



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What will sustain journalism in service of democracy?

Some newspaper, public-media and technology leaders are ready to consider a collaboration to help manage consumer privacy, identity and information purchasing across Internet and mobile services, interviews since June, 2014 with more than 85 experts¹ suggest. The platform would sustain and change journalism, and help the public discover trustworthy information relevant to their personal needs and interests.

Consumers need a simple, secure way to access, share and pay for valuable information from multiple services and sources. News organizations – legacy and new – would like to be the best-possible source for those users to receive a timely diet of information that matters. Now, people on the go want to efficiently access the broadest range of multimedia content customized to their needs – in a single, simple action. Achieving this simplicity will require the coordination of publishers, content licensors, aggregator and usage trackers, a range of stakeholders currently unfocused on such collective activity.

This report paints an abstract picture of the current news landscape – seen as dominated by Internet technology platforms -- through the comments of those experts, then presents a proposal for a new platform that might help sustain and morph journalism practiced by existing or new entities. It ends with a question: If the proposal makes sense, who will lead it? One possibility: The [NetGain](#) initiative of five U.S. foundations who [“seek to collaborate on large projects”](#) involving Internet data security and privacy that transform learning and education.

“When the whole Internet thing took off we all put a lot of hope in advertising,” says Frederic Filloux, who co-writes the authoritative blog [“Monday Note,”](#) from Paris. He is managing director of digital operations for Group Les Ecos, which publishes a daily business newspaper and website. He also [writes for The Guardian](#). “The fact of the matter is that as far as news is concerned advertising is a complete failure,” he says. “For years we have been seeing the spiraling down of the advertising revenue both in general terms but also in terms of dollars or Euros per page view -- whatever the metric is. It is constantly spiraling down. So that is a real, real problem.”

[In a public speech Nov. 21](#) at the Reuters Institute at Oxford, Emily Bell, director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University, argued: “[J]ournalism has an important role in building and deploying new technologies, shaping noncommercial parts of a new public sphere and holding to account these new extensive systems of power.”

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Report findings

The 85-plus interviews, conducted since June for the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute at the Missouri School of Journalism (RJI) show:

¹ -- See Appendix H for a list of all interviewees quoted by name in this report.

- There is a significant "coalition of the willing" among those 85 people -- some 30 or so are explicitly willing to help -- at least 25 through participation on a provisional steering committee.² What motivates them varies across a spectrum of challenges and interests discussed in the following pages.
- For all the "willing," many interviewees express deep doubt that the newspaper industry -- specifically -- can muster a cultural shift necessary to collaborate across corporate ownerships. Yet the hunger for leadership and the perception that the industry must do something transformative is stronger than in 2011 or 2008.
- The news industry lacks a system for variable pricing and exchange of individual items of news content in real time. Yet in the last 10 years, the advertising industry has innovated sophisticated "programmatic" technologies (*See Appendix L*) that allow in milliseconds the variable pricing, bidding, selection, tracking and billing of advertisements to targeted, unique consumers.
- The news industry also lacks a common system for single-signon or user authentication across multiple news websites. Yet in the last 10 years, Tier 1 U.S. universities running on the Internet 2 network have used open-source Shibboleth and SAML trust technology (*See Appendix K*) to achieve single login across 100 independent campuses and institutions.
- Indeed, there was no one, including technologists, who thought creating technology to achieve the objectives of a user and content sharing exchange is a difficult financial or engineering challenge. The challenge they see is how to identify and stick to an agreed mission and value propositions.
- For those interviewees who believe something is possible, almost none doubted that RJI could be in a position to help provide convening, collaborative and administrative leadership. On this point, several interviewees explicitly see leadership from academia as potentially capable of overcoming vestiges of competitive fervor and cross-industry suspicion.
- A few others, however, worry that academia cannot move quickly enough, or could not infuse a project with entrepreneurial or competitive fervor. Yet the reality is that the news industry has not moved by itself to solve its sustainability challenges with the benefit of traditional business incentives and forms. For this reason, support from non-platform-owning tech companies would be helpful.
- Some interviewees raise concern about illegal collusion or monopolization which could result from collaboration. Our study (*See Appendix A*) finds these "antitrust" concerns likely unfounded, based upon well-documented examples of sanctioned collaboration around technical standards or services that create a more efficient public market. Any collaboration will need to access expert legal and practical knowledge in this area.

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In its mission to sustain the values, principles and purposes of journalism, RJI now narrates in "From Persona to Payment" opinion and ideas from interviews since mid-2014 with more than 85 editors, publishers, technologists, policy advocates, academic researchers and other experts. These interviews supplement expert views solicited at RJI gatherings in 2008, 2009 and 2012, and for a 2011 white paper. Hundreds of industry observers and insiders have been heard since 2008.

² -- See Appendix I for a list of provisional steering-committee members