." □



**THE TAMPA TRIBUNE  
NEWSROOM FLOOR**

Opening ceremonies:  
visitors view  
multimedia area  
and atrium

**"SUPERDESK"  
TELEVISION NEWSROOM  
INTERNET**

**WFLA TV STUDIOS  
FLOOR  
BELOW**



**Before the  
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
Washington, D.C.**

In the Matter of:	)	
	)	
Cross-Ownership of Broadcast Stations and Newspapers	)	MM Docket No. 01-235
	)	
Newspaper/Radio Cross-Ownership Waiver Policy	)	MM Docket No. 96-197
	)	

**THE PUBLIC INTEREST BENEFITS  
ACHIEVABLE FROM ELIMINATING THE  
FCC'S NEWSPAPER-BROADCAST CROSS-OWNERSHIP RULE**

**By James K. Gentry, Ph.D.**

**Prepared for Media General, Inc.**

**December 2001**

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## Summary

The idea of “convergence” has been around for quite some time, but in the early 1990s the concept seemed to take wings in two areas, technological convergence and mass media convergence. One dictionary defines convergence as a movement toward a point or the coming together to unite in a common interest or focus. On the technology front, convergence refers to the coming together of digital media, specifically the computer, telephone and television. David B. Yoffie of Harvard Business School describes convergence as “the unification of functions – the coming together of previously distinct products that employ digital technologies.”<sup>1</sup> Inherent in the definition is the coming together of different and sometimes antagonistic environments, attitudes, and technologies.<sup>2</sup>

In the mass media world, convergence typically refers to the active partnering of a local newspaper, broadcast station or stations, and Internet web-sites for the purposes of improved news reporting, advertising sales and/or community outreach. Just as digital media are in various stages of converging, so are news media. Today, many media partnerships involve “baby steps” where the newspaper runs a weather forecast prepared by the television partner’s meteorologist; in return, the television station mentions tomorrow’s newspaper headlines on its late newscast.

“Full convergence” is at the opposite end of the continuum and refers to the complete integration of newsgathering and reporting by reporters, photographers, editors, and other news professionals in a manner that enables news and information to be presented seamlessly and more comprehensively on multiple platforms. It also permits cross-promotion and joint sponsorship of community outreach events, and integrated, multiple-platform approaches to clients’ advertising needs.

Demonstrable benefits to local communities flow from full convergence. Consumers of news and information can gain faster access to more news reports, and more extensive and deeper coverage by the local media involved in convergence as well as by other local media outlets, which are forced, in turn, to improve their own products to remain competitive. Full convergence also can help build ties across boundaries that historically have separated communities in the same geographic area.

The public interest benefits of convergence are possible not only in large markets, but in small markets as well. Indeed, there seems to be no meaningful demarcation between small and large markets: communities of all sizes can benefit from the delivery of more, faster, and better news through convergence of local media.

Without common ownership of media properties, however, full convergence is immeasurably more difficult to achieve. Media that serve different owners typically do

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<sup>1</sup> *Competing in the Age of Digital Convergence*, Edited by David B. Yoffie, 1997, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, at 2.

<sup>2</sup> See generally *What Will Be: How the New World of Information Will Change Our Lives*, Michael Dertouzos, 1997, HarperCollins, New York; *Being Digital*, Nicholas Negroponte, 1995, Alfred A. Knopf, New York; *Blown to Bits: How the New Economics of Information Transforms Strategy*, Philip Evans and Thomas S. Wurster, 2000, Harvard Business School Press, Boston.

not share common values and goals with respect to reporting, sales, and key administrative tasks. Without common ownership, it is unlikely that local communities will fully experience the benefits of full convergence. And when full convergence fails, the “losers” will be consumers of local news and information.

Full convergence of local media presents a great opportunity for improving the quality and quantity of local news. As the Commission considers what is in the public interest, it should do everything it can to foster the benefits achievable through full convergence – benefits that are far more likely to result where newspapers and broadcast stations are commonly owned. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the Commission eliminate completely its current ban on the cross-ownership of newspapers and broadcast stations in all markets.

## **I. Full Media Convergence Yields Tangible Benefits in Local Markets.**

In this proceeding, the FCC has an opportunity – if not a public interest duty – to strengthen local media voices in a manner that enables local newspapers and broadcast stations to improve the quantity and quality of news provided to their local communities and to compete better against larger (and usually distant) media outlets. The changing media marketplace offers many exciting opportunities to serve these goals, but none is more important than removing the antiquated prohibition on the common ownership of local daily newspapers and broadcast stations.

National media players, which typically offer no local content, prosper in this new media environment by creating more cable networks, Internet web-sites, and other outlets serving national (albeit fragmented and dispersed) audiences that are often funded by local advertising dollars siphoned away from existing, local media. They also can take advantage of an ability to restructure their advertising sales forces to focus on cross-media deals, as ABC recently has done.<sup>1</sup>

By contrast, local media outlets find their opportunities much more limited. Daily newspapers face increasing costs of maintaining expensive, high-quality local news operations while facing declining circulation and market penetration. And classified advertising, long a bulwark of newspaper revenue, is being wooed by a host of online competitors. As the Commission also knows, local television stations face escalating programming and newsgathering costs while losing both audiences and, importantly, network compensation payments. These financial pressures threaten the historic bases on which local newspapers and television stations have founded their local news operations.

Traditional media patterns appear to be changing, as well. One recent study found that more than half of Americans are obtaining news on the war on terrorism from cable news networks, while only 18% are turning to local television and 17% to network stations as their primary source for such news.<sup>2</sup>

Another recent study found that Internet use continues to grow and affect traditional media. According to the study, the percentage of Americans going online increased from 66.9% in 2000 to 72.3% in 2001. The study also found that television Internet users watch an average of 4.5 fewer hours per week of television than non-Internet users. Also noteworthy is the finding that Internet users with broadband connections spend 3.2 more hours online than those who connect via phone modem, indicating that more people will spend more time online as access to high speed connectivity increases.<sup>3</sup>

Although the changing media marketplace has yielded increased consumer choices, diversity, and competition, it also has created financial pressures that have

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<sup>1</sup> *Advertising Age*, “ABC Shuffles Sales Deck,” Page 1, Nov. 5, 2001 (ABC restructuring sales force to facilitate cross-platform ad sales).

<sup>2</sup> “But Military Censorship Backed: Terror Coverage Boosts News Media’s Image,” Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, Nov. 28, 2001; available at [www.people-press.org](http://www.people-press.org).

<sup>3</sup> “UCLA Internet Report 2001: Surveying the Digital Future,” UCLA Center for Communication Policy, Nov. 29, 2001; available on-line at [www.ccp.ucla.edu](http://www.ccp.ucla.edu).

hampered the ability of local media outlets to continue to pursue high-quality news operations. Due to these pressures, some television stations have dropped or are considering dropping local newscasts; over thirty such examples from the past three years are identified in Attachment A. Indeed, at least seven television stations over the last three years have cancelled all newscasts and eliminated their news departments altogether. Most recently, St. Louis ABC affiliate KDNL (DMA 22) announced it was ending its local news programming in October 2001, explaining that “the increased competitive landscape and current market conditions have made it increasingly difficult to operate a competitive news operation.”<sup>4</sup> In other markets, such as Jacksonville, Florida, one newsroom provides the news for two local network-affiliated television stations.

As for newspapers, the number of dailies has dropped significantly over the past 25 years.<sup>5</sup> Between 1985 and 2000, newspaper circulation fell from 60.6 million to 55.8 million.<sup>6</sup> “More recent figures appear to mark acceleration in the decline,” according to a report in a recent issue of *Presstime* magazine.<sup>7</sup> That article cautioned that, if recent declines continue, “the ‘read everyday’ figure for the entering cohort of 20-to-29-year-olds in 2010 is projected to be 9 percent,” compared with 22 percent in 1998.<sup>8</sup>

In this challenging environment, it is essential that local media outlets find new ways of doing business, new ways of reaching local audiences, and new ways of gathering and reporting news for their communities. Local media outlets are attempting to preserve – and strengthen – local news operations through alliances and partnerships with other local media. Alliances, however, are not new. For a number of years, various outlets have collaborated in sponsoring political debates, sharing the costs of public opinion polling, and promotion of community activities. In recent years, however, the rise of new and different media offering local news, information, and advertising content, as well as the advent of the ubiquitous Internet, have spurred many news professionals to begin exploring deeper partnerships.

Today, there is a great deal of excitement about the opportunities and benefits of full convergence; that is, the complete integration of ownership, newsgathering and reporting, community outreach and advertising sales, all under one owner. By pooling newsgathering resources, reporters, photographers, editors, and other news professionals can enhance and expand news coverage and present this content seamlessly on multiple platforms. And they can serve their communities in other ways, too.

In a recent article on convergence efforts under way in several markets, Patrick Yack describes some of the aspects of new, deeper alliances between newspapers and television stations:

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<sup>4</sup> STL Today web-site, *www.stltoday.com*, “Channel 30 Will Drop its Local News Broadcasts,” Sept. 28, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> *Cross-Ownership of Broadcast Stations and Newspapers*, Order and Notice of Proposed Rule Making, FCC 01-262, Sept. 20, 2001, at ¶ 10.

<sup>6</sup> *SRDS Circulation 2001* at 1038.

<sup>7</sup> “Born to Read?” *Presstime*, Sept. 2001, at 23.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

What is making these new alliances noteworthy is the depth of the relationship. Stations are broadcasting live from the paper's newsroom. Reporters for the paper are reporting for the TV station. The TV station is using still photos – and sometimes video – shot by the newspaper. The newspaper is using the TV's video on its Web site. Some papers are even rearranging their news operations to coordinate news coverage to fit the medium and the audience of each medium.<sup>9</sup>

Yack should know. As executive editor of the *Florida Times-Union* in Jacksonville, Florida, he has studied convergence efforts at other newspapers, including Media General's *Tampa Tribune*.

These efforts are just some of the examples of what can be accomplished through full convergence. In addition, news professionals from distinct media can work together to locate, develop, and report on stories of interest to local audiences. Reporters and editors for the co-operating newspapers, television and radio stations, and local web-sites can share and exchange story ideas, leads, and sources. Broadcast stations and Internet web-sites can provide depth by utilizing the archives and editorial perspectives available only from the local newspaper. Newspapers can gain faster access to breaking news and better access to video images. The Internet web-site of the newspaper and/or of the converged entity can present better products that take advantage of all these benefits.

Full convergence not only enables wider dissemination of news. It also facilitates coverage of stories and events and the sponsorship of joint activities that otherwise would be much more difficult for independently operating media to achieve. The expansion in the amount of local news flows directly from the ability of converged media to draw upon a larger pool of resources than a single medium would normally have at its disposal. For example, while a radio station alone might not have the resources to conduct a long and costly investigation into corruption at city hall, the radio station working with the newspaper likely could do so. Likewise, a television station might be able to broadcast an interview with a national political candidate if its reporter partners with a peer from the local newspaper.

By expanding the breadth of news and information reported by local media, full convergence fosters the principles of journalism. Through an extensive study of dozens of television stations, thousands of stories, and millions of viewers, the Project for Excellence in Journalism, which is affiliated with the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, has identified wider coverage of local communities as a key attribute of successful, high-quality local television newscasts.<sup>10</sup> The study also reports that "audiences want to learn about the whole community," which is exactly what full media convergence facilitates.

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<sup>9</sup> Patrick Yack, "It's all about reach' in newspaper-TV partnerships," *Extending the Brand: A newspaper editor's guide to partnership and diversification in a converging media world*, American Society of Newspaper Editors, April 2000, at 40.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Tom Rosenstiel et al., "The Magic Formula: Five proven steps to financial success in news," *CJR/Project for Excellence in Journalism*, November/December 2001, at 5-10.