

2005 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

Opening Session

Panelists:

Rosental Calmon Alves, Professor and Knight Chair in Journalism, University of Texas at Austin

Lorraine Branham, Director, School of Journalism, University of Texas at Austin

ROSENTAL ALVES: My name is Rosental Alves, and I'm a journalism professor here at the University of Texas at Austin. I'd like to welcome everybody who came from other countries and other cities for this small but very intense, very rich conference on online journalism. We started this in 1999, so this is a conference that comes from the last century (laughter), and we have been accumulating all the material of this conference in a website. That's journalism.utexas.edu/onlinejournalism. And so the conference is kind of an observation of what is going on in online journalism, and the evolution and the creation of this new genre of journalism.

I invited the Director of the School of Journalism in this College of Communication of University of Texas at Austin, Lorraine Branham, to welcome all of you in the name of, on behalf of the university and all of us.

LORRAINE BRANHAM: My name is Lorraine Branham, and I am the Director of the School of Journalism, and I wanted to give all of you a hearty Texas welcome. Thank you for coming to Austin. And a special thanks to those of you who came from so far away. We appreciate you making the effort to come here.

This is my third year as director of the School of Journalism, and my third year participating in this event. And it's been a very exciting time. This is the sixth actual international online journalism symposium that we've done here. And it's been amazing to me to see how not only this conference has evolved, but the things that we've been looking at has evolved.

Professor Rosental has planned what I think is an interesting and informative two days of panel discussions. And I believe that by the time we leave here we'll all be a little more knowledgeable about the state of online journalism, and especially the rapidly growing phenomenon of participatory journalism, which I'm really intrigued by.

Even now, it's hard to believe how far we've come in my journalistic lifetime. I'm actually old enough to remember when we first got computers in the newsroom. And I can remember back in the early 90s getting my first AOL account and wondering if

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I'd really use email (light laughter). And ten years ago when I got a cell phone, it seemed like an extravagance. And now I wonder how anyone lives without it and also, how can you have a cell phone that doesn't do email? So, we've come a long way.

Now, we have our own websites. People have their own blogs. and now, thanks to technology, we've got this emerging notion that anyone and everyone can be a journalist.

I spent 25 years as a newspaper reporter and editor, and I can remember the angst and trepidation in the newsroom when the Internet first came into being and online news sites were popping up, and we were worried about how they would affect newspapers and traditional journalism. Well now we know.

Now we have "Oh My News" and "Wiki News" and "Powerline" and "Talking Points," and hundreds of other online news projects that are encouraging a whole new generation of community journalists.

The power and influence of bloggers became apparent with the Howard Dean campaign. It escalated with the whole Dan Rather-gate situation when bloggers exposed the CBS/ "60 Minutes" report on President Bush's National Guard service. And I guess it was just highlighted again recently with the incident involving the CNN news executive, Jason (inaudible), who ended up having to resign from his position after bloggers started reporting his comments about the U.S. military targeting journalists in Iraq.

So we've experienced the highs and lows of online journalism. The boom and the bust of high technology, and the ongoing effort to figure out the appropriate business model for this new news medium. We've gone from the early days of simply throwing all the days news from newspapers online, to stand-alone websites with their own staffs, to weblogging by individuals, to citizen journalists, with barely time to catch our breath.

Sometimes it seems the technology has dragged us kicking and screaming into this brave new world, as we struggle to figure out the implications for journalism -- define who is a journalist, what is journalism, and how to best serve readers and viewers, and the democratic process that we all cherish. And also, how to make some money with this darn thing, and how to find the next new innovation so we can stay one step ahead of the competition.

And in higher education, we have our own challenges, as we try to keep up with the latest technology with limited resources, and we try to figure out how to best train the journalists of the 21st century. That's a major challenge. Once upon a time, our only job was to get them ready to go off and work in some newsroom. Now we've begun to realize that there is a growing number of alternatives and opportunities for our students in this changing world of journalism.

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Which is why this conference and others like it is so important. This symposium provides practitioners, publishers, educators, researchers and students an opportunity to come together to collectively explore what we're doing in online journalism and how we can do it better.

Thank you all again for coming. I look forward to the discussions that we're going to have. I hope that by the time we leave, we will all be well on our way to better understanding what we're doing and how we can do it better. Clearly the web has changed the way we operate as journalists. We continue to grapple with how it's changed journalism, and how we can take the best of what it has to offer, and continue to do what we believe journalists ought to be doing to best serve the public. That is both the challenge and the opportunity for us, and I think we're up to the challenge.

Thanks again. Enjoy Austin and this conference, and I look forward to you all coming back next year when we'll be doing this all again. (Applause)